

August 1, 1999

This article is in response to **TENNIS WEEK'S** July 15, 1999, Article titled "Star Wars" by Beth German and several other articles written about the points of international tennis players playing at American universities.

I would like to examine some of the points of recruiting international tennis players:

Point: The recruitment of international tennis players is hurting the development of American tennis.

Counter point: The mission of the American universities is not to develop American tennis players or American basketball players. If the universities mission was to develop American tennis then making collegiate tennis more competitive will develop American tennis.

Point: International tennis players are taking tennis scholarships away from American tennis players.

Counter point: Provided the university tennis coaches were required to issue all of their scholarships this could be true; however, international students are also taking academic scholarships from American students. They are also taking jobs away from American students. Yes, they are even marrying American citizens.

Interesting thought: The discussion of the international collegiate tennis players seems to overshadow the discussion of international collegiate tennis coaches. The **Tennis Week** article quoted Illinois tennis coach, Craig Tilley as saying, "I think it's wrong if the American kids are not the first players given the opportunity. In private institutions it doesn't matter, but it does in state universities supported by taxpayers." I firmly believe coach Tilley is a positive impact on American collegiate tennis and I hope my son will be able to play for such a fine coach, however, he is a native South African and he is also the Davis Cup Coach of South Africa. People who are concerned about international players should also be concerned about the amount of international coaches coaching at American universities. There are several collegiate coaches who are not American citizens. There are also numerous international coaches working at tennis academies located in the United States.

Point: State universities are using tax money to recruit international tennis players.

Counter point: In the state of Virginia it is against state law to use tax money for university athletics. States do differ on this concept, however, if state universities use tax money it is usually for shared facilities. I know of no university athletic department using tax money for scholarships or operating budgets. University athletic departments generate funding from student fees, contributions, and other self-generated money such as ticket revenue.

Interesting thought: I would like to think that no city, state, or federal tax money was being used for athletics. Most people would be annoyed knowing their tax money was being used to provide an international tennis player a scholarship. I would be just as annoyed knowing my tax money was going for an athletic scholarship for an American football or softball player. I do believe there are greater causes for tax money than athletic scholarships.

Point: It is unfair to compete against experienced foreign players.

Counter point: It is unfair to compete against American players who have enjoyed the direct financial support of the USTA as well as its support in providing developmental and competitive opportunities. It is also unfair competing against upper echelon American players who either because of location or circumstances have the opportunity to play professional satellites during the academic year.

Point: A tennis program is taking the easy way out by recruiting international tennis players.

Counter point: It is important to realize that other countries produce some players that cannot help certain universities compete at their desired level. Tennis programs need good players and they also need to develop players. I think it is really naïve to think it is easy to excel in a competitive environment. Yes, college tennis has become a more competitive environment.

Point: Some International tennis players are just coming for a couple of years and not completing their education.

Counter point: Yes, there are some international players leaving school early for professional opportunities. American players who left school early for professional opportunities include Bryan twins, James Blake, Justin Gimelstob, Alex Kim, Mike Russell, Rudy Rake, Cecil Mamiit, and John McEnroe.

Interesting point: In recent years several top American female players have bypassed collegiate play all together due to lack of collegiate competition. Universities wanting to compete at the top level must recruit this level of play somewhere.

Point: International players are taking money as professionals and should not be eligible for collegiate tennis because they do not have amateur status.

Counter point: The NCAA has the necessary paperwork and control procedures to detect any violations of amateur status. In addition, various people including competing coaches can turn players into the NCAA for violating amateur status.

Interesting thought: Professional status has to do with receiving compensation on the basis of one's performance. The USTA gives financial support to American players based upon a player's year-end rankings and rankings are based upon tournament performances. In addition, racket & apparel companies offer players equipment based upon performances. College coaches offer thousands of dollars in scholarships based upon a player's performance in tournament/s.

Point: International players do not fit in as well into the team concept or take as much pride in the university as American players.

Counter Point: It is my experience that coaches with effective leadership can lead a diverse group of players into a good teamwork-like atmosphere. These coaches also recruit and develop players that believe in the spirit of their respective university.

Interesting thought: Many of the same American people that are opposed to international recruiting also wanted to see Germany's Steffi Graf defeat American's Lindsay Davenport to win the 1999 Wimbledon. How can any American not want Lindsay to win? I have not experienced any Germans wanting Lindsay to win. I do believe the passion of representing one's university is contributed to the coach's passion regardless of where the players come from.

Point: The **Tennis Week** article quoted a high school player as saying, “There is a brutal fight because money is divided into tiny pieces. It’s unfair how foreigners get everything and they give back nothing”.

Counter point: There is no real data to support this point. Good programs participate in various community services and have players contributing financially back to their programs after graduation. There are many good well-represented programs that have international players. A programs success does depend of financial contributions from former players and the amount of community support regardless of where the players come from. If an American citizen will root for Steffi Graff over Lindsay Davenport, you bet they will support your program if an international player is doing the right things in the community.

Summary: The recruitment of international tennis players has contributed to the increased competitiveness of college tennis; however, I believe a coach should not limit their recruiting base. I do understand a coaches desire to work with only American players due to their own personal preference, however, I do not condone the criticism of the programs that recruit international players. I firmly believe the justification of much of the criticism is based on misinformation that has been questioned in this article.

I want players who will allow us to compete at the national level while being great ambassadors for our program and university. My intention is to recruit American and International players in order to achieve this goal. Ideally I would like to do this with student-athletes from the Commonwealth of Virginia. In fact, I really would like to do this with players from South East Virginia where my university is located.

Tennis elitist schools losing to the non-elitist schools have contributed to collegiate coaches being critical of international recruiting. Parity has arrived in collegiate tennis. Let’s not subdue competition. Let’s embrace it!

Darryl Cummings

Darryl Cummings, an American Citizen & Virginian, is currently the men & women’s head tennis coach at Old Dominion University in Norfolk, VA. Old Dominion is ranked #62 in the men’s and #66 in women’s on the final 1999 ITA Division I Spring rankings. He is certified with the USPTA & USPTR.

E-mail: darryl@darrylcummings.com

Web site: www.CummingsTennis.com