

New tennis pro brings skills to Prestonwood's courts

By Ron Page

The new tennis pro at Prestonwood Country Club's tennis facility is 24-year-old Mike Rayos, a native of Toronto, Canada, who started playing at age nine.

Rayos came on board at Prestonwood a month ago, arriving here after holding pro positions in Kinston and Hilton Head Island, S.C. His chores include more than teaching tennis, but his background has prepared him for his new assignment.

"I guess you can say I've had tennis in my mind almost from the time I started playing the game," he says, "although not always as a career. My father played, and the interest started from watching him. It started out just hitting the ball back over the net, which was fun, especially when it went over the net. The competitiveness that followed just heightened the interest."

But even after his prowess on the courts eventually earned him a scholarship at UNC-Wilmington, Rayos didn't consider tennis as anything more than a sport he really enjoyed. He took courses in education and got a degree in commercial recreation. "But like many at that age, I really wasn't sure about the future," he says. "I didn't know how usable a commercial recreation degree could be."

So he looked into tennis positions that were available throughout the country. He said there are several publications which list jobs in the sport and he was able to get an internship at the VanderMeer Tennis Club at Hilton Head.

"I spent the summer of 1994 there and then was hired full time as tennis instructor and reservations agent at the hotel," he explains. "Hilton Head is a beautiful resort area, and the job provided me with a great deal of experience. There were tons of tennis players, and every class was full, with several classes a day." Rayos says there

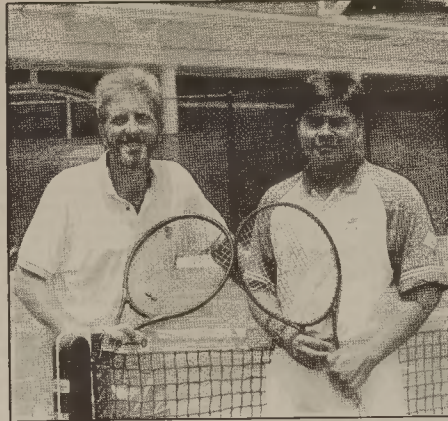
were 35 pros, including eight head pros. He was one of the staff pros. "A good part of the experience came with dealing with people - all types of personalities and abilities," he points out.

Prior to joining the VanderMeer staff, Rayos had interviewed with the Kinston Country Club in North Carolina. It was while he was in Hilton Head that a call came from that club, asking him if he'd be available. He said he was and spent the past year there as assistant pro before joining Prestonwood.

As a resident pro, Rayos's other daily duties include running the fully-equipped pro shop, which is a separate brick building to the right of the main clubhouse, and maintenance of the nine courts, six clay and three hard surface. "We check and care for the clay courts at night, after the day's activities have finished," he says, noting that the club is just now finishing the league season which runs from March to May. Prestonwood offers tennis year round, although the number who play drops off considerably during the winter.

Does he have a preference for clay or hard courts? "Further north you'll find more hard court surfaces," he says. "They're faster, of course, and the ball bounces quicker. On clay surfaces, the balls stay in play longer because of the slower movement. Footwork, there, is also different, but I really have no preference."

More junior tennis takes place during the summer along with a variety of clinics for all ages. Rayos says you must be a member of Prestonwood to use the courts, but those who take private lessons are also permitted use. "Tennis has increased in popularity throughout the country in recent years," he says. "Television gave it a big boost in the 1970s, but today it's growing on its own. People like the sport because of its competition. It



READY TO SERVE-Dan Weant, left, and Mike Rayos, right spend a good part of their days teaching tennis lessons at the Prestonwood Country Club. Weant is director of tennis and Rayos is the new tennis pro.

starts out as a social thing to many people, but the competitiveness is what holds the interest. And it's a great way to exercise.

"Tennis is an easy game to learn, but a difficult one to play well. One of the nice things about the sport is that you can go anywhere in the world and you'll find tennis courts rules and boundaries the same," he says.

