

Success breeds success for **STEVEN BLUNDELL** who draws on the inspiration of his own role models in setting a positive example to the athletes he now coaches.

A successful cycle



Steven Blundell

QUALIFICATIONS: Tennis Australia Club Professional coach

VENUES: Legend Park Tennis Club, Mount Waverley Tennis Club, local primary schools, 5th Dimension Tennis

OTHER: Bachelor of Science, Health and Human Performance, Tennis Australia Talent Development coach

I first started playing tennis at five years old and have been coaching now for 14 years. Coaching became my clear choice after a small break from the game after playing. I realised just how much I loved the game and how big a part of my life it was.

Playing the Australian Open boys' event, and also playing Division One college tennis for a nationally ranked program were probably my most memorable as a player. This has certainly fed my desire to achieve a great more as a coach than what I did as a player.

I enjoy the range of challenges in working on my coaching business. These include being closely involved with coaching a number of elite juniors; my role with Tennis Australia in the Club Professional Coaching Course Facilitator Team; working with the Super 10s; as well as spending some weeks working on the WTA Tour.

The long and winding path of becoming the best you can is a challenging one, no matter what the age or level of player. It is very satisfying to have a positive impact on athletes who are on the journey. My time on tour with Nicole Pratt and Christina Wheeler was a fantastic experience and is one I draw on today in terms of educating young athletes on the skill sets required to reach the tour and succeed on it.

Travelling to Europe with Ash Barty and the AIS Women's Program in 2012 was fantastic. I later spent two weeks working with Barty at WTA events in Tokyo and Beijing. My years as a VIS Coach were also very rewarding, working with some of the best talent in the country at the time. Currently I have a number of national level juniors that are showing distinct promise.

My basic aim is to make myself redundant. By that I mean to develop the whole athlete technically, tactically and mentally so that they have the tools in place to be independent both on the court and in the surrounding tennis environment. While I am always happy to be a resource I don't think it is healthy for athletes to be reliant on coaches in their daily existence.

I feel honoured if they see me as a role model. However my major aim is to conduct myself in a thoroughly professional and approachable manner. I see my role with the athletes as a coach, advisor, and hopefully someone they feel can act as a resource when needed to help guide them on their tennis journey.

I always read with interest the philosophies of elite coaches in other sports. This includes the standards they set their athletes and the environment they create as coaches. I feel I am very lucky with the access I have to Paul Annacone (Roger Federer's former coach), Jason Stoltenberg and Nicole Pratt, among others. It provides great insights into their philosophies, which has certainly helped shape my philosophy.

I tend to select different role models based on the characteristics of the athlete I coach, choosing someone they can relate to, in particular the journey that the role model has taken to succeed. Assisting the player to appreciate the

similarity between some of the challenges they both have faced tends to be productive.

Athletes often have differing personality traits, learning styles and experiences with a variety of aspects that shape who they are. In maintaining positive relationships with players I feel that coaches must therefore be flexible and understanding. Creating a clear connection with the athlete is critical to getting the message through.

My feeling is that most athletes have a sense of you as a coach. If you as a coach have energy, passion, work ethic, and show a genuine interest in the athlete, then the athlete will give you everything they have in the session as well.



POSITIVE DEVELOPMENT: Working with Ashleigh Barty and other successful players provides the ultimate coaching reward for Steve Blundell.

I really enjoy the challenge of the variety of my coaching. This includes being able to successfully adapt to different levels, ages, and standards of player. I feel this variety has certainly made me a better coach and prepared for a greater number of coaching situations and challenges.

My goals are to play a part in developing some of Australia's next generation of champions. At the same time, maximising participation, enjoyment and quality coaching at club level of the sport I love.

DANIELA TOLESKI