

College Tennis SPOTLIGHT



Mythbusters: College Club Tennis is for Losers



By Ricky Becker

At this point in my college consulting career, each of my consults fall into one of a few categories. For example, many consults are with parents of freshmen in high school who want to know whether their child should make an academic or athletic run through college doors. Other clients want to know what colleges might be interested in giving their child a scholarship. Other clients have children outside of the Ivy League ranking threshold, but want to be told (falsely) that there is some backdoor way in. Sometimes, I will know the situation before meeting with the family, and sometimes, I won't know.

One particular consult I did over the summer did not fall into an aforementioned category. I looked up the player on tennisrecruiting.net and did not see the name. I was also told the player never played in a tournament. I had a feeling that this player had good grades and I was told that the player was number one on her high school team.

"Okay," I thought, "This is probably going to be one of those sobering consults where I need to tell someone that if they want to play college tennis, they will need to take an academic drop. Not get the bump up they are looking for."

When I met the girl's father, he was a very nice guy which made my job harder. We started talking, and I encouraged him to enter his daughter in USTA tournaments. Then he asked me about a lot of the top academic schools and is it possible to play tennis at any of them without setting foot onto a court in a USTA tournament. I empathetically said no. Not un-

less she tries out for a team and somehow makes it, but circumstances like this are rare.

"That's unfortunate," the father said. "I thought club tennis was always an option."

Wow. I knew club tennis was growing across the U.S., and I also knew that there were club nationals where nationally-ranked juniors played. But I never thought that club tennis would really quench a tennis player's thirst for competition. I did some research and virtually 80 to 90 percent of Division I teams have a club team.

"Sure," I told the father a couple of weeks later. "There are plenty of club tennis options out there." However, there are some pros and cons to club tennis to consider.

The pros

- There are inter-collegiate nationals for club tennis as there is for varsity tennis. In fact, the level of top club teams (usual big state schools) is higher than some Division I varsity teams and many Division III varsity teams.
- At some schools, club teams have a better chance of going away to the national championships for club tennis than the varsity team does for the NCAA Championships.
- The commitment for club tennis is often what one wants it to be. If you can't make a practice, it's usually not a big deal.
- Often, a bench-warmer for a varsity team would be a star for a club team. Some people would have a much more fulfilling college tennis experience playing high on a club team, rather than riding the bench and not playing team matches.

- With fundraising as a part of club tennis, often the camaraderie among the players on the team is tighter than that of varsity tennis. Fundraisers can often build team unity.

- There is less pressure to perform on a club team than there is on a varsity team. Nobody is playing to keep their scholarship.

The cons

- Club tennis does not hold the same cache with would-be job interviews out of college.
- The search for funds could sometimes be a nuisance.
- There is sometimes a struggle for court time while the varsity team doesn't really need to think about such things.
- Club tennis does not provide scholarships, nor does it give a student who plans to play club tennis a real academic bump.
- Club tennis is not as organized as varsity tennis.

Overall, club tennis is a sound alternative for someone who has a strong proclivity for a school but won't make the tennis team. Club tennis is also ideal for someone who wants to play college tennis on their own terms. For more information, visit TennisOnCampus.com.

Ricky Becker is founder of JuniorTennisConsulting LLC, which offers off-court college guidance services to junior tennis players. He is also director of tennis at Sportime Bethpage. He can be reached by e-mail at rbecker06@yahoo.com, by phone at (516) 605-0420 or via JuniorTennisConsulting.com.