



Q&A WITH TAYLOR DENT

INTERVIEW BY CHRIS ODDO

SINCE TAYLOR DENT'S RETIREMENT LAST NOVEMBER, THE 30-YEAR-OLD HAS HIT THE GROUND RUNNING. He has joined forces with his father Phil (Taylor's former coach, who is an Australian Open finalist and French Open semifinalist) and wife Jenny to form the Dent Tennis Academy in Newport Beach, California.

Reporter Chris Oddo recently spoke with Taylor about his new academy, the state of American tennis and his fond memories of his legendary match on the Grandstand vs. Ivan Navarro at the 2009 US Open.



Landon Draper

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TVM: Taylor, how has retirement been treating you?

Taylor: I haven't really missed a beat. My dad and I had wanted to start the Academy for a long time. Now that I'm retired, we thought it's the best time to go forward with it. It's going great. We're trying to take it as slowly as possible because we want to make sure that everybody who experiences the Academy leaves with a smile on their face and is dying to come back.

TVM: What is the Dent Academy philosophy and the role you play.

Taylor: It stems around improvement. If you come and participate, you have to be willing to improve. A lot of people want to improve but aren't willing. That means a lot of hard work, a lot of intelligence – it's an all-encompassing thing. My role is extremely active. My personality is very tunnel vision. I'm almost O.C.D., so now that I'm not playing tennis, I am just two feet in trying to get these kids to improve. That's what makes them happy, that's what makes me happy.

TVM: Have you placed a racquet in your son Declan's hands yet? Or maybe you'll have a baseball kid like the Agassis?

Taylor: My body type was never complimentary towards tennis, so if Declan chose baseball or football I wouldn't argue too much. But he does have a racquet. The kid's got so much energy, and he loves being outside, so I strung a tennis ball, and I hung it from the awning, and I just dangle it about waist high. We gave him a racquet, and he just smacks it. He loves it, and it's pretty funny.

TVM: Everybody has an opinion on American tennis. Patrick McEnroe and Jose Higuera think clay-court tennis is the answer. Robert Lansdorp favors one-on-one instruction. What are your thoughts?

Taylor: I understand Lansdorp's opinion, but I tend to agree with

McEnroe. If you look how the professionals are playing the game, they're not winning off of one and two shots. You'll see one rally a game where there are at least 20 strokes. American junior tennis is played on fast hard courts, and that is a problem because it rewards flat, hard strokes, and in the pros, the slower courts and the slower balls reward topspin. Still aggressive, but safer shots overall.

Life is still good here in America, so if an American kid competes against a kid from Serbia or South America, kids who are literally fighting for their survival to make it as a professional tennis player, that's pretty tough for the American kid to overcome.

TVM: Are we soft in America?

Taylor: Soft is a tough word – we're speaking in generalities – but in a lot of cases it's true. Where you know, it's 'oh, I'll skip that tournament' or 'I won't practice that extra hour.' We're competing with Eastern Europeans, Europeans, and to me, the competition is too tough for that.

TVM: Do you believe champions are born or created?

Taylor: I don't think you can say one or the other. We are working with this little 9-year-old kid from Taiwan, and he's a born freak. This kid is something that you don't see very often, but having said that, there's a long way between 9 years old and being a great professional player. I think it's a combination of both, but I don't think you need both.

TVM: Looking back to your amazing match on the Grandstand in '09 with Ivan Navarro, are you immensely proud of that match?

Taylor: Even if I'd lost that match, it would have been a lesson to me and to the kids that we now coach. I didn't play that well – the matchup wasn't great for me, and I actually had set points in every set we played – but it didn't matter. I talked a lot with Tom Gullickson before the tournament, and he told me that Pete Sampras would hope for those white-collar days where it would all look pretty, but he'd be prepared to put on the blue collar and just go to work.

That's kind of what I felt, and that's what we try to relay to these kids. The fact that I did get through that match, and the fact that it was the US Open, and the fact that the crowd there is just unbelievable for Americans, made it probably the best single tennis experience of my life.