

dedicated to the territory



Name: Pat Coburn
Qualifications: Tennis Australia Club Professional coach
 Tennis Australia Development Coach
Club: DTC Sports, NT
Coaching awards: 2004 TCA Advanced Coaches Award of Excellence. 2004 and 2009 NT Sports Awards Coach of the Year

Pat Coburn and his team at DTC Sports are offering an environment where Territory kids have the opportunity to become nationally competitive tennis players.

the urge to coach

It was football that was initially calling when Pat Coburn returned to Darwin, from Adelaide, in 1985.

But the qualified accountant soon found another more powerful calling with tennis coaching.

"In those days there weren't many coaches around Darwin. I got asked to do a few hours coaching by the owners of a new tennis centre that had just opened and within a few months I was earning more from coaching than I was in my day job," Coburn says.

"I tossed in the accounting and have been coaching full-time in Darwin ever since."

The Tennis Australia Club Professional coach was subsequently offered a share in the business and in September 1986 he became the business manager and head tennis coach at the Darwin Tennis Centre.

"Over the years I turned the facility into a multi-sport centre now known as DTC Sports. I have been the head coach there ever since so that makes it 25 years," he says.

A player's journey is something that has given

Coburn satisfaction in the job he is completing.

"I remember teaching my younger sister to hit a topspin backhand. The feeling of accomplishment I got when I saw her achieving it, gave me a real buzz," he says. "I guess that's the feeling that I'm still chasing.

"Nothing in tennis beats seeing young athletic kids fall in love with the game."

athletes making a mark

These days he is proud to boast that all five Northern Territory athletes – Hrehan Hakeem, Ashlee Brown, Cassandra Dunser, Emily Moo and Emily Webb – who have won Australian singles or doubles titles have been DTC Sports athletes.

"Although I worked with all of them it was Cassandra Dunser's journey from starting tennis as a seven year old through to winning an Australian singles title as a 13-year-old that really gave me the confidence that I could develop nationally competitive athletes," he says.

While with the younger kids Coburn believes it's all about letting them achieve so they enjoy their tennis experience.

"As coaches we have to make tennis a sport they can play. Kids have great imaginations; they are great at making up games," he says.

"Real tennis for kids doesn't have to be tennis as we know it. When I finally realised that coaching was less about teaching and more about creating an environment where kids could learn I started to get much better results."

As a vote of confidence, almost all the players Coburn has worked with have been at DTC Sports since they started participating in the sport.

"Although I work with most of our players in squads, that's not the case with private lessons," he says.

"Between our team of coaches we try and match players with the type of coach that will get the best out of them. That always helps to foster positive coach player relationships."

Seeing first-hand the commitment and hard work put in by the Northern Territory top players is encouraging for the juniors coming up the ranks.

"It's just a culture thing. They know to be good they have to get their hours up and they have to travel.

"The early mornings and long hours are just part of the package. The athlete, the parents and the coach all have to accept the sacrifices if the player is going to be nationally competitive," he says.

developing coaches

In Coburn's eyes the strength of a playing field is also seen through the knowledge of the coaching team.

"I am driven to develop a sustainable future for tennis in the Territory," he says. "I invest heavily in the education of my coaches. As I see it, if a coach shows a love for Darwin and the Territory and they give their heart and soul on the court for the kids then I will do whatever it takes to help them on their coaching journey."

Having now coached for 25 years Coburn looks at Australian tennis in a more positive light than ever before.

"I believe the next five years will be a very exciting time for tennis in Australia and I'm looking forward to watching future Australian Grand Slam success."



Pat Coburn believes real tennis for kids doesn't have to be tennis as we know it.