

TPA COACHING PROFILE – GARY CARON

Throughout the summer, we will be highlighting some of the top coaches and tennis professionals from around the country, all of whom have been members of the Tennis Professionals Association (TPA) for 10 years. Here they will share their experiences and provide tips and advice for fellow coaches and players.

Gary Caron has worked at Granite Club in Toronto for the past 29 years and is currently the club's Athletic Director. While he may oversee all the sports offered, tennis remains the one in which his contributions have been seen the most.

Caron completely understands the role of a tennis professional, and even though he has earned many accolades to show his individual success, everything always revolves around those who are trying to learn.

"One thing that I have always preached is that you are there for your students," Caron said. "You are always finding out what it is that can help them get to their ultimate goal."

"It is never about you. It is always about them. As a coach you should be there quietly supporting and not getting too high or too low because the majority of people lose, unfortunately. It's about bringing them to the next level. It is about them as a student and giving them what they need."

A club pro two and coach three certified professional, Caron took some time to share with Tennis Canada how his club utilizes progressive programming, how he tries to deal with challenges involving parents, what to look for when hiring summer staff, and more.

Progressive Programming

With over 1,800 summer tennis members and 1,300 in the winter, one can imagine how tough it is to connect with that many people. In order to counteract that predicament, Caron has made sure to utilize and implement what he calls progressive programming. This allows any player, of all ages and levels, to get involved and develop a passion for tennis.

"Whether it is with the juniors or the adults, there is always something they can aspire to with progressive programming," Caron said. "Everything we offer allows them to continue to improve."

Even players who are just beginning to play the sport can slowly learn the game through lessons and then enter themselves in the house league. If they continue to improve past that point, there is opportunity to join more competitive-level teams.

Originally, says Caron, the club began with a lot of daytime ladies leagues. But the players continued to improve and team practices were created in the hopes they could move up to a higher level-of-play category.

"Now we are doing that with the men and they want to have more practices and be more competitive in the interclub competitions," Caron said.

Ultimately, progressive programming pushes people to improve their game. This structure means a demand for lessons develops amongst club members as they work to move up in their leagues and

reach their goals – all the while meeting new people and interacting with those who work at the club through lessons and competitions.

Q and A

How do you handle challenges involved with dealing with parents?

You have to handle them straight on, and early on, in any relationship. You want to make sure you have had a good talk with the parents to figure out what it is they want for their child before you go down a path. After the fact, it is harder to have heart-to-heart conversations or they might have had a different opinion of what they thought the relationship was with you. Have the conversations up front, early on, and you can revisit them as goals change. A kid wants to go pro, then they change it to a scholarship and then they change it to just get a good ranking, for example. That might happen, but if you go in saying it is pro or nothing, and you do not have that conversation, you probably won't last too long.

What key elements do you think are important for your summer staff to be aware of when organizing on-court sessions?

Variety. As much as we coaches might say you have to be repetitive and do things over and over, kids' attention spans are very small. Knowing that, you have to always be changing it up. You might have a theme but in terms of the lesson plan you have to be changing it all the time and keep it as fresh as possible. If you don't, the first thing they will say is, 'I am getting bored.'

Caron's Pro Tip

Wondering what to look for when hiring summer camp staff? Here are three specific traits that Caron likes to see in his future employees.

1. Likeability – “When you are having a conversation with someone, right away you should be able to enjoy it. They have this likeability about them and you enjoy the time you are spending with them.”
2. Positive Energy – “I want to feel like they have positive energy and can go out there with a group of kids, and it might be 30° Celsius, but they still have the kids being active, engaged and enjoying themselves.”
3. Personality – “I don't want to have everyone the same. You can't all be really high energy, for example. I would like a lot of different personalities because everyone gravitates to different styles of individuals.”

“Those three things I want to feel in an interview. I would say a resume gets them in the door but you will probably know within five minutes if they have these intangibles. Things that make you believe kids will gravitate towards them or adults will want to be around them. That's the kind of things I look for.”

The TPA, which is currently celebrating its 10th anniversary, is dedicated to growing the profession of coaching across Canada and assisting the nation's certified instructors, coaches, and club professionals. A Tennis Canada organization founded in 2004, the TPA has over 2,800 members, all of whom receive exclusive TPA member benefits. For more information, visit www.tpacanada.com.