

Novak Djokovic wins 2015 US Open

by Milos Rastovic

Novak Djokovic, ATP World Tennis Champion and honorary member of the Serb National Federation has, for the second time, won the US Open men's singles champion trophy in a final match against Roger Federer at Arthur Ashe Stadium in New York. This is his 10th Grand Slam Title and the 55th trophy of his career. He is the first player in ATP history who has more than 16,000 points in computer ranking. After the final match, Djokovic said that he had an incredible year as a player, husband and father. "I am very proud of all of the achievements...I am sitting down here with this trophy and reflecting on what I have achieved, it's quite incredible." As if that wasn't enough, Brother Djokovic now appears poised to sweep the China Open for the 6th straight year as he eloquently racked up his 29th consecutive win in the Beijing.

In a challenging final match against Federer, Djokovic showed dignity as a great player. Even when he slipped and was left bloodied on the court in the first set, he continued to play with the same Spartan-like resolve in his pursuit of victory. This kind of mental and physical fortitude Djokovic got not only from his talent, but his hard work. Growing up in Serbia during the civil war under economic sanctions by the United Nations, Djokovic amazingly developed mechanisms to build his sturdiness and will for victory. Any hardships and challenges he had

through the years made him a mentally stronger and physically resilient player. He pointed out that "a lot comes from my character and from the fact that I grew up in circumstances which were not very ordinary and maybe not the circumstances that most of the guys grew up in. They have shaped me and my character, and those memories give me that bit of strength that I use in occasions like the one last night." One of the important influences on his mental ruggedness was his first coach Jelena Gencic who gave him tennis and life guidelines. Djokovic said of her, "She was definitely the right person to be with, to learn from. From that point of view, I was fortunate. But, I also believe that in life everything happens for a reason. Those kind of circumstances in which we were growing up and developing and training to become professional tennis players have shaped me into who I am today and have helped me to grow mentally stronger. She has taught me most of the basic stuff that I know about tennis both from a game point of view and also mental approach." In his family nobody played tennis, but at the age of four there were three tennis courts in front of the restaurant his parents owned. These kinds of chances, which shaped him to become what he wanted, Djokovic calls "destiny."

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Novak Djokovic was born in Belgrade, Serbia in 1987 to Srdjan and Dijana Djokovic. At age 13, Jelena Gencic, Djokovic's coach, advised his parents: "If you want him to keep progressing, he has to leave the country." Like SNF Honorary President — Mihajlo I. Pupin before him, Djokovic temporarily said good-bye to Serbia in order to better-develop his natural talent and fulfill his destiny.

He went to the Pilic Academy in Munich, Germany and started his journey to become an international professional tennis success story. He was the European champion in the Under-16 age category. The year 2008 brought his first Grand Slam title at the Australia Open. Because of the magnitude of his contribution and personal effort for the Serbian National Team, they won the Davis Cup trophy, and became the World Champions for the first time in their history in 2010. Djokovic also won the bronze medal in the Olympic Games in Beijing in 2008 for Serbia. Whatever he is doing, whether playing tennis, providing crucial humanitarian work, or dancing kolo on the Tonight Show with Jay Leno, "Go Ne1e" makes Serbians proud and not just because he is the world's tennis champion. Those who read my last article in the American Srbobran know his virtuous character is not limited to the sports world.

As many of you read, after repeated denials for an interview by the ATP Tour handlers, I broke ATP Tour protocol and spoke to him in Serbian as he was leaving a press conference at the Western and Southern Open in Cincinnati, Ohio, last August. He likewise broke ranks in a gracious way. As one of the ATP handlers rushed over to put an immediate halt to our conversation, he held up his hand as if to say 'stop' and left no ambiguity when he told the agent "He is from Serbia and I want to hear him." We as Serbians know that this kind of graciousness is a standard Serbian cultural trait, however, this isn't always the picture of Brother Djokovic portrayed in the press.

His recent win over Italian Simone Bolelli was a shellacking to say the least, but the sports press went further than necessary--embellishing the story with catch-words like "imperious" and "bully" to describe the commanding manner in which he won. Regardless of what they may print, it was the real Novak Djokovic that August day in Cincinnati--gracious, understanding, and supportive of an unknown fellow Serb far away from his homeland trying to get an incredible story for a little, 109 year-old *American-Serbian* newspaper whose last big story on honorary celebrity members was about Nikola Tesla becoming its honorary president 80 years ago.

He was very delighted when I asked him about his humanitarian work. His Novak Djokovic Foundation is focused on early



UNICEF Deputy Executive Director Yoka Brandt and Novak Djokovic
Photo Credit: UNICEF/NYQ2015/2048/Nesbitt



Photo Credit: UNICEF/NYHQ2011/1502/Babic

childhood education, but they also support the rebuilding of schools after the floods in Serbia in 2014, and sponsored the Serbian Special Olympics Team. When asked about his Foundation, he responded, "Currently the mission and assignment of our Foundation is to focus as much as possible on preschool education and we do everything to comply with our mission. We are aware of the fact that people who are our donors and benefactors show and recognize the work of our Foundation and also those who work for our Foundation."

