

SPADEA'S ADVICE TAKES CENTER COURT IN DELRAY

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South Florida Sun - Sentinel.

Apr 17, 2005. pg. 26

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One week before jetting overseas for a six-week trip culminating at the French Open, pro Vince Spadea stopped by the Delray Beach Tennis Center to support some area high school tennis teams.

"I think impacting kids is a great asset and privilege I can pursue," said Spadea, 30, of Boca Raton. "I want to do this more and more. This is a first-time experience, but I thought it was a good idea to inspire tennis players/youngsters from where I live and just tell them about my life, growing up on the tour playing.

"Hopefully, somebody will learn something and apply it to their life or their tennis. That's what it's all about. It takes a unique talent to convey any type of charisma to people. I'm doing my best to try and do that."

Spadea, a St. Andrew's graduate, remembers hopping from baseball practice to tennis practice in Delray Beach.

"This is a great chance for a lot of kids to see what it's like to be a pro tennis player, what my personality is like and maybe it will inspire them to work hard and to play tennis like I did," he said. "I'd love to do this anytime I get a free chance. It's not like a once-a-year type affair."

Spadea moved with his family from Chicago to Boca Raton when he was 8 years old.

"We all just started playing tennis as a family," said Vince Sr., Spadea's father.

"He's a great influence for [kids] and a great role model," added Hilda, Spadea's mother. "I'm really glad he has the time to do this because a lot of times it's hard with the busy schedule he has."

Tennis players from Boca Raton High School, Atlantic High in Delray Beach and Buchanan High in Michigan took part in a short hitting session with Spadea. Before hitting the court, the students watched an exhibition game between Spadea and former Atlantic High standout Richie Brown, who is now playing tennis at Northwood University in West Palm Beach.

The students also saw Spadea perform a short rap video for his Web site www.vincespadea.com. And then Spadea kept his word and bought some of the Boca High kids a smoothie drink, too.

"Ken [Rubin] called me and I was happy to do it with Atlantic High," Brown said. "I try to make it to a couple of matches a season since I graduated. It sounded really fun and it's a good cause."

Rubin, Atlantic's tennis coach, organized the event.

"I've known Vince for 20 years," Rubin said. "I used to play him when he was 10 years old. I beat him when he was 10. I told him if he doesn't beat me in 20 years, he's got to come and do this. We haven't played since he was 10 so the time elapsed before we could play again.

"It's great of him to come out. He's very personable. It gives a chance for these kids to really experience the pro level and what it takes. That's what it's all about."

Jeannette Habib, a Boca Raton High senior, has played tennis since second grade.

"It's nice that [Spadea] came out," Habib said. "We haven't had anybody like this before."

Ali LoPresto, an Atlantic High freshman who has played tennis for seven years, agreed.

"It inspires to me to try and do the same thing," LoPresto said.

Spadea's ranked 18th on the entry list for his first European stop in the Masters Series-Monte Carlo which began Monday, with Roger Federer, Andy Roddick and Andre Agassi on the list as well. Other stops before the French Open in Paris include Munich, Hamburg and Dusseldorf in Germany, and Rome.

"I'm looking to play great at the French Open," Spadea said. "I'm just excited. It's a great time in my life. Tennis has been great to me -- the travel, the fun, the disappointment, the glory is all part of it."

Boca Raton boys' tennis coach Steve Beck said he has enjoyed watching Spadea's career.

"I've known Vince's family since he was about 6," Beck said. " ... I think it's great he's coming back and spending some time with the kids."

"It's pretty cool," said Ross Warsett, an Atlantic High sophomore.

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