

## **A Reinvented Junior Program back in New Canaan**

The New Canaan Racquet Club, under new management and ownership, has lofty expectations for the tennis culture here in the town of New Canaan. NCRC is committed to recruiting an international staff of industry-leading professionals to run its newly renovated world-class facility.

The Club's junior program has made tremendous strides in offering top instruction for all ages, and can now be considered one of the leading programs in the area. NCRC has hired two acclaimed professionals to lead a comprehensive recreational and competitive program. Pedro Wagner from Brazil is heading up the Academy program for the high-performance players over the age of 12, and Luke Robbins leads the 12-and-Under program from beginners to accomplished competitors.

According to General Manager Len Simard-- a USPTA Master Professional who has been leading various tennis operations in the New Canaan area since 1998-- the focus has been to redesign the program from the ground up. This has been done to allow NCRC to fulfill its mission of forging well-rounded players here in our community. Simard is proud to note that, when you have distinct competitive and recreational pathways like at NCRC, all juniors are able to access the best coaching methodology, be they recreational players looking for a fun fluency in the sport, or top competitive players looking for innovative training. With NCRC's dual program, both can be found under the same roof!

Luke Robbins leads the 12-and-Under program and is considered one the best coaches in the country. Luke spent four years on-staff at the prestigious Midtown Athletic Club, where he served as coordinator of the innovative Tennis Explorers program. During his time in the Windy City, Luke received his junior coaching training from two of the world's premier Junior coaches and curriculum designers, Butch Staples and Mike Barrell. Originally recruited by Mr. Simard in the Summer of 2015, Luke is now halfway through his second year as 12-and-Under Director at NCRC. The Club's 12-and-Under program is fully compliant with the USTA Junior protocol. There are very few clubs in the Northeast—let alone Fairfield County— that can make this claim. This "Play First" program incorporates only interactive teaching, drills and games to ensure children are engaged at all times. This is an intentional departure from the Junior group lesson structure of the past, where students would wait in-line for their coach to hit a ball to them, before getting their shot and returning to the back of the line. All of the youngsters are learning and practicing together under the watchful eye of the professionals. The juniors learn more quickly thanks to the increased number of shots they hit in this new system, and even learn to practice on their own with other children.

The high-performance Academy program is headed by Pedro Wagner. Pedro is a former top junior from Brazil with worldwide experience competing and coaching. He was an NCAA standout for Division-1 Jacksonville State University, and later served as a graduate assistant for

the men's tennis team while completing his MBA. His experience culminated in his leading them to the NCAA Nationals in 2014. With an exceptional talent for improving the performance of players at all levels, his experience reflects with the focus of the Academy: empowering players to compete at the high school, USTA, and sometimes even the collegiate level. As a former high-level collegiate player, Pedro provides a role model to the current Academy players, as well as employing an unusual range of coaching techniques in enabling the technical and tactical development necessary for them to achieve success in the highly competitive environment of collegiate recruitment. "We are in an area with a lot of good players who feel they have to travel great distances every day to get proper training. We want to change that and are already making great progress. Our first generation of homegrown players, developed in-house, are showing great potential already, and I am very excited to see what the future holds for NCRC," says Wagner. Simard also commented; "Pedro is the perfect professional for this job as his familiarity with both American collegiate tennis, coupled with the South American style of coaching, gives him an extraordinary gamut of coaching skills, which in turn can give an invaluable comprehensive experience to our Academy members. Hopefully this can help them along the way as they work reach the next level."

In addition to coaching and teaching, the NCRC has made a full commitment to area players and give them a local option for competing against the best in CT. NCRC is now a leader in hosting USTA-sanctioned junior tournaments for all ages, and will host over 20 tournaments in 2020. This will greatly increase access for local players to official USTA tournament play, without the usual burden of extended travel!

The Racquet Club will now offer year-round programming for juniors and adults in its newly renovated facility, now with pro-cushion courts, LED lighting, and fully air-conditioned courts.