



**April 17, 2020**

## **TPA Insights and Perspectives**

We're in the midst of our second month of the COVID-19 pandemic and it continues to have a lasting impact on all parts of life. New daily routines have been established, as we all do our part to flatten the curve.

From all indicators it looks like we will be in a "shelter at home" directive with non-essential business closures for upwards of a minimum 6-8 weeks. The uncertainty of so many things in life and business can seem overwhelming. Remember though the two things in life that you are in control of are your attitude and effort. Channel your focus first, on your loved ones, staying home, and keeping your social distance.

Our goal now is to provide our coaches and professionals with a compass to ensure that when we do get back to our new normal, we will be prepared and have the necessary tools and ideas to provide the best possible experience for our stakeholders.

With that in mind, we'll be providing a series of informative and in-depth Q & A's from some of Canada's TPA leaders in clubs/Academies. The series is called "Insights and Perspectives", and asks leaders about their actions and initiatives taken to date along with their impacts, as well as delving into valuable insights and strategies they are pursuing for their club, staff and members/players. This diverse group is comprised of a cross section of private, municipal, bubble, and commercial clubs and academies from across Canada.

Our hope is that in sharing this diverse industry knowledge from across Canada with our TPA membership, we will be better equipped for the challenges to come and for the new journey ahead. We hope you agree.

### **Tennis Professionals Association**

The Tennis Professionals Association (TPA) is a member-based association dedicated to growing the profession of tennis coaching throughout Canada. The TPA was developed by Tennis Canada for Canadian certified Instructors, Coaches, and Club Professionals. The TPA's mission is to support members in their contribution to the growth of tennis in Canada. For more information, visit [www.tpacanada.com](http://www.tpacanada.com).

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This week, we will be featuring the following TPA Members:



### **Danny Da Costa**

Danny Da Costa has been the Chief Executive Officer for the OSTEN & VICTOR Alberta Tennis Centre since 2015. He is a Coach 2, Club Pro 3 certified coach and has more than 25 years of experience in a variety of leadership roles in the racquet sport industry.



### **Yves Boulais**

Yves Boulais has been overseeing, directing and managing the tennis department at the Ontario Racquet Club since 2015. He is a Tennis Canada Coach 4.



## **How has the Covid-19 virus pandemic impacted your Club/Academy?**

**DD (Danny Da Costa)** – Like all facilities in Canada, the pandemic has created a very difficult situation for our facility. The OSTEN & VICTOR Alberta Tennis Centre has been temporarily closed since March 17<sup>th</sup>. Our facility has taken a number of steps to ensure the club's viability including business continuity planning, staff salary reductions, temporary layoffs, and slashing expenditures. We have also instituted an employee support plan which provides a 20 – 30% top-up to our temporarily laid-off employees. The employee support plan assists all full-time tennis professionals and managers who were affected by the facility closure and subsequent lay-off. Our immediate focus is to mitigate the financial risk to our organization so when things normalize, we can return to regular operations.

**YB (Yves Boulais)** – This tragic event has stopped all activities and forced the closure of the Ontario Racquet Club since the beginning of March 2020.

### **a) Are you still processing monthly membership/Academy fees or have you put them on freeze? Will the time/program be extended or will refunds be issued?**

**DD** – At this time, we are still processing monthly membership dues, although we are pausing some memberships on a case-by-case basis due to compassionate or hardship reasons (i.e. illness, job-loss). Program fees have been frozen (suspended). We will extend membership expiry dates and offer program credits for all programs affected by the facility closure.

**YB** – The club management has decided to continue processing memberships and fees, and extend the termination of their member's contract once this comes to an end.

### **b) Did your Club/Academy continue compensating employee and independent contractors, or lay them off?**

**DD** – Our facility does not employ any independent contractors, so all of our employees were treated in the following way:

1. All key salaried staff members took a 20% salary reduction
2. All remaining tennis professionals, maintenance staff, managers and member service attendants were placed on Temporary Unemployment (EI)
3. All employees who qualify for employee benefits will retain their benefit coverages until April 30<sup>th</sup>
4. All employees who were put on Temporary EI, were paid out vacation pay as well. Also, all of our employees were paid 100% of their earnings for the first full week of the facility closure, even though we were not operational.



