

Canada's Prosperity comes in Threes

by Rick Angus
New York City

First, Vancouver's Rebecca Marino takes the junior girls title at Repentigny in the Canadian Junior Invitational Championships. Secondly, Vasek Pospisil reaches the junior boy's doubles final and receives as a bonus for his effort, a special exemption that allows Vasek to be placed in the U.S. Open junior boy's field.

Both players should be here this week. In Marino's case, her failure to enter the U.S. Open tournament was perhaps guided by her reasonable expectations in true Canadian fashion that a win at the National Bank Canadian junior event was not to be presumed. Her Quebec success therefore did not translate into the usual wild card given to the Repentigny winner..

In all fairness, Rebecca had a busy schedule planned in August when her junior ranking was hovering around the 300 level. Marino did enter an event in New Jersey where she made the semis. Add in the National Bank event last week where she was victorious, it was expected to take a toll on her training schedule. Next week, Rebecca is slated to play in another well regarded junior tourney in Kentucky.

Vasek, on the other hand, planned to try and win the singles event. Combine that potential result with his high junior ranking, currently floating in the mid sixties, it seemed the U.S. Open juniors could become a reality. A change in plans was necessitated after his second round loss in Repentigny, thus Vasek simply went out and made the doubles finals which placed him at the mercy of the selection committee in New York.

It appears that august junior group saw Pospisil's potential and rewarded him with a back door entry as a special exempt, effectively an end run around the regular access routes used to get to play on the hard courts at Flushing Meadow. Maybe there is some truth to the old adage, good things come in threes. Canadian tennis is the lucky recipient of these players great timing and impressive results.

Today, Vasek begins his biggest quest ever in developing his junior game and fulfilling his destiny to become a professional tennis player, maybe even a champion who will bring a new revitalization to Canadian tennis.

Last year, Peter Polansky of Toronto made it all the way to the U.S. junior final, falling but one win short of the ultimate prize. After Pospisil's win today against Mohamed Safwat of Egypt, 6/2, 5/7, 6/4 in first round play, the ex-Vernon and currently part time Vancouver resident has only four more rounds to go to match that unusual feat by a Canadian junior.

Mind you, a similar outcome is far from assured. Vasek will meet the tourney's top seed Uladzimir Ignatik of Belarus in the second round. However, it is much better to utilize the element of surprise against the #1 and hope that due to an abundance of confidence on the part of the Belarussian, Ignatik overlooks a last minute entry in the field.

If Vasek gets that favoured opponent out of the way early, it will surely reinforce in Pospisil the belief that anything is possible. In his match against the Egyptian, Vasek took the first set looking very much in control of the outcome. The second set took over where the first set left off. Up a break, the end seemed nigh but fate intervened and soon the outlook was very grim as Pospisil lost the second and

trailed 1-4 in the third.

No problem when you strike the ball with authority as did Vasek. He charged the net at the right time, applied the pressure with his returns, served well when he ran into a potential glitch and overall was tougher mentally than his nervous opponent. Vasek played his best tennis in sweeping the final five games to close a match.

Maybe it is that, hard to define, quality in Pospisil that has led both Lorne Main, 25 time world senior champion, and our top Canadian male, Frank Dancevic, to suggest this kid is truly special. Getting into the tournament on a technicality may lead to the minting of a new nickname for Vasek. If this week turns out as Vasek hopes, just call him "special exempt" for good reason.

Win or lose, Pospisil is on course and full steam ahead in his pursuit of a career playing the game he loves. Vasek is the youngest of three sons of Milos and Mila Pospisil. His older brother by eight years, Tomas says that all three boys began the game about the same time which given Tomas' interest at 10, would lead one to conclude that Vasek began the game when slightly removed from his terrible twos.

Three years ago, Vasek's father, Milos left the security of his job in Vernon at the Okanagan Springs brewery to guide his son's development. Summers at his grandmother's home in the Czech Republic led to a valuable exposure to the joys of clay court tennis, a necessary and vital component in constructing an all round game. Local observers must have liked the talent they perceived in this youngster.

For the past two years, Vasek has played junior league tennis in his father's homeland. This is a very important competition for the European tennis set. A prime benefit of this league activity was access to one of the two national tennis centres in the Czech republic. Imagine a large facility in Prague and a smaller centre in Prostejov that lent its assistance. This exposure to surface and the numerous competitive events nearby has served Pospisil's efforts well. It may be the turning point in making father and son's long range plans realistically achievable.

As always in Canada, the oft heard lament is lack of funding for training prospects, lack of access to good courts year round and general lack of attention to tennis as a major sport. The Pospisils have found a good friend to help with the Canadian sponsorship woes and Vasek has truly enjoyed the Czech tennis centre to promote his overall development of a game for all surfaces. Hopefully, the recent results of our top professional players such as Peter Polansky and Frank Dancevic will assist to heighten the requisite attention from the sporting public.

Rebecca Marino and Vasek Pospisil may be the immediate beneficiaries of a renewed interest in the sport, but it is likely that their prominent international results will repay the sport in kind. With such wins comes a growth in national pride and that usually results in much needed financial aid.