His humanitarian work has been recognized by the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) who appointed him a Goodwill Ambassador on August 26, 2015 in New York because "he has focused on the issues of vulnerable children and their communities through his previous position as a UNICEF Serbia Ambassador and his own Novak Djokovic Foundation." Djokovic was grateful for this honor and stressed, "The early years of life are crucial. When well nurtured and cared for in their earliest years, children are more likely to survive, to grow in a healthy way, to have fewer illnesses, to develop thinking, language, emotional and social skills and become productive and successful citizens of society."

At the same Press Conference, Djokovic signed a Memorandum of Understanding between The World Bank and the Novak Djokovic Foundation in order to promote early childhood development, "which will include global advocacy on the importance of investing early in the lives of children as well as investments to help disadvantaged children in Novak Djokovic's home country of Serbia." Djokovic said, "We hope many will be supportive of this cause, because only working together can we make great things happen



Jelena Gencic
Photo Credit: Andrej Cukic/Associated Press

for children...By giving them a fair start in life, we are improving the future of our whole society." The Serb National Federation expressed a great interest in working with the Novak Djokovic Foundation in order to support its humanitarian projects in Serbia.

When I asked him about the importance of preserving Serbian heritage, he enthusiastically expressed its importance. "I think that you touched a very important question," he responded, "about our identity, and preserving, maintaining, and nurturing the culture of our families and from the country we come from. I think that a lot of young people have an opportunity to try to give some contribution to their nation in their micro world. Of course, maybe they cannot do that on global level as I do, but everybody has their own possibilities. If each one of us makes an effort to focus on a positive promotion of our country, I think our country would be much better. I am aware that there have been a lot of failures and many people are disappointed in our country and political system. I am aware of that reality, but people should remember the fact that only twenty and some more years ago there was war, two wars in less than ten years. Our country is still recovering from all of that, and it is very difficult to resist capitalism and globalism which are very dominant in the system of social values. However, we should preserve and nurture our identity, and focus more on respecting the human values which reflect our culture throughout the many centuries of our existence. We are a very old nation who settled in the Balkan region in the seventh century. We have an extraordinarily rich history and we can be proud of that; we have a valiant spirit, we have never surrendered to great empires, we respect family values, and we have a rich culture. You are right; the priority of social values has changed because



Nole and Jay Leno dancing kolo.
Photo credit: The-Slice.com

of globalization. People are less reliant on human qualities and characteristics, and more dependent on materialistic values. We should find a balance between them. We should show moderation in both directions. My message is: act with dignity, work very hard, and do not think that success will fall from heaven. Everything, even luck, must be deserved. Be kind to others. Behave toward others in the same way as you would like them to behave toward you. When you meet people, always proudly distinguish where you are from because people will appreciate that."

When I bestowed him with a plaque of honorary membership from the Serb National Federation, he was very excited to join honorary members Mihajlo I. Pupin and Nikola Tesla, American-Serbian scientists and inventors, and to hear about the SNF and its activities. We can all be proud of the fine work the Serb National Federation does to maintain Serbian culture in the Serbian diaspora in the USA and Canada. We actively work not only to maintain our culture, but also to strengthen ties with our ancestral homeland and educate the general public--advancing the honest and balanced portrayal of Serbian-American life. The SNF hopes, one day, to have the opportunity to partner with the Novak Djokovic Foundation on projects that will further support the missions of both organizations, Serbia, and the Serbian-American diaspora across this continent. Until that time, we will continue to cheer on and support Brother Djokovic in both his sports and humanitarian work. Go Ne1e!



Djokovic is blessing himself
Photo Credit: mundomilitaria.es

1. An interview with: Novak Djokovic(Final) US Open org, September 13, 2015: http://2015.usopen.org/en_US/news/interviews/2015-09-13/an_interview_with_novak_djokovic_final.html
2. Clarey, Christopher. "Novak Djokovic's Winning Strategy: Mind Over Chatter." The New York Times, September 14, 2015.
3. An interview with: Novak Djokovic (Semifinals) US Open org, September 11, 2015: http://2015.usopen.org/en_US/news/interviews/2015-09-11/an_interview_with_novak_djokovic_semifinals.html
4. Press Centre – Unite for Children (UNICEF) "World Tennis No. 1 Novak Djokovic Takes Centre Court For Children With Appointment as UNICEF's Newest Goodwill Ambassador," August 26, 2015: http://www.unicef.org/media_82998.html?p=printme
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