

discover

CAPTAIN JIM COURIER

FULL SPEED AHEAD

BY CHRIS ODDO

Listening and Learning

Jim Courier played for two of the longest-tenured Davis Cup captains in U.S. history and lives a few doors down from a third. So when he accepted the job as the 40th Captain in U.S. Davis Cup history, he had an idea of what the job entailed. Still, the methodical planner refuses to leave stones unturned. Soon after he was hired, he grabbed his colleague and good friend Patrick McEnroe and whisked him to a local watering hole.

"I took him out for drinks after I accepted the job," says the four-time Slam winner, "to basically just download from his brain his last 10 years as captain, get his insights into the players and their motivations, all the different angles. They've all (McEnroe, and Courier's former captains, Tom Gullickson and Tom Gorman) been extremely generous with their time and thoughts."

Courier has a keen sense of appreciation for McEnroe's achievements as captain, and while Courier will pave his own path, he will attempt to replicate the tremendous team essence that McEnroe fostered.

"I admire how Patrick formed the team unity that came together under his watch over the course of time," says Courier. "That's something I'll look to continue. There's been a great camaraderie amongst the guys playing for Patrick over the past decade, and if we can keep that same spirit, I think we'll have a great chance to win here on multiple occasions."

As a player, Courier was known for his tireless work ethic and dogged enthusiasm – not only for tennis but *preparing for tennis*. The desire to succeed, along with an astute ability to critique and willingness to seek advice, are expected to make him an effective captain.

WORLD-CLASS CAPTAIN

Career Record: 506-237

Became the 10th No. 1 in ATP Rankings on Feb 10, 1992

French Open Champion: 1991-1992

Australian Open Champion: 1992-1993

Davis Cup Career Record: 17-10

Davis Cup Champion: 1992, 1995

Career titles: 23

Inducted to the International Tennis Hall of Fame & Museum, 2005



“Improvement on clay is the key to the future of American tennis, which is why at all three of our training centers we now have clay courts, and certainly no one understands that mentality as well as Jim.”

“In Jim’s case, I think he’s going to have a great impact, not only on our Davis Cup team, but also on all the players that he’s going to be in touch with,” says Jose Higuera, USTA Director of Coaching and Courier’s former coach. “It’s not only Jim’s reputation as a player, which we all know, but also his work ethic and the way he goes about his business. I’m sure he’s going to bring that same intensity and focus towards his Davis Cup position.”

Communication is Liberation

“It’s my job to make *them* comfortable, not to make *me* comfortable,” Courier says of his coaching relationship with the players. “In management, which is really what coaching is, you have to understand what makes people tick,” says Courier. “Some people respond to different things, and others respond on their own time. So it’s a case-by-case approach, managing the players on and off the court. I don’t think that you can take a unilateral approach – this is my way or the highway. At least, that’s not the way that I’ll approach it.”

In addition to spending quality time with the players – Andy Roddick, Sam Querrey, Ryan Harrison, Mardy Fish and John Isner – Courier also connected with coaches.

“I’ve been developing relationships with their coaches because that’s an important relationship as well,” says Courier. “To get that information on how they’re feeling, how they also receive information. Not everyone gets it the same way or receives it in the same way.”

“I believe that Jim knows how to relate, not only to the team collectively, but to individuals,” says Courier’s long-time coach, Nick Bollettieri. “This is where Courier’s advantage lies,” he adds. “Jim is intuitive interpersonally. He can change the tone. As a coach, you have to know each player as a person – their idiosyncrasies; can you be tough on one player and soft on another? – this is what Courier brings.”

Shaping the Future on Clay

Courier says American tennis has a bright future and clay court competition is part of that optimism.

“Improvement on clay is the key to the future of American tennis, which is why at all three of our training centers we now have clay courts, and certainly no one understands that mentality as well as Jim,” says Patrick McEnroe, USTA’s head of Player Development. “We think developing on clay will make them better all-around players on all surfaces and not just on clay.”

Jim was raised in Florida and learned to play tennis on hard courts and green clay. This experience, he recognizes, helped him hoist the French Open trophy twice.

I asked McEnroe if the Davis Cup Captain has adequate time with the players to impact their clay court results.

“I definitely believe that the captain can have a positive influence with the players,” says McEnroe. “Obviously you’re not going to change their games, but I think in terms of shot selection, strategy in playing particular players and how to use their strengths and manage their games – I think Jim will do that as well as anyone.”

Courier is enthusiastic too and looks forward to Santiago (the site of the upcoming American tie vs. Chile, March 4-6) and other ties played on clay.

“Hopefully helping them to better understand the surface and maybe better understand how to construct the points.”

Courier says he will work to impact players at their various stages of development, a responsibility that is not only a challenge, but a desire.

“The goal is to not only help these guys maximize their performance during Davis Cup weeks but hopefully give them a few little things they can take with them every week of the year and just become better players in general. If I can do that then the results in Davis Cup will take care of themselves.”

IN GOOD COMPANY

The biggest and brightest American names to ever play the game.

Arthur Ashe: 13-3 | 1981-1985
Donald Dell: 7-0 | 1968-1969
John McEnroe: 2-1 | 2000
Bill Tilden: 3-0 | 1928
Tony Trabert: 14-3 | 1953; 1976-1980

BIG SHOES TO FILL

The top-5 winningest captains in U.S. history

Tom Gorman: 18 [8 seasons]
Patrick McEnroe: 16 [10 seasons]
Tony Trabert: 14 [6 seasons]
Arthur Ashe: 13 [5 seasons]
Tom Gullickson: 13 [6 seasons]

