



On Court With ... Kevin Ullyett

By: Matt Fitzgerald

Kevin Ullyett had a career on the ATP tour that is unparalleled to most tennis professionals. He won multiple grand slams, built great partnerships and friendships and competed at the highest of levels.

Nicknamed “Ully”, he possessed a solid work ethic and a drive to perform his best on the grandest of stages. But perhaps his biggest asset was his ability to ‘gel’ with a variety of partners, which can be credited to his compatible personality.

While his tennis career is coming to a close, he is content at where he’s at and is looking forward to turning the page to the next chapter in his life. Ully is not one hundred percent retired yet, as he has intentions to play at two tournaments – you can find the answer to this in the interview!

Looking back at your career, how has the doubles circuit evolved/changed since you first started on the tour?

The dubs circuit has evolved while I was out there. Obviously the current short scoring is probably the biggest change we all had to adapt to. I feel as well that the players have become better as well.

There’s much more poaching and risk taking. I think that can be attributed to the higher quality returning going on.

The top singles guys are playing more frequently which has been good - lots of baseline rallies as they serve and stay back most of the time, which was unheard of in the 90s.

Berasategui was the pioneer of that. The ball has been slowed down by the tour so one needs to work harder to hold serve now in doubles.

Is there any victory or milestone that stands out to you?

The victories and milestones that stick out for me are definitely my first slam with Wayne Black in New York! Another would have to be our 2nd slam in Oz...As well as winning our dubs match vs. the USA when they came to Harare for Davis Cup in five long sets in front of the loudest crowd on the plane!

Most recently would be winning my 5th Stockholm open with five different partners and surpassing 500 wins.



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Quite a few of the doubles veterans are married and have children. Can you shed some light on the challenges of balancing life as a professional tennis player and life as a husband and father?

Married with children....where do I start!!! It definitely is a challenge...and I mean that with travelling, etc. A lot of the guys who are late 30s at the top in dubs have kids due to the fact that they are pushing 40!!

My wife has been very supportive and is often lumped with the kids for the days when I am playing and practicing. I believe that once you have

kids on tour with you, the playing becomes the easy part, I almost couldn't wait to grind a two hour practice session if it meant not worrying about the kids in the room causing chaos.

It's really tough as being away from them for weeks is hard and when they are with me the routine of sleep for them and us gets thrown out the window! Also travelling nowadays is a nightmare (security) with prams, car seats etc. takes an extra hour of airport time!

Did the new rules changed that were introduced in 2006 help extend your career with matches tending to be shorter and/or did they make things more difficult?

I don't think the rules changed things too much as the same teams kept making the Masters and the top teams would beat the top singles teams more often than not. It is nice to only play for 75 minutes on average but dubs is not an aerobic sport so no one really gets tired ...or put it this way ...they shouldn't! You get the odd unlucky loss in the superbreaker but under pressure the cream will still rise to the top!

You've gone deep several times at majors in both men's and mixed doubles. Based on your success, what does it take to be a consistent force in doubles?

I think to be a consistent force in doubles you need a good partnership with someone you get along with on and off the court. It's also important to put in the hours and do the homework on the other teams, which includes studying what they like doing under pressure.

Dubs players need explosive movement so working on the quick twitch muscle groups is imperative! You also need to keep moving and be in the corner of your opponents' eyes ...especially in mixed!!

You had two great partnerships with both Wayne Black and Jonas Bjorkman – was there any driving factor that enabled you to work together so well with those guys?

I had good success with Black and Bjorkman who were great returners from the left court. I feel it is key to have a clutch returner in the combo even more so now with the no ad

scoring. Jonas and Wayne would take 99% of them, so when I got my returns going we were in good shape. Wayne and I had a good understanding and we worked out the less we cared, the better we did, so our mantra was literally swing away and poach plenty which won us some big matches over time!

Finally, do you have any plans/ideas for what you want to do in 2010 and beyond?

I have no set plans for 2010 besides a long holiday in South Africa (will play the SA open) and Mauritius until May. Then I will go to London, and ideally would like to play Wimbledon as my ABF event as I will be right there, and my ranking will still be high enough to sneak in.

I am hopefully going to figure out what I will do for the next period in my life...would like to stay in tennis, but am quite keen to get into the property development side, so will see what turns up in the fall 2010 when my eldest starts fulltime school and I apply for a job somewhere. I live ten minutes from the LTA tennis center so who knows I might land a job there if I'm lucky??



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