



DARREN CAHILL

SUCCESS AT EVERY STAGE

BY CHRIS ODDO

The Player | Pro Tour 1984-1994

Darren Cahill was a short, skinny child. But even as one of the smallest kids in high school, he displayed athletic promise. The son of a prominent Aussie-rules football coach, Darren finally experienced a growth spurt. The development, ironically, marked the onset of knee problems.

Cahill had his sights on the pro Tour and, at 17, began working with legendary Australian coach Bob Carmichael. After two years, Cahill would turn pro and later credit Carmichael for much of his accomplishments.

"Bob [Carmichael] left a big mark on me. I would put down most of what I've learned about coaching primarily to him. It's not only what I teach, but how I teach."

Constant knee injuries inhibited Cahill from producing consistent wins on the Tour. He would, however, advance to the semi-finals of the U.S. Open in 1988, his best result in a Major and where he beat Boris Becker in the second round. One year later he reached a career high ranking, No. 22. But by his mid-twenties Cahill endured double digit surgeries and suddenly found himself at a crossroad.

"When I was 25 I was pretty much wiped out of the game."

Sidelined for three years, he would attempt a "mini-comeback," as he calls it. But his efforts were fruitless, so a discouraged Cahill retired in 1994 at age 29.

Cahill says his only regret as a tennis player is that he believes injuries prevented him from realizing his full potential.

Coach | 1998-2006

With competition behind him, Cahill turned to coaching. The next best thing to competing yourself, says an enthusiastic Cahill, is teaching.

"Similar to playing tennis, coaching provides a rush of energy that makes the heart pound faster and keeps you anxiously awake the night before a match."

Working with high profile players, Cahill enjoyed great success. In 2001, he guided Lleyton Hewitt to a U.S. Open title, a victory that led to a No. 1 ranking. Then, just three months later and at the peak of their success, the Cahill-Hewitt partnership abruptly ended. Reportedly, Hewitt's management team balked at Cahill's request to allow his wife and newborn son to travel full-time with the Hewitt's entourage.

Unemployed and fresh on the market, top players pursued Cahill.

"I've always liked Darren," says Andre Agassi. "I find his Aussie accent soothing – it almost puts me to sleep."



AT-A-GLANCE

Born: October 2, 1965
Hometown: Adelaide, Australia.
Best Tennis Memory: Playing No. 1 singles for Australia's Davis Cup team.
Coaching His Son: "There's no coaching, it's just play. As long as he's out on the court and he's running around and he's swinging a racquet, I'm all good with that."
Greatest Student Reaction: "Getting a smile after someone has a nice win. For me, that's everything."

“It’s not that Federer or Murray aren’t attractive to Darren. But when you’re coaching one player it means you’re on the road more – there’s more dynamics to it.”

A desperate Agassi negotiated persistently to acquire Cahill’s services, but at that time, the Aussie contemplated working with Marat Safin.

“You’ve *got* to work with me, Darren,” said Andre, who had recently parted with Brad Gilbert. “I promise you, I have game left.”

Agassi and Cahill sealed the deal in 2002 and positive results followed. With Cahill’s influence, Andre would win his eighth [and last] Grand Slam, the 2003 Australian Open.

“Coaching somebody that’s already one of the greatest players in the game, it’s a great challenge to try and make them better.”

Cahill’s key to maximizing a player’s potential: pay attention and listen.

“You need to learn from the player, and be able to sit down and have meaningful conversation about the game, about where that particular player is heading in the game, and how you’re going to go about achieving that improvement in their game.”

Coaching requires adapting to the personality and game style of each player. Hewitt and Agassi, recalls Cahill, were as different as night and day.

“How each player [Hewitt and Agassi] would perceive their own strengths and weaknesses *and* the strengths and weaknesses of their opponents were markedly different because of their different approaches to playing the game.” Cahill says coaching demands complete dedication, where responsibilities engulf your life and your mind is preoccupied with work.

“You never stop thinking about how you can become better, how you can alter the training. You never stop picking the minds of people that have been there before and talking to other coaches and making sure that you turn over every single stone.”

Since Agassi’s retirement in 2006, speculation on Cahill’s next coaching job remains active. A trial run with Roger Federer fizzled in ‘09.

“I had full support from my family. My wife thinks the world of Roger and she was kind of pushing me to hang in there and see whether or not I would get offered that job,” says Cahill. “But I’m not quite sure if it’s because she gets sick of me after a couple of weeks at home and she wants me out of the house,” he chuckles.

Many people in the tennis industry thought Cahill would be a great match for Andy Murray, but Cahill downplayed the rumor. Cahill’s friends suspect that family matters may have played a role in the jobs that didn’t materialize.

“Family is definitely important to Darren,” says ESPN commentator Brad Gilbert. “It’s not that Federer or Murray aren’t attractive to Darren. But when you’re coaching one

player it means you’re on the road more – there’s more dynamics to it.”

With a wife and two young children, Cahill opted against coaching full-time and accepted two part-time gigs instead: one as a consultant-mentor, the other as a commentator.

Commentator | 2007-Present

The relaxed and methodical Cahill broadcasts on ESPN with ease, and describes the duty as “a bunch of friends sitting around watching a match and talking tennis.” As one of the most popular tennis commentators, he says the secret to success isn’t complicated: “Be yourself.”

The part-time responsibilities don’t require lengthy travel, which allow him to “see my kids grow up during these important years and keep them in one place to attend school.” His daughter is 6 years old, his son, 9.

Consultant-Mentor | 2009-Present

As a consultant-mentor for the Adidas player development program, Cahill works with a team of coaches training athletes such as Ana Ivanovic, Daniela Hantuchova and Fernando Verdasco.

“We’re not really there to be anybody’s individual coaches, nor can we be. We’re trying to enhance what they’ve already got in place and help the athlete.”

The facility is conveniently located near Cahill’s Las Vegas home. The position provides an attractive opportunity to collaborate with his idol, renowned fitness trainer, Gil Reyes. Reyes was the inspiration behind Andre Agassi’s resurrected career.

What’s Next | 2011 and Beyond

Cahill says all stages of his tennis career have been good and that he’s a very lucky man.

“I’ve been in the right place at the right time.”

At 45, he’s satisfied with the status quo – teaming with Gil Reyes in Las Vegas and commentating – however, he won’t rule out the possibility of eventually accepting a full-time coaching position.

“With all the people that have coached – like Brad (Gilbert) and myself – and have now jumped into commentary gigs, there’s no question that you still have that deep-down burning desire to coach again.”

Coaching will have to wait, insists Cahill. While his children are young he’s not actively looking for additional work and he’s content to wear headphones and hold a microphone for several more years.