5. All full-time staff members who were laid-off were also given an employee support plan (employee top-up on their regular earnings equaling 20 – 30%) paid twice a month (15th and 30th).
6. I have communicated regular information to our staff and provided additional information on various funding programs and how they can apply.

**YB** – Our club has been compensating our employees since the club closure and have agreed to do so until May 2020.

**c) Are you currently initiating any club maintenance/cleaning work at the facility during this shutdown?**

**DD** – Yes, our maintenance manager was retained and is thoroughly cleaning/disinfecting the facility. Our maintenance manager is also spending time daily in our facility to ensure the building is secure and for insurance purposes. As well, our maintenance manager is also performing other club maintenance projects (i.e., painting, organizing storage rooms, preparing for outdoor tennis). The facility will also be re-cleaned prior to opening as a precautionary measure.

**YB** – The club has been continuing to do maintenance and upgrades during the shutdown.

**d) Are you currently reviewing your Tennis Department/Academy processes and procedures, schedules, lesson plans, changes in delivery of program?**

**DD** – We have engaged our tennis staff to lead a thorough examination of our operations. We are analyzing all aspects of our operation and making changes as deemed necessary. We are treating this time as if we are opening our business for the first time, given the uncertainty of this pandemic situation. We are considering everything from rolling back pricing, schedule and program changes, analyzing our budgets and program delivery as well as understanding how human behaviour and expectations may change. We fully understand that some of our clients will be hard-hit financially and we have to be resilient and flexible during this time. We are also preparing various scenarios (financial and otherwise) and drafting our program guides for the summer and fall programs. As well, we are coming up with scenarios to complete the winter/spring sessions. I have been working on developing a business continuance plan for the Alberta Tennis Centre and have been reviewing our employee handbooks, employment agreements and other pertinent documents. Financially, I am examining all aspects of our financial and human resource planning. This exercise is necessary so we can quickly recoup/minimize the financial losses we have experienced at this time.



**YB** – Due to the uncertainty we have reviewed hypothetical scenarios for the reopening of the club.

**e) Who are you receiving guidance from?**

**DD** – I am receiving guidance from my Board, tennis staff, colleagues and mentors. I am also having regular discussions with the City of Calgary to get updates from CEMA (Calgary Emergency Management Agency). We are closely working with each other to analyze and make sound business decisions in the best interest of our facility and the general public.

**YB** – Due to the unprecedented situation, finding credible sources is challenging. We have consulted with other clubs and facilities managers/owners on how to proceed.

**f) For those with domes, what is the plan for take down this Spring? (Given that labour workers are unavailable and restricted).**

**DD** – N/A

**YB** – Our plan is to try to get the domes as early as possible. We believe that the restriction may be earlier on an outdoor court than on an indoor court, therefore allowing our members to start to use the facility earlier. We are contemplating using our own staff instead of waiting for our normal contractors to bring the domes down.

**Communication is crucial for an effective and efficient business operation, and now during a pandemic, even more so. What methods and frequency are you using to communicate and engage?**

**a) Your members/players/parents**

**DD** – We have sent club memos to our membership and program participants regularly (every 10 – 14 days) via newsletter. In addition, our tennis professionals have undertaken an initiative to make personal calls to members and program participants to see how they are doing during this time. As well, this type of personal communication is helpful to understand the mindset of our membership. In addition, we are also sending regular daily communications on our social media channels (Facebook, Instagram and Twitter). Our website is also a source of communication and updates.



**YB** – We have been communicating via emails/blast emails for most of our adult members. As far as our Academy parents and athletes, we have an internal media messenger that we use. Communication occurs multiple times a week.

**b) Your staff**

**DD** –I have had several communications with our staff via email/phone and our Tennis Director is engaging our laid-off tennis professionals on a weekly basis. We are also providing our staff with information relating to Government Funded Programs, how to apply for funding etc.

