



ROBBY Ginepri

TALKS ABOUT GEORGIA, HIS FOUNDATION AND LIFE ON THE ATP TOUR

>>> By Holly Goddard

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he life of a professional tennis player is one of constant motion. Jet-setting from one side of the country to the other is standard practice. Touring hot spots such as Vegas, California and New York City are just par for the course. Hotel jumping and suitcase living is the price, but the opportunity to see the world is a gracious return. For touring professionals, summer vacation starts on the red clay at Roland Garros, jumps the creek to the prestigious lawns in England, and finally culminates under the light of the Big Apple. It's not just fancy-free fun in the sun; along the journey are interviews, charity events, photo ops, autograph sessions and sponsorship commitments. Therefore, these pros are continually keeping their on-court and off-court obligations in balance, and Robby Ginepri is one such superstar who talks about the often demanding aspects of professional life on the road.

Since turning pro in 2001, Ginepri has learned the value of hard work and commitment and used those virtues in his climb up the ATP rankings. Reaching a career high ranking of No.15 in 2005, Robby is currently ranked No. 45 in the world and has a renewed focus and confidence in his game. "I know when I am working out that I am busting it 120 percent every single time," Ginepri said. Honing in on his conditioning proved to be an asset, as he was the first player in history to play four consecutive five-set matches at the 2005 U.S. Open. His impressive resume contains wins over current tennis giants such as David Ferrer, Carlos Moya, Marat Safin, James Blake and Andy Roddick.

With the constant attention that accompanies a high-profile athlete, one might find it tempting to get caught up in the fame and fortune. Not the case with Robby, whose career was catapulted after his 2005 U.S. Open run to the semifinals. Ginepri, who admits that life has been a little different since his appearance against tennis legend Andre Agassi, maintains that focus and discipline are key factors for reaching his goals. In an effort to pass along the virtues that tennis has bestowed upon him, Ginepri is using his star status to influence

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lives of children through the Atlanta Youth Tennis Foundation and the newly established Ginepri Fund.

"Robby's support has been overwhelming with donations of equipment, clothing, funding and his time," explained Matt Olson, USTA Atlanta Executive Director. "He adds a special element to our Foundation that means the world to our kids."

The Ginepri Fund was created to honor, thank and recognize Ginepri for his years of ongoing support of the Foundation. Ginepri joined the advisory board of the AYTF in 2004. The Ginepri Fund provides assistance for a variety of projects, including tennis and non-tennis community-based initiatives in addition to support for inner-city youth tennis players who demonstrate a financial need and show dedication to academic excellence. The first donation from the fund went to BlazeSports, an organization that assists wheelchair athletes. Moreover, BlazeSports will provide transportation for their athletes as part of their "Get Blaze on the Bus" campaign.

Before Robby hit the road for the summer tennis season, he made a special appearance at the PGA Superstore in Duluth, Ga., to hit tennis balls and share advice with ATYF kids. Ginepri discussed everything from his passion for the foundation to his routine on the ATP Tour.

Your family recently bought the Olde Town Tennis Center in Marietta. What are your plans for the club?

Right now we just built two indoor tennis courts, we have five hard courts, three clay, and are building another section for a ballroom. We have a junior academy, a lot of USTA matches, and wheelchair events. We are trying to get things done.

What is your involvement with the Atlanta Youth Foundation?

I started this (involvement) three years ago. When I was growing up I didn't have all of the racquets and clothes. Everything was tough. It is something that I have wanted to do for some time now, trying to help the underprivileged kids with the things that they need. I try to give clothes, money, racquets and anything else that can help make their dreams become possible.

What is the Ginepri Fund?

The Ginepri Fund donates money to the Atlanta Youth Foundation, and a lot of other players are contributing to this as well. It is basically the backbone of the organization.

How does it feel to have a foundation fund named after you?

It's strange. It's interesting, you know. For quite some time I've wanted to have something like this and now it is finally coming true. It is just something to give back to the game. This game has helped me with so many things. It has taught me life experiences so I just want to share it with these kids.

What was the turning point in your life when you knew tennis was going to become your career?

I played a lot of other sports until I was about 12, but nothing real seriously. About age 16 or 17 I realized tennis could be my main objective in life, and I just hit the ground running when I was about 18 or 19. I got to the finals of the U.S. Open (juniors) and lost to Andy Roddick, who was already a pro at that time. That gave me the hope that I could do the same thing he was doing and, sure enough, here I am.

Out of all the places that you could live, why do you choose to make Atlanta your home?

I grew up here and all of my friends and family are here. I went to school here. I have so much support (in Atlanta). I am on the road so much that when I come back home I want to share my time with my family. It's lonely on the road. I just want to come home and relax.

Describe what it was like to walk onto Arthur Ashe at the U.S. Open and play Andre Agassi.

He is a legend of the game so it was electrifying when 30,000 people stand up and start cheering for you. It is pretty remarkable. It is a little bit nerve-racking at the same time but once you get playing it all goes away.

Obviously, the U.S. Open must be a special place for you. Talk about what it takes to physically and mentally prepare for an event of that magnitude.

It's rough because there are so many people there ... coaches, parents, players, trainers, and you feel crammed. In New York, life is so busy and everything is electrifying. It is tough to stay focused, but you need to and you have to. To win an event like that, the mental part is very, very tiring. After five-set matches you're very spent, your body is tired. You have to listen to your coach and trainer and stay disciplined.

When tennis season is in full force, what does a typical day consist of?

At a tournament, depending on whether or not I have to play that day, I usually practice for a couple of hours. If I have a match, my whole day revolves around when I play ... how I eat, how I train, sleep and relax. If I am at home training, I will hit for about three hours a day, do some off-court stuff in the gym, lift weights, ride the bike, stuff like that.

What do you do before a match to get relaxed and focused on what is about to happen?

I like listening to music. Hip-hop gets me pretty fired up before matches. I usually get a good long stretch. My trainer Jamie gives me some instructions, and then I put the headphones on and am ready to go.

How do you handle the pressure of expectations for the upcoming Grand Slams?

It's tough. There are four Grand Slams a year and you want to do your best at those obviously. It's rough going into the French for me. I haven't won a match there yet. I have to block that out of my mind and go out there with all the confidence in the world and just do what I do and play.

How is the support in the U.S. compared to abroad?

It is definitely better here in the States. It feels like you're playing in your back yard anywhere you go in the U.S. No matter if it is California, Florida, Texas; it feels like everyone is cheering for you.

What do you like to do in your down time?

Down time, well, just hang out with friends, shoot pool, listen to music. Play the guitar a bit ...

You play the guitar?

Yeah, I try. Play some golf here and there.

People are quick to mention that you are able to remain grounded even though you got this sudden celebrity status after your U.S. Open run in 2005. How do you deal with the fame?

It is a little different walking into restaurants or the mall or something and people come up and ask for pictures. I don't think it's really hit me yet. I still feel like I am a normal kid hanging out. People like the game and they come up to you and it's a compliment but, at the same time, you have to stay focused.



Why is the U.S. Open the best venue to play?

- 1 Biggest stadium, packs a full house especially at night time.
- 2 All the fans are more rowdy there; the Heineken sponsor may have something to do with that.
- 3 Tradition behind the tournament.
- 4 Thirty thousand people on their feet, it's electrifying.



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