

Legends inspire



After dedicating his life to his own playing career, Wes Horskins became an inspiration to other aspiring professionals as an award-winning coach.

It may have been a black and white TV, but the moving images of Rod Laver, John Newcombe and Ken Rosewall in a 1973 Davis Cup tie left a lasting impression on a young Wes Horskins.

Within a matter of days the 11-year-old picked up his first tennis racquet and from that moment tennis was engrained within the Horskins psyche.

He went on to become a promising junior claiming the prestigious Czechoslovakian National Junior Championships and the Swiss National Junior Title along the way.

Horskins had the opportunity to represent Australia in the World Junior Esso Challenge and Victoria in both the Wayne Reid and Linton Cup teams. In 1980, he was ranked as the number one junior in Victoria and top five junior in his age group in Australia. At just 17, Horskins played State Grade 1 pennant, which is the highest open grade pennant in Victoria.

He was on the ATP Tour for six years, achieving an Australian singles ranking of 39, an ATP singles ranking of 434 in 1983 and represented Oklahoma State University after receiving a full scholarship. His most vivid memory though was qualifying for the Australian Open in 1982. Having this vast playing experience, Horskins knew exactly what career path he wanted to pursue once his professional playing days came to an end.

“I had devoted my life to being a tennis player and it was natural to want to pass on that experience” he says.

Before settling in Melbourne 26 years ago Horskins started coaching in Fuengirola, Spain at the prestigious Aquarius Tennis Centre on the Costa Del Sol.

This coaching stint lasted for two years, after which point Horskins moved back to Melbourne, where he worked for two years as a self-employed coach at numerous clubs, while completing his Diploma of Education.

He founded Futures Tennis Academy in 1992 and this full-time academy is helping to shape the future talent of the sport.

“All our coaches are Tennis Australia qualified and some of my head coaches have been part of Futures Tennis Academy for 15 years or more,” he says. “I hope all kids we coach leave with the same passion and love for our great sport that we have.”

In 2008 the East Malvern Tennis Club, one of Futures Tennis Academy’s coaching bases, was ranked the number one largest Community Based Tennis Club in the state.

Horskins’s hard work and dedication to tennis coaching was recognised last year when he won the TCAV Club Coach of the Year award and was also finalist in two categories at the 2010 Australian Tennis Awards: Coaching Excellence – Club and Coaching Excellence – MLC Tennis Hot Shots.

“Getting to know what ‘drives’ the kid to be at coaching is the key. With the players we coach that want to make it as a player – we always remind them that there is

always someone else out there who is willing to work longer and harder than what they think is their longest and hardest,” he says.

Horskins is someone who admires the athletes who, like him, have also made tennis the cornerstone of their life.

“I really get a thrill out of seeing the kids who continue coaching all the way from juniors to adults. We have a group of girls who commenced coaching in our modified program and continued until they were 19 and now, some 20 years later, are still playing night competition together,” he says.

Horskins’s personal urge to compete is still evident, having represented Australia twice in the over 35 World Team Championships and reaching the singles quarter-finals in 2000 at the over 35 World Individual Championships in Amsterdam, Holland.

He claimed the Australian 35 and over Clay Court Championships in 2000 and won his first pennant flag playing for Kooyong in the Grade One Vets team in 2009.

“I just want to simply stay fit enough to be playing and coaching on court into old age,” he says. “Although I understand that my career is now heading towards a greater managerial role, administering the clubs and supervising the 12 coaches we employ.”

