

PLAYER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM OVERVIEW

By Jim Zug

For most of the long history of court tennis in America, bringing in new players into the game and improving existing players was an entirely haphazard affair. Geography, luck, timing, genetics—that was the admixture necessary for an introduction to tennis or the chance to get good.

Beginning a year ago, the Association and Foundation had for the first time attempted to provide a comprehensive, holistic and organized approach. With the generous support of Temple & Ellie Grassi, these two groups were able to catalyze progress on purpose.

The program has involved a couple of layers. At the heart of the Player Development Program is the grassroots, bottom-up work. Instead of imposing a uniform plan, the PDP has instead financially supported each of the nine active tennis clubs with programs created and run by those clubs. The professionals on the ground know what works best and much the PDP's efforts are directed as sustaining them. Additionally, the PDP, through its steering committee and regular committees, has led to deep thinking about what we do and how to do more and then took steps to implement these ideas. This included Skyping and emailing with the directors of junior tennis in Great Britain and Australia to learn best practices from abroad and then regular conference calls back here.

The PDP has grasped the nettle of junior tennis. It has helped start summer camps. It has expanded and evolved the junior tournament schedule by dividing the national juniors into two separate events, one for players under nineteen and another for players from nineteen to twenty-six. It has seeded the creation of new, regular junior tournaments, similar to a junior squash or lawn tennis fixtures list. For the Bathurst and the Van Alen & Clothier cups it has created a full, transparent system—for the first time in the many decades of these events—for selecting the team members and for helping train those elite players, including a coaching weekend for the Bathurst cohort. Even the masters group has received the PDP's attention.

Much much more needs to be accomplished. Against the yardsticks of our own goals—full booking sheets, robust tournament draws, more USCTA members, lower handicaps—and the goal of better results internationally, we have barely moved the needle. But the work has begun.