

# SPATZ BRINGS ARGENTINE FLAVOR TO US

In 2002, a 14-year-old from Tandil, Argentina, named Juan Martin Del Potro was just another player among the more than 1,000 who flock to Florida each December to play in international junior tennis tournaments. He lost in the round of 16 at the Eddie Herr in Bradenton and the first round of the Prince Cup in Miami.

Or was he just another player? Three weeks later he won the Junior Orange Bowl 14s.

Daniel Spatz remembers the story well. Del Potro and his coach, Marcelo Gomez, stayed at his house in Miami because they didn't have enough money for a hotel. Spatz, a teaching pro who worked at the prestigious Raul Perez Roldan Academy in Tandil in the late 1980s, allowed them to use the court in his back yard.

"After he lost in the Prince Cup," Spatz recalled, "we had a meeting at my house. I said, 'This is what I think you should do,' and three weeks later he went on to win the Orange Bowl. So I disagree with people who say if you don't reach semifinals at Eddie Herr you will not make it. And winning the Orange Bowl doesn't mean you're going to be a top player. The time table for each person is different. Juan Martin's time came at the Orange Bowl."

What changed after the Prince Cup?

"The attitude," said Spatz. "Training harder. He was going out every single day hitting 50 balls to the middle of the court, 50 balls cross court, both wings, and then he was working on a lot of movement. And serve and return. Simple workouts. And put-away shots. That was the pattern."

"Simple things make you a better player. I think there's too much X's and O's about patterns. You look at his game and it's very simple. And he's very strong from both wings."

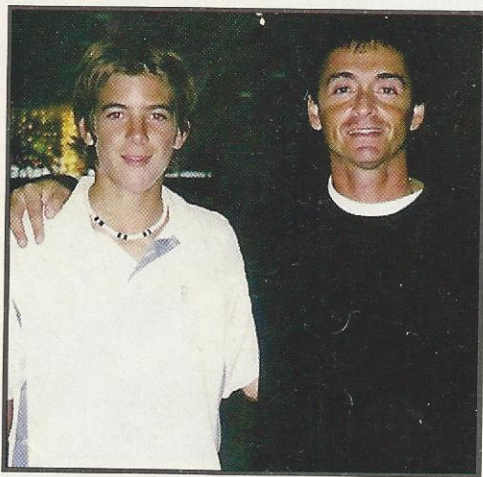
Spatz said Del Potro came back to Miami the next year to play in the Orange Bowl 16s. "He lost in the first round and that was the last Orange Bowl he played. He also stayed with me then. He was upset with personal things in his family."

Did Del Potro, the surprise winner of the 2009 US Open, ever talk about winning the Open?

"Yes, that was his dream," said Spatz. "He didn't say French Open like many South Americans said. He was already a wonderful hard court player. And he learned on clay courts in Argentina. You didn't have to be a genius to see that he would make it."

Tandil, Argentina, also was the home of other standout players, including Guillermo Perez Roldan, Franco Davin, Mariano Zabaleta and Juan Monaco. Spatz has brought the "Tandil System" to Miami, where he works with advanced junior players as well as players of all ages and levels at Continental Park Tennis Center.

Spatz, who is writing a book about tennis and is a student of the game, is PTR, USPTA and Etcheberry certified and is a graduate of USTA



Juan Martin Del Potro at 14 with Daniel Spatz.

High Performance. He has worked with tour pros Bethanie Mattek, Julie Ditty and Mallory Cecil; plus University of Miami standout Vivek Subramanian. He has also trained his stepson Renzo Maggi, who plays collegiately at Loyola Marymount in California, and his 13-year-old son Daniel, a ranked Florida player.

Spatz offers this advice:

\* "Build a solid foundation on both sides, along with serve and return of serve. And learn how to quickly make the transition from defense to offense."

\* "I don't believe you can produce players having eight, 10 kids on the court. No more than four or three, and develop a well-rounded game."

\* On what the US needs to develop more top players: "Getting coaches with proven results and credentials the opportunity to share their knowledge with Patrick McEnroe, Jose Higuera,



Del Potro with Spatz last summer at the University of Miami.

with the people at the headquarters at Boca Raton. I think the USTA should somehow find out about teachers of the game and not just former players or coaches. In order to be a coach you have to be a teacher first.

\* "Teach how to vary the game more. The last generation of American players is all power, power, power, a one-dimensional game."

\* "Rule number one in my house is we don't talk about tennis, unless my son asks me. Rule number two, when you take your kid to a tournament, do not talk about the match that's coming. Let them listen to music, whatever they want to do."

\* "Kids should do both group and private lessons, group two or three times a week and private two or three times a week. Three hours a day is enough for a talented, competitive 14-year-old. That's what Del Potro did."

## JCC EVENT A SUCCESS

Legendary pros Fred Stolle and Owen Davidson participated in the Ladies Pro-Am Tennis Tournament at the Michael-Ann Russell Jewish Community Center on the Sanford L. Ziff Campus in North Miami Beach.

Sixteen women from the MAR-JCC Tennis Committee and 16 pros, including local teaching pros, were divided into two groups of eight women and eight professional players. The goal was to raise money for improvements to the tennis facilities.

Among the professional players were Stolle, former No. 1 player in the world and U.S. Open Champion from Australia; Davidson, also from Australia and multiple Grand Slam doubles winner; Venezuela's Maurice Ruah, former top 100 professional tennis player; and Switzerland's Ivo Heuberger, also a former top 100 professional player.

Dean Goldfine, MAR-JCC Director of Tennis, and Donna Tollefsen, Assistant Director of Tennis, collaborated with a motivated group of

dedicated ladies who make up the "Tennis Committee" at the Center.

"We wanted to make sure this event was not only fun, but truly exemplified the caliber of high-quality tennis programming and activities we have here at the JCC," said Goldfine.

Working with him were Gabby Berenstein, Lily Kubiliun, Tania Weiss and Betty Brenner. "These women in addition to many other committed and loyal staff and volunteers are the heart and soul of the Soffer Family Tennis Center here at the 'J', and work so hard to help us reach our goals. We are also grateful to Hili Scheck for her generous contribution," Goldfine added.

The Ladies Pro-Am brought about 300 spectators. Winners included Betty Brenner and Goldfine, who beat Ruah and Vera Kassin.

The Michael-Ann Russell Spring Tennis Leagues will begin February. Junior Team Tennis will also begin Feb. 1.

For more information, call 305-932-4200 x160.