**YB** – We communicate with our staff via an internal media messenger that we use and a weekly Zoom meeting.

**c) What has the response been like?**

**DD** – Generally, very positive reaction from our membership. We have received many positive comments on our communication and the creation of our online/virtual classroom. Our staff also appreciate the information and follow up during this time. Most of our members and staff fully understand the challenges this situation has caused our operation and are supportive of the decisions being made to maintain our operations.

**YB** – We had very few complaints so far. Our members have been supportive.

**d) Have you already, or are you now considering online, virtual technology?**

**DD** – We have fully integrated online technology during this pandemic. We have created online content, classroom sessions with our High Performance and Next Gen Athletes using platforms like Google Classroom and Zoom. Our students are assigned work and the can attend our zoom sessions with our tennis centre coaches. We have also created content for every level of program in our adult and junior pathways. Members and program participants can log-in to the appropriate session and hear the weekly discussion on tennis development (tips, virtual curriculum) as well as Q&A with coaches. We are also using this time to create a program summary series (video content) for each level of program, which will summarize the content taught in the program, what they can expect and how they can progress through the pathway.

**YB** – We are currently using Telegram, Slack, Mailchimp (to send e-blasts) and Zoom.



**Marketing for your Club Tennis/Academy business is an ongoing and creatively challenging process at the best of times. During this time of uncertainty, what are you doing now and planning for in the near future with respect to:**

**a) Summer rec/HP Camps**

**DD** – At this time, we have suspended registration for our summer camps/programs, given the situation we are facing. We will communicate information as soon as our club closure is lifted by the City/Province. In the meantime, we are preparing our marketing and promotional materials and developing our content, so that we can communicate and open registration on the first day our facility re-opens.

**YB** – Our summer programs are presently on hold due to the uncertainty of the dates we will be allowed back.

**b) Unique programming/training**

**DD** – At this time, it is unknown how and when we can open. We will definitely offer some sort of 'freebie' to our membership (welcome back clinics or event), but largely our plan will depend on what the city/province will allow. We may opt to put a credit into each members account to promote play (i.e., one free hour of court time) as a thank you. We will make all necessary adjustments relating to social distancing. In addition, to ease concerns this will likely mean some changes to our on-court class organization until society normalizes.

**YB** – At this point we haven't decided to change anything besides that the summer programs will be delayed and potentially not happen due to the current situation.

**c) Welcome back club member/players initiatives**

**DD** – Yes, we are working on that as part of our return to regular operations. We anticipate it will take several months before our members and participants return to normalized human behaviour.

**YB** – We do not know the possible restriction, but we are aware of the possibility and prepare to be flexible and creative to ensure a pleasant experience for our members.

**d) Community outreach program**

**DD** – We organize a number of charitable activities on an annual basis, so at this time there is nothing specific to COVID-19 that we are contemplating. Our focus will be on





re-establishing operations, completing programs which have been postponed and generating revenue and playing opportunities for our members and the public.

**YB** – We have not planned anything at this point.

**What advice and guidance would you offer your tennis coaches and professionals as employees/independent contractors for now and over the next two years to assist them in their career?**

**DD** – I think this pandemic has changed the way we view things. It has caused significant financial/emotional stress for us all, but I believe we will come back stronger. I believe this situation has allowed our staff members to appreciate our facility more fully, to understand the business operations and challenges it faces. I am hopeful that when we return to regular operations it will bring our team even closer together. I know from my interactions with our membership, that they are missing our staff and the facility. Our staff have commented that they definitely feel that our facility is taking care of them, during this time. We always strive to build quality programs and experiences for our members/program participants and the importance of program/member retention is critical to our success coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic. We will use our normal techniques: program calls/emails, member surveys, regular communications to retain our customers. Going forward, I will continue to stress to our staff members the importance of customer service and engagement. We have to continue to put our membership first, support them if they need assistance and value their continued support. We have to appreciate that people's circumstances will be different, and we have to be adaptable to the needs of our membership (financial or otherwise). As the CEO, I whole-heartedly value the contributions of our staff during this time, they have been wonderful, and I am very appreciative of all our staff who have been affected by the closure.

