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Brian Barker on James Blake

Brian Barker has been coming to Van Der Meer since he was about 11 years old. After playing for the Gamecocks, Brian played some circuit events before returning home to Connecticut. He started coaching, and found out he really enjoyed it. One of his young students, James Blake, turned out to be a top US professional. Brian brought James to VDM several times when he was 16-17. James was a likeable young man with talent, but it wasn't clear he would go as high as he ultimately did - reaching #4 in the world.



Brian comes back every year and gives back to VDM Academy by talking and/or hitting with our players. I asked him to share his insight into James' transitions - junior to college player, Harvard to the pro tour. One of the recurrent themes was trying hard every day to get just a little bit better at some aspect of your game. Brian helped James understand that he shouldn't stress over rankings - James didn't make nationals early on, and when he did, he lost 1st rd. But by working hard to improve each day, by his 2nd year 18's, he became the top US player. He had a lot of pressure to turn pro, but decided with Brian's guidance to go to Harvard. After 2 years he had enough big results to get a great endorsement deal, and it was time to turn pro. Once again, he didn't break through immediately. But through his hard and focused work with levelheaded Brian, he climbed through the circuits to the ATP Tour, and we began seeing each other at Grand Slams and big events.

James' story became very well known after he slipped in Rome, broke his neck, and had to return home. His beloved father was very ill at the same time, and what had seemed a terrible hitch in his career became a blessing. James and his dad got to spend precious time together, and James emerged re-centered on his true values. He played freely, wanting only to enjoy his time on court. Once again, he found his love of competing in tennis tournaments. No longer concerned about protecting his ranking, he played with abandon, and desire to be the best he could be. He's married now, with a child, still out there giving it his best. He says he'll play until his body just can't do it any more...he loves it that much. James Blake and Brian Barker - quality people in the Tennis World.

Van Der Meer Spring Break Clinics / Academy Weeks

Spring is just around the corner, and so are VDM Spring Break Clinics/Academy weeks. Get ready for your upcoming tournaments by joining the expert coaches at Van Der Meer. Limited spots available at VDM academy boarding. Get the Van Der Meer Advantage!





Tournament Results

Holly Tree Tournament

The Holly Tree Tournament L3 Junior Open was held February 8th through February 10th and was a great success for the Van Der Meer students. Jared Woodson won the 18's Boys singles, despite pulling his groin. Jared went on to play the finals with his groin pull and won the match 6-1, 6-2! Now that's playing tough! Tim Becker went to the finals in the back draw where he lost in a tough three set match 6-2, 5-7 and 10-7 in a tiebreaker. John Page had a great doubles tournament with his partner Austin Schlarb, beating the #1 seeds, before losing in the finals to the #2 seeds.



On the girls side, Masako Makiba won the Girls 18's singles, beating fellow VDM Academy player Barbora Vasilkova 6-3, 7-6 in the final. Saera Kanda made the Girls 16's final, losing in a close 3rd set tie breaker 7-6, 2-6, 10-8. Anna Dzehtsiarova ended up making it to the finals in the back draw but lost to Sabrina Soliz 6-4, 6-2.

St. Andrews Point Quest

David Botti was the winner of the Boys 18's singles, and Masako Makiba won the Girls 18's. Samantha Schuster was the finalist of Girls 18s, Valerie Droop made semis, and Yuriko Ono won the back draw. Yuriko and Samantha Schuster also won the Girls 18's doubles, beating Masako and Saera Kanda in the finals. Saera was the runner-up in the Girls 16's singles.

Conrad Alford made the semis of singles in Boys 12's and won the doubles with Stratton Pollitzer. Mary Grace Armistead was a consolation finalist and made the Girls 12's doubles semifinals.

RKO Results

Our juniors learned how to start fast and maintain solid play in shorts sets at this mostly rained out event. With only one day to complete all the matches, they had to condense match play and had very short breaks. While challenging for all, it was an important learning experience for all involved!

Barbora Vasilkova - winner, singles and doubles (w/Scarlett Walston) - Girls 18's

Anna Dzehtsiarova - backdraw semifinalist, winner doubles - Girls 16's

Mary Grace Armistead – finals of singles and doubles - Girls 12's

Harrison Luba -winner singles and doubles w/Fisher Luba - Boys 10's

J.T Page – semifinals doubles - Boys 16's

Taylor Childress and Samantha Schuster - finals - Girls 18's doubles

Wildwood Tournament

Jack Armistead won the Boys 12's singles and doubles, Bo Jenkins won the Boys 14's singles, Mary Grace Armistead was a semifinalist for Girls 12's singles and won doubles, and Nicole Sister reached the finals of Girls 14's.



USTA Fitness Testing Protocol

At Van Der Meer Tennis Academy, we use the USTA Fitness Testing Protocol so that our athletes scores can be compared to the USTA Fitness Testing Standards Scale. This protocol is used to test the country's top junior players to measure their tennis-specific speed, agility, flexibility, strength and other areas of fitness. Some examples of the tests that our academy players performed included the 20 Yard Dash, Spider Drill, Vertical Jump, Sit-Ups, Push-ups, and many more. Players achieve the best results when their training activities replicate the actual demands of tennis, therefore, practice sessions should challenge the same movement patterns, muscle groups, and energy systems used in competitive play. Fitness testing provides a baseline for designing appropriate training programs for our academy, and also gives the players an idea on how they have improved, as well as what aspects of fitness they need to work on. Refiloe Molaoa (South Africa) & Masako Makiba (Japan) had the overall best scores for February/March.

Fitness Stars of the Month



Refiloe Molaoa



Masako Makiba