

Canadian Frank Dancevic faces a daunting PacLife Challenge

by Rick Angus
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Day three of the Pacific Life Open at the Indian Wells Tennis Garden in California could have been pivotal in the career of Frank Dancevic, Canada's #1 tennis player.

Breaking into the top 100 is usually a cause for celebration in tennis circles but young Frank is meeting unexpected challenges since passing through that marketable threshold in the sport on July 31, 2006. This week for Dancevic can be considered almost a blessing, as he has survived a first round meeting with a journeyman player and qualifier, Alex Waske of Germany, whose psychological confidante is a coach at nearby San Diego State.

But once more Frank was bitten by the luck of the draw! So far in 2007, Dancevic has played losing first rounds versus Andy Roddick #3 and Andy Murray #14. Other early round losses came at the hands of #16 Richard Gasquet of France, #20 Lleyton Hewitt at home in Australia and in Croatia against #18 Marcos Baghdatis of nearby Cyprus.

The age old proverb readily applies, "If this guy didn't have bad luck, he wouldn't have any at all"

Now in this rare expanded draw of 96 players for the PacLife Masters event and what represents in practical terms another first round meeting, Frank plays #5 ranked Fernando Gonzalez, the 2007 Australian Open finalist to Roger Federer in January, who is beginning his tournament play today.

It is extremely difficult to hold ground in the rankings race when each week entails early round matchups with the calibre of these top 20 title contenders that Dancevic has competed against in the last two months. As a foreseeable result, his ranking has plunged to #117 and qualifying events on the ATP Tour loom as the only viable alternative as he lays out his personal calendar for 2007.

Competing well and holding your own when met with such precious few points for expending your best efforts can become debilitating. Each week, further slippage in the rankings, necessitating the resultant search for confidence boosting meditations off court or reverting to the Challenger circuit again will define the true measure of Frank's potential.

At age 22, the world of tennis should be an oyster waiting to be opened by Frank in a headlong rush towards a prosperous career of his choosing. Instead, each week he continues to search for that elusive breakthrough and the all important ATP points that accompany a few easy wins to get his feet positioned firmly underneath his drive for rankings success. Such a launching pad is a prerequisite for title chances and all the riches the game may bestow upon the successful practitioners.

Being in the right place at the right time can be a crucial determinant in validating a player's efforts to make noteworthy leaps towards the top 20. Repeated setbacks colour one's outlook and can depress even the most optimistic aspirants to tennis glory.

Today, Frank met Gonzalez in one of his weaker moments. Victory was at hand. Bonus points, third round ATP Masters points, a change in direction for his career ranking. Staying tight to the magic top 100 means direct entry in the Slams and usually the same at Masters events. At those events, is where

the points are.

The first set went to a tiebreaker and may have partially hinged on a close line call at 2-0 with Frank leading. Denied the opportunity to grab the early momentum, Dancevic eventually fell by a count of 8-6 to trail the match.

In the second set it was all Dancevic and he whistled through it in 21 minutes, 6 games to 1.

The third set was a hard fought battle which opened with promise but again a line call went against Frank. Both players held serve until 15-40 in game 12 on Dancevic's serve.

Frank regained his composure and scrambled to deuce, actually holding the ad with a chance to send the match into a tiebreaker once more. It was not to be! Next came a missed easy forehand that floated long in response to a short Gonzalez return.

Frank was then to double fault on the third match point he faced. This will be a hard match to forget as life would have been a whole lot simpler the next few months if the victory that was so close at hand had been consummated here in the California desert.

What could have been will haunt Frank's spring plans and may result in him not qualifying for the main events. Another huge opportunity to progress gone, for want of a put away shot that begged to be struck at the critical moment in time.

This is indeed the prospects of the rabbits on tour. Run hard and hope for good fortune. Once the stars align in the right order and one achieves a top 50 ranking, that in itself will help ensure that the first rounds hold much more promise than the present fear of the unknown.