**YB** – We have discussed in our staff meetings that it will be even more important after this passes to reinforce communication with members and clients, players, and set guidance on new formation for on-court social distance techniques. We must also provide optional weekly meetings for updates, share importance of customer service skills and techniques (to attract and retain clients/players), parent communication, adapt and adopt virtual meetings, welcome feedback from members/players, etc.





**What do you feel are the biggest challenges and opportunities for your Club/Academy and our Canadian Tennis Industry over the next 2 years? How can the coaches/professionals play an active and important role?**

**DD** – I am hopeful that we can minimize the damage this has caused, but I am realistic in thinking there will be a significant reset before we can normalize our operations and expectations. There has been significant financial damage done to recreational facilities across the world, most businesses cannot support a 2 to 3-month facility closure and this will take years for clubs to fully recover. There will be some players who cannot return to the sport for financial reasons so we will need to support them: whether that is a payment plan, lowering prices, focusing more on cost effective options such as programs or play opportunities. In our case, we will need to examine whether we continue with our facility expansion plan or possibly defer the start date for the foreseeable future. As well, we run a world-class and very successful ATP Challenger event, but we will need to determine what people's behaviour will be like for attending events. There is significant financial risk associated with hosting events of this magnitude. Any lost sponsorship revenue will be difficult to recoup and our ticket and box holders (8,600) in 2020 will have to make tough financial decisions on how and where they spend their money. Finally, we have to all work together and support one-another, so we can enjoy the sport we all love. If you are a coach working in a club, seek to support your employer during this time. Offer any insight that can help benefit the business. If you are showing that you care about the business, it will be repaid back to you in the future with continued employment and advancement. Club leaders do not forget loyalty during adversity. If you are a leader, use this time to cross-train your staff members, provide mentorship and guidance during this time and think about succession planning. It is imperative that we use this downtime to productively read some books, improve our skills and exercise our minds and bodies. If you need anything from me or our organization during this time do not hesitate; we are always ready to serve and support the industry and the sport we love.

**YB** – The biggest challenge is to anticipate the future. On one side we may experience a surge of interest, because the people will be reluctant to travel and will turn to local activities. On the other side, the economic situation and the potential breakdown of the tennis systems may change the interest of adults for tennis. It could change the interest of parents of kids to train seriously. The uncertainty will be affected by the NCAA and the scholarship availability. The local tournaments, ITF tournaments, Pro tournaments. The reboot of all these systems could be very difficult and affect all the tennis business drastically. Second, the opportunity is to make it better. We were all in a system that had plenty of problems. The cost of competing, playing opportunities, local competing



development programs. It is a great time to assemble leaders together and map out what could be possible. We will have to think for ourselves, not following outdated antic programs from abroad. I think that we will have to think about development in a new way. The business as it was will never be possible again. Time to put on our creative hats.

### **Additional Comments:**

**DD** – This pandemic has also created a significant challenge for Tennis Canada and the organization's resources. Potentially a cancelled Rogers Cup would create a very significant and challenging situation for Tennis Canada. This may mean that many of the programs and support services we have enjoyed will be cancelled/postponed for the foreseeable future. The tennis industry as a whole may look very differently coming out of the pandemic. Will all the clubs be able to sustain the closure and lost revenue? What will that do for tennis professional compensation going forward? How will the financial health of our tennis clubs affect compensation, employee/employer relationship and status going forward? How will our customers' spending habits change? How will competitions change in the future, will people want to travel or attend events? Lots of things to consider going forward. While there are so many things for us to ponder, we have to make the "tennis industry" stronger. It's great that the TPA is working on initiatives such as this one to bring our community together and I applaud these types of initiatives and hope the TPA can do more to support the tennis industry.

For all parties, this is a great time to review business and strategic directions and re-prioritize what is truly important for our industry and the growth of our sport. We all celebrate the great strides Canadian Tennis has made but without strong clubs and coaches we cannot grow the next wave of talent in Canada.

Now is the time for Tennis Canada, the TPA, our Provincial Associations and its stakeholders (clubs, academies and coaches) to review organizational priorities. This pandemic has created a real opportunity to work together, improve communications and support one another for the betterment of our tennis industry. The success of our tennis industry as a whole, is dependent upon all parties working together due to the limited resources and challenging situation COVID-19 has caused.