

PETER LUCZAK

ON COLLEGE TENNIS & HIS PRO CAREER

Professional tennis has become so physically and mentally challenging that you are seeing players come into success later in age. The days of Michael Chang winning a Grand Slam at 17 are over. There are still young players coming through with success on the circuit, but many who are not ready for the grueling physical, mental, and emotional grind are giving themselves a great alternative (and great prep for the tour) through college tennis.

Peter Luczak was one of many that chose college tennis to help develop his game before heading into the competitive world of professional tennis.

You played all Grand Slams in the main draw, competed against Roger Federer, Rafael Nadal and reached a career high ranking of 64, that is a dream for every college player, how did you manage to get there?

I'm not to sure to be honest. I know there was a lot of hard work but also luck as far as not getting injured and good fortune which came my way, especially in the sense of the people who were around me and shaped me as a person and tennis player.

How old were you when you left to college to the US, and what did your friends and family think about that idea?

I was 18 and had just finished my high school in Melbourne, Australia. We finish the school year in December and in January I was off to Fresno State for the Spring Semester. I think my friends and family were all pretty excited for me especially my dad. I sort of wanted to have a go at satellites straight after high school but dad persuaded me in going to university saying there is no future in tennis for me. At the time I think he was probably right.

What was your Australian (or ATP / Junior ITF) ranking when you went to college?

I definitely did not have an ATP ranking when I went to college and I doubt if I had an ITF Junior world ranking. I was never one of the top juniors in Australia. We have 7 states in Australia and I was always between 3 to 6 in my state I would say.



Did you think about playing on the ATP Tour when you went to Fresno State?

Yes I always wanted giving playing on the tour a go. I wanted as I said earlier to play straight out of high school but my dad convinced me otherwise. As it turned out it was a great decision. A lot of the juniors from Australia who were my age and a lot better then me at the time went straight to playing pro but stopped for various reasons after a few years. I have no doubt I would have been one of those.

What was your biggest challenge in college?

It is hard to say because I had so much fun and really enjoyed my experience in college. At time to time you would miss your family but you were so busy with tennis, training, studies and hanging out with friends it did not leave much time for getting homesick. Actually using new balls for most practices and matches was tricky to get use to, also the no let rule through a spanner in the works for the first 6 months.

What impact did the years in College have on your career on the ATP Tour?

They had a great impact on me. I feel like I did my biggest improvement during my college years. My coach was great, a fellow Aussie called Michael Hegarty who now coaches the women's program at Arkansas. It was hard not to improve in that type of environment. With eight young guys trying to push each other and a coach who would work us extremely hard.

What was your major in college and how do you benefit from it today?

I was studying Business/Finance but did not finish my degree. As I mentioned earlier I went in the spring of 98 and also took my senior fall off to play a few satellites and futures as an amateur. So I was there for six semesters (2 fall, 4 spring) so still had a couple of semesters to go before I attained my degree. I was always hoping to go back and finish after my tennis career but I doubt if I ever will now.

What did college teach you about life on the ATP Tour?

I'm not sure but I know the ATP tour taught me college tennis was a great life and pretty easy. I love playing tennis and being on the tour for the most part but it is not always as glamorous as it seems especially when you are starting out playing futures with not a cent to your name. In college everything is already done for you. Hotel rooms and flights are booked, schedule is organized, food and restaurants are taken care of, clothes and equipment is provided you just have to show up and play. And the best part about it you are never on your own.

What advice would you give young players who are thinking about playing on the Tour after and during college?

It obviously depends on how good you are and what sort of college environment you are in but my advice would be, if you are in college stay for as long as you can and make the most of it while you can. The opportunity to improve and work on your game without worrying about money and making points and being able to study at the same time is incredible. I didn't start playing my best tennis until I was at least 26 so it was still years after I finished playing college; there is plenty of time to go pro.

Why are many tennis players like James Blake, John Isner, Kevin Anderson Jonas Björkman, the Bryan Brothers, Lisa Raymond or Jill Craybas to name a few so successful on the tour after they leave college?

All those players are much more successful then me and I can only speak from my own experiences. Looking back on it now I know there was no way I was ready for the tour when I was 18. College gave me the opportunity to grow physically and also mentally as a player. Those years from 18 to 21 were the springboard to my career. Instead of being overwhelmed, disillusioned and most likely disappointed with results it gave me the time to really get ready and give it a real crack on the tour.