

## Calvin Bennett – A Coach Perspective

Written By Yvonne Profit, March 26, 2010

I have had the pleasure of knowing Calvin Bennett for several years now. He has mentored and coached so many children over his 30 year span of teaching juniors his beloved tennis. He has 50 total years in tennis. I wanted to talk to him about the state of junior tennis in Southern California and I found his views relevant to junior tennis everywhere. This is the first of a two part interview.

**Yvonne:** Calvin thanks for taking the time to do this interview. I really do appreciate this wonderful opportunity to gain insight from you regarding junior tennis.

**Calvin:** Thank you Mrs. Profit, love to do so.

**Yvonne:** Okay, let's get started. In junior tennis in Southern California, how many junior African-American girl players do you think are on track to become potential professional tennis players?

**Calvin:** I think about four girls right now, and your two girls are of two of them.

**Yvonne:** What about African-American boys?

**Calvin:** Actually, I don't know of any off-hand. The competition is so stiff, can't get the break necessary to compete at this level. Parents set the tone and this must be done at an early age. I think you will see more girls doing well than boys on the circuit. Donald Young for instance is having difficulty getting out of qualifying and he was number one in the junior ITF.

**Yvonne:** There was a recent article on Donald Young in a tennis magazine, and it spoke of how Donald would not relinquish his parents from coaching.

**Calvin:** Yes I heard about that. He had a chance to train with Nadal's team and refused. Go figure that. We all know how well Nadal is doing; it's the complete opposite for Donald. It's too bad too, has a great deal of talent. Look at James Blake. He has the same coach and now decides to change coaches and his tennis career is almost over. He should have done that a whole lot sooner. I think tennis players stick to the same system too long, unwilling to transform their game to become more versatile on the tennis court. All other sports players go through that, but in tennis it has proved to be quite challenging.

**Yvonne:** What do you think about the Southern California Tennis Association (SCTA) developing children of color?

**Calvin:** Usually in my opinion the kids with talent are used to develop other kids in the sport to the detriment of our kids. The uniqueness of the Profit sisters is that your girls'

coach David has been willing to take their athleticism, and years on the tennis court. What is it now, over ten years?

**Yvonne:** Yes, that's about right.

**Calvin:** Okay, he has taken these ten years of tennis and court experience and is transforming them into awesome tennis players. This is what I meant when I was saying earlier having the willingness to transform the game in order to meet the challenges of this evolving sport.

**Yvonne:** What about racism in tennis?

**Calvin:** Due to this alleged transparency, people are always saying it's not there. It is but I think it is also very subtle, very political and a lot of underhanded dealings take place. It's not as much racism than just plain politics. You got to document this stuff. Anyone can throw a hissy fit, and complain but you can't dismiss a letter to the SCTA grievance committee, head referee and the tournament director that's for sure. Typically, you don't have 40 or 50 Black kids in the top juniors, you may have four to five that are competing for positions on the Davis Cup, the level one tournaments, and often it's not that many. I think the tournament directors, coaches, referees; parents sometimes if not often times don't want to see these kids do well. They want their children to do well, and are threatened by the few that are very successful. The odds are so against these kids. Look at your girls for instance, talking about beating the odds. Honestly, that's what we do, we fight, we don't quit. That's what it's going to take to make it. Can't have cream puffs at the top; got to have kids who develop heart, determination and an unwillingness to quit. Trials and tribulation teach that. Adversity teaches that. It prepares them for the tough road to success. Would this be considered racism or just blatant favoritism over one kid over another? Unfortunately the results appear to be racist when it's a Black kid versus a White kid, but usually there are a lot of underlying factors. I think for the Black kids, it definitely builds mental toughness. In order to build a champion, that's one key ingredient necessary to reach the pinnacle of success. You can't buy mental toughness. I don't care how much money you have.

**Yvonne:** Calvin, this has been a wonderful opportunity for me to hear your perspective. There is so much that we discussed. I'm sure our readers are looking forward to hearing more from you.

**Calvin:** Absolutely. Thank you so much. I really enjoyed it!