To those who have been thinking about taking lessons, Rayos says to look for a certified professional to provide the instruction. "There are a lot of non-certified professionals making a living. Everyone has their style of play. A coach might affect it somewhat, but personal style always comes out. Look for someone who is enthusiastic about teaching."

Despite his young years, Rayos has had a wide variety of students. "I've had a few youngsters who were about four years old when their parents brought them in for

lessons. At that age you introduce them to the sport by making it fun, by showing them hand-eye coordination, and play games. You don't try to teach specifics such as wrist movement or footwork. Make it simple and fun," he says.

The oldest student he had was an 80-year-old man he taught during a summer trip back to Canada. He says there was a lot more depth to those lessons and the man was a quick learner.

Rayos says he approaches every day as a learning experience. He's no different than anyone involved in tennis. He keeps up with developments, new equipment, racket styles, and changes and innovations. He also does a lot of running and lifts weights.

Does he miss Canada? He insists he doesn't. "I went back at Christmas, and my parents are coming down for a visit late in July," he says. "I know they'll like North Carolina. Who wouldn't?"

Prestonwood couple share more than love of tennis

By Ron Page

Prestonwood Country Club's Director of Tennis Dan Weant and his wife, Ginny, who runs the club's tennis pro shop, do things well together. Each has a master's degree from East Carolina University, each likes teaching, and each missed their same-day graduation ceremonies for master's degrees for the same reason—their first baby.

"It was in the spring of 1982 and I was getting a master's in teaching physical education, and Ginny was getting hers in adult education," Weant says. "But our son, Patrick, scheduled his debut for the same time as the ceremonies so we both spent the time at the hospital."

Today Patrick has a brother, Aaron, 11, and a sister, Kyrie, 7, and all three show an interest in playing the sport that their father has been involved with since he was about 10 years old. "My entire family played tennis," Weant says, describing his pre-college life and growing up in Salisbury with his brother, Ted, and sisters Linda and Elaine. It was a close family, and his father, Dr. Ted Weant, and mother, Kathleen, used to take their four children on weekly picnics to various tennis sites.

"Some families went out to dinner," Weant explains, "but ours packed a picnic basket and drove off to the tennis courts where we all played together. My father was an avid tennis player and taught us in those early years."

Weant played a lot of junior tennis and ranked fourth in singles in the state and second in doubles in those days. He played in college at Appalachian State, both doubles and singles, and held the number one spot in singles as a senior.

In the 1970s and 1980s Weant says many young players who had pro aspirations played a satellite circuit, moving from tourney to tourney in cities such as Raleigh, Greenville and Richmond. "It wasn't an easy life," he says. "They literally lived in their cars to save

money, many doing it just so they could say they played pro tennis. A winning purse may have been about \$2,000. Today purses may be in the area of \$10,000, but the tournaments are fewer and farther apart in places all over the country."

But he passed up the tour route, opting instead for a summer stint as assistant pro at Sedgfield Country Club in Greensboro as his first job after college. That was followed by court maintenance at the Raleigh Country Club, everything from repairing courts to fixing seats in the stands. In 1983 he got a call to be the pro at Cary Country Club where he stayed for three years before returning to Raleigh in the assistant pro's job for a year and a half.

He was hired April 1, 1988, as director of tennis at Prestonwood Country Club, and his wife was hired to run the pro shop. The Weants live in the Huntingdon section of Morrisville.

He says most people don't realize the intense desire and training that is needed to be successful as a competitively professional tennis player today. "They have to be in great shape, of course, and off the court need to lift weights, jump rope, run miles and sprints consistently, and couple that with the right mental attitude," he says.

"Those in the top 10 or 20 carry certain arrogance if you will, something that shows they feel they can beat you. Remember, they have managers and personal coaches who handle all of the bookings and paperwork. The player's sole responsibility is to concentrate on playing the game. Everything else is handled by someone else."

