

TPA COACHING PROFILE – ANDY SUTTON

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.

It took a few tries but Tennis Canada was finally able to connect with Andy Sutton. The first scheduled time had to be changed because Sutton needed to take the place of one of his coaches on court.

But after talking to the Head Pro from the Mayfair Parkway and Mayfair East racquet clubs in Markham, Ont., it is tough to imagine that he 'had' to get on court, but rather wanted to. Like a true professional, Sutton always puts the players first and gives them his all every time he is with him.

He has worked in just about every tennis environment a pro can since he started his career. Being a part of community, commercial or private clubs never changed how Sutton approached his craft.

"What you try to accomplish is really the same," Sutton said. "You are trying to make people develop a love for the game and make them get better. On court there is not much difference between the types of clubs."

Sutton shared with Tennis Canada some of his thoughts ranging from his advice to a young pro and what to look for when hiring staff to key elements coaches should utilize on court and how to coach players who are not high performance.

What would be one piece of advice, or two, that you would give a young tennis pro trying to be successful in the business?

Overall, if you want to be successful as a tennis coach you have to have passion for what you do. So those long days and the long hours do not seem like work. The people I look at who I think will be good coaches all love what they do. If you love what you do, you can bring your best performance all the time. I think have a passion for it, and if you have a passion for it, success will find you.

The people who I know who are good at it have never struggled to get enough hours because people pick up on the fact that they really care and have a passion for what they do. Word spreads and they are always in demand.

The other thing I would say is surround yourself with quality coaches as much as possible. You will learn the most from watching what others do. There are not that many new ideas, it is a matter of seeing something done well and making it your own. Then you can develop a repertoire of ways to help people.

What are some things that you look for when hiring staff at your facilities?

Ultimately, if your club is going to be successful it is going to come down to culture. I hire on personality and character. Certification is important, but if I have the right person they can acquire certification, knowledge and experience later. It is hard to change who somebody is.

The first thing I am looking for is, are they going to be a good fit with the existing team? Are they going to be able to compliment the team and be a strength as opposed to a weakness? That's the biggest thing.

And then do they have a strong work ethic. Are they prepared to work hard? Tennis is a tough business in the sense that when you work it is other people's leisure time. You need to be prepared to put in nights and weekends and be prepared to work and be responsible, on time, live up to commitments and all those sorts of things.

What key elements are important for coaches when organizing training sessions?

I think it is really important that they have a clear sense of the goals the person they are working with has and where they want to get to. I think it is really easy to come in and fix someone's game but you need to know what it is they want before you choose the path you are going to take to make them get better. That way you are in line with the goals they have so that the roads you choose to lay out for them takes them where they want to go.

The other thing I would say that is really important is making sure their level of engagement is high. Because when people come for lessons it is the time they look forward to during the week. It is their hour of enjoyment and it means a lot to them. So you need to be prepared to bring your best performance every time you step on the court. Your last hour in a long day deserves the same level of effort and focus and attention as your first hour. You need to be prepared to bring it all the time.

If you are coaching players who are not high performance, what is it that you should be trying to accomplish?

If the players you are coaching are not high performance, you are really just trying to get them to be better with what they already do. Or, understand what their goals are and help them achieve those.

Some people may say they want to get as good as possible and in that case you will treat them like high performance. But other people may say I just want to get a little bit better because I want to play with my friends. Then you really just try to help them improve by working with what they already have as opposed to rebuilding their game.

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.