

Tennis star ranks among the best on the planet



Jo-Wilfried Tsonga comments during a post-match interview.

Photos by Craig T. Greenlee

For seven straight years, Jo-Wilfried Tsonga has ranked among the world's Top 15.

Jo-Wilfried Tsonga plays in Winston-Salem Open

BY CRAIG T. GREENLEE FOR THE CHRONICLE

In his 12 years on the pro tennis circuit, Jo-Wilfried Tsonga of France has become one of the game's most recognizable personalities. He made a name for himself in 2008 when he reached the finals of the Australian Open as an unseeded player.

As a pro, Tsonga has won 11 tournament titles in singles. In the process, he's proven himself as a world-class elite. For the last seven years, he's ranked among the Top 15 in the world (ATP). During that stretch, he was in the Top

10 five times, which includes a career-high No. 5 ranking in 2012. Tsonga's career earnings total over \$15.3 million in singles and doubles.

During last week's Winston-Salem Open (WSO), Tsonga's star power was put on full display. After winning his first-round match against Denis Istomin, he stood at center court and hit tennis balls into the stands for fans to collect as souvenirs. While walking back the locker room after that match, he was besieged by a throng of well-wishers who wanted pictures and autographs and he happily obliged.

Seeded third at the WSO, Tsonga was eliminated in the third round by Steve Johnson, who advanced to the semifinals. Earlier this week, Tsonga was matched up against Jarkko Nieminen of Finland in the first round of

the U.S. Open.

When healthy, Tsonga, 19th in the world rankings last week, is formidable. Standing 6-feet-2 and weighing 200 pounds, he's at his best when his serve (130 mph) is right. Tsonga's booming forehand is equally impressive. He was a semifinalist in this year's French Open.

Tsonga, whose father is African (Congo) and whose mother is French, is one of the few active players who have advanced to the quarterfinals of all four Grand Slam events (French Open, Australian Open, Wimbledon and U.S. Open) during his career.

Plus, he's one of only three players to register Grand Slam victories against the top four men's players - Roger Federer, Rafael Nadal, Novak Djokovic and Andy Murray.

In the aftermath of his

early-round victory, Tsonga granted this interview with SportsWeek.

SW: In making the decision to play in the Winston-Salem Open, did you view the tournament as a means to prepare for the U.S. Open which is scheduled the following week?

Tsonga: I didn't come to play in this tournament to help me prepare for the next week. I came because I was looking to play some good tennis and move up in the (world) rankings. I'm looking to get back in the top 16, and possibly the top eight.

SW: Prior to the Winston-Salem tournament, you had only played in eight tournaments because of an early-season injury to your forearm. Do you feel like you're beginning to get back on track?

Tsonga: Since I haven't

played that much, my game feels fresh and I'm not worn out. But on the other hand, it's always tough to come back after being out for a period of time. It's like I have to start all over again from the bottom and work my way back to the level I was at before being injured.

SW: It seems that you tend to struggle in your first-day matches. But in most cases, you're still able to win and advance in the rounds. How do you manage to play well enough to win when you're not at the top of your game?

Tsonga: In tournaments, I usually play better and better with each match. It's always been like that with me. I've never played really well on my first day of competition. As I play more matches, I get more accustomed to the playing surface, which is always a big factor in how well I perform.

SW: You recently celebrated your 30th birthday. How much longer do you plan to compete on the pro circuit?

Tsonga: The fact that I'm still around proves that I still believe in myself and my ability to play at the highest level. I'll keep going until I feel like it's time for me to stop.

SW: Regardless of what city or country you play in, there's no denying that you're the crowd favorite. How does it feel to be so well received in your travels?

Tsonga: I don't know what it is that I do that causes me to get such warm welcomes. I play all over the world and that's what happens everywhere I go. I'm very pleased with that because it means that people think a lot of me.

City receives donation to improve local tennis clubs during Winston-Salem Open event

BY TEVIN STINSON THE CHRONICLE

On Wednesday, Aug. 26, a number of children from Forsyth County participated in the Emirates "Returns" Tennis Clinic at the Wake Forest Indoor Tennis Complex.

The clinic was designed to teach children the basic skills of tennis, including the important skill of being able to return the ball.

Emirates "Returns" is part of the Emirates Airlines US Open Series, a series of tennis tournaments held in different cities across the nation.

While partnering with the USTA (United States Tennis Association)

Foundation, the Emirates Airlines US Open Series makes charitable donations to each host city. The donations to each city include educational programming, tennis equipment and facility improvements.

During this year's clinic, the city received a cash donation of \$5,000 and \$5,000 in equipment.

The cash donation will be used to organize tennis tournaments and clinics at the different tennis clubs in Winston-Salem.

Tamer Hegazy, director of tennis at the Wake Forest Tennis Complex, said he has really seen the sport of tennis grow over the years.

"The city does a good job of setting up tournaments and clinics at the different clubs in the area."

The Wake Forest Tennis Complex was built in 1997 and is home to the Demon Deacons men's and women's tennis programs. According to Hegazy, the complex also offers local memberships and is open to the local community.

During the summer months, the complex offers a number of programs and clinics for children.

"During our summer camps, we have over 200 participants each year," said Hegazy. "We have also been able to give scholarships to a number of participants."

The complex also offers a number of scholarships to deserving camp and clinic participants through a partnership with the North Carolina Tennis Association.

Hegazy said youth participation in the sport has really grown.

"I've been here for 13 years," said Hegazy. "It's good to see that the youth in the area are becoming more interested in tennis."

The Wake Forest Indoor Tennis Complex is located at 100 W. 32nd St. For more information on the complex, visit www.wfuitc.com

WSSU Rams announce hiring of Brion Dunlap

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

The Winston-Salem State University men's basketball program has announced the hiring of Brion Dunlap as an assistant coach for the Rams for the upcoming 2015-16 season.

Brion Dunlap will join the Winston-Salem State University men's basketball coaching staff after previously spending the past five seasons as an assistant coach at the College of the Holy Cross. "Brion Dunlap is an extremely well-rounded

coach with recruiting contacts all over the country", says WSSU head coach James Wilhelmi. "His experiences as a Division I player at Old Dominion, a high school coach and as a division one assistant coach make him a rising star in the coaching business and a valuable asset to our program. We are very fortunate to have him join the WSSU Ram family", added Wilhelmi.

He helped the Crusaders to an overall record of 34-30 the last two seasons, and in the 2013-14 season, Holy Cross finished with a 20-14 record,



good for their first 20-win season since 2006-2007. Holy Cross also placed third in the Patriot League with a 12-6 mark in conference games, and received

an invitation to the CollegeInsider.com Tournament. Holy Cross' 68-65 victory at Brown in the first round of the 2014 CIT was its first in a

national postseason tournament since 2004-2005.

Overall, Dunlap helped the Crusaders to three finishes in the top half of the Patriot League standings in five seasons. Holy Cross placed third in the conference in both 2010-2011 and 2013-2014, and fourth in 2011-2012.

Dunlap came to Holy Cross after serving as an assistant coach at Mount St. Mary's University for the previous seven years. In 2008, the Mountaineers won the Northeast Conference Tournament title and posted the first NCAA Division I

Tournament victory in school history, with a 69-60 win over Coppin State in the opening round.

Dunlap is a 1998 graduate of Old Dominion University with a bachelor's degree in human services counseling. He was a four-year starter for the Monarchs on the hardwood, helping lead the team to two NCAA Tournament appearances and two Colonial Athletic Association titles. Dunlap was named to the CAA All-Rookie team in 1995 and the CAA All-Tournament team in 1997.

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