"I guess if you asked what my forte was, I'd have to say bustle," Weant says. "I believe in a strong mental approach to the game and I try to instill that in my teaching. If it's hot for me, it's hot for you, too. So being hot isn't really that bad."

Spanish dish adds pizzazz to summer gatherings

If you are looking for any excuse to cook outdoors, entertain, or better yet, combine the two, but want to serve something with a little more pizzazz than your standard grill-fare, then you may want to try your hand at the Spanish dish paella. On the other hand, if the idea of a pot of rice combined with a variety of seafood sounds appealing, but you don't want to bother with paella pots, saffron strings, aborio rice, and are perhaps even intimidated by the possibility that this somewhat costly menu could come out too dry from "cooking over the coals," you may want to try my simplified version. You can save the grilling for the accompanying corn on the cob and large sections of red and green bell peppers.

This dish is simple to prepare and beautiful on the table with the vivid and exciting color contrast of the red lobsters and black mussels paired with the also colorful platter of grilled vegetables. It is also high in flavor and nutrition and VERY low fat. In fact, this dish is so good that a good friend of ours who is better known as "No Show Al" is guaranteed to show up if it is being served!

As for dessert, why not stick with the Spanish influence and prepare a flan? This simple, light and cool



dessert is the perfect complement to a hearty meal, and can be made up a day or two in advance.

- Mock Paella**
Light vegetable oil cooking spray
1/2 cup dry white wine
1 med. to large onion (chopped)
1 cup frozen English peas
3-1/2 cups chicken broth
2 cups long grain rice
3 boneless skinless chicken breasts
1/2 lb. bay scallops
1/2 lb. med. shrimp (peeled and deveined)
12 mussels (scrubbed and beard removed)
3 6-8 oz. lobster tails (halved)

Season to taste with following: salt, pepper, seafood magic, small sprigs of thyme, rosemary and basil.

Preheat dutch oven over medium-high heat. Spray 4-5 times with cooking spray. Sauté the onion until limp. Add the rice and sauté until golden. Meanwhile, in large skillet combine half the chicken broth, half the wine, chicken breasts and lobster tails. Cook on medium heat

just until chicken breasts begin to turn opaque. Remove lobster tails and set aside with mussels. Add all ingredients but lobster tails and mussels to dutch oven and stir. Tuck lobster tails into the rice shell-down, and mussels into rice mixture joint-down. Place covered dutch oven in oven (preheated to 350 degrees) for 30 minutes. Remove lid (do not stir) and continue cooking in oven until excess moisture is cooked out. Divert!

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Baseball tournament took efforts of 200 volunteers

Tom Miller had plenty of help as coordinator of volunteers for the Atlantic Coast Conference Baseball Tournament held this month in Durham.

Miller, a Morrisville resident who is a sales representative for Cad-Plus Plain Paper Solutions, supervised the efforts of 200 volunteers ranging in age from 16 to 70. Their work became even more hectic when rain forced postponements and led to simultaneous play on the second day in both Durham and Chapel Hill.

Miller, however, brought experience to his assignment. It was his ninth year as coordinator, the previous eight being in Greenville, S.C., where he lived before moving to Morrisville.

A N.C. State fan and a member of the Wolfpack Club, Miller says he'll probably pass up next year's tournament in St. Petersburg, Fla., and instead will follow State when it takes a regular season trip to New Orleans.

Town Crier

of Public Works have received letters of commendation for the Morrisville Board of Commissioners for giving the Town of Zebulon a helping hand in its recovery from the devastating tornado that swept through that Wake County community last month.

"We called the day after to see if we could help them in any way," Town Manager David Hodgkins said. "We offered to send equipment or whatever they might need. They accepted."

Hodgkins said Public Works Director Steve Lawrence and employee Walter Stroud spent the better part of a day clearing up debris at a trailer park. They brought the town dump truck and other equipment to help in the work.

"We had a presence; we pitched in," Hodgkins said. "I'm sure they would do the same for us."

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