

Serbs Shine Bright in Tennis

by Milos Rastovic

CINCINNATI, OH - I had a great opportunity to be present on behalf of the Serb National Federation at the Master Cup Tennis Tournament Southern & Western Open in Cincinnati last August to follow almost all of the Serbian national tennis team which includes Novak Djokovic, Jelena Jankovic, Ana Ivanovic, Nenad Zimonjic and Viktor Troicki. It was amazing to watch all these wonderful players and to be proud of their success and heritage.

When I came to the Western & Southern Open Tournament, I was following Novak Djokovic's training, matches, and press conferences and was given the opportunity to present to him an honorary membership in the Serb National Federation. Besides Djokovic, Jelena Jankovic, also from Serbia and currently ranked 22nd by the Women's Tennis Association, had an extraordinary tournament in Cincinnati. She reached the semifinal match against Romanian Simona Halep, WTA #2. At the press conference about this tournament, Jankovic said: "I have a lot of support. You always love coming back to places you've played well, that you have had great results in the past. I really love playing here in Cincinnati...The fans are very supportive.



Jelena Jankovic

It's nice to see that, and I appreciate that very much. They are out there, cheering and really pushing me on when times get tough out there. I love it. I love battling and I love being out there. It's a great atmosphere." ¹

Jelena Jankovic was born in Belgrade, Serbia, and began playing tennis at nine

years of age. Her parents are Veselin and Snezana, and her older brother Marko is her current coach. As a junior, she won the Australia Open in 2001 and became the No. 1 junior player in the world. In 2008, she was the top ranked player in the WTA. She won the Wimbledon Grand Slam title in mixed doubles with Jamie Murray in 2007. She played for the Serbi-

an Fed Cup and Olympic Team. Playing for the Serbian Fed Cup, Serbia for the first time was placed in the World Group 1 in women tennis. At the press conference, Jankovic pointed out her pride playing for the Serbian tennis national team: "I played for my Serbian national team for about 12 years. We started there [Euro/Africa group] and we made it to the finals of the Fed Cup...Sharing those wins with teammates and just overall experiencing those moments it's completely different when you're alone on the court and playing for yourself and then playing with your teammates and for your country. It's unbelievable. Sharing the wins and the losses together, it's a special teamwork and a special feeling. I love playing for my country. I will always give my best." ²

After the Press Conference, I got an interview from her for the American Srbobran. I explained to her that the *American Srbobran* is the oldest Serbian newspaper in North America since 1906 and about the Serb National Federation. She was very gracious and charming during the interview. Because she played for the Serbian National Team many times, I asked her how much that had meant to her.

continued on page 12

¹ ASAP Sports, "An interview with Jelena Jankovic", at asapsports.com, August 21 and 22, 2015.
² ASAP Sports, "An interview with Jelena Jankovic", at asapsports.com, August 21 and 22, 2015.



ROCKIN' & BOWLIN' IS A MEMORY

Good golly, Miss Molly—we were bowling in Milwaukee in October.

We had a small but lively tournament—95 team bowlers, 46 doubles and singles bowlers and 19 teams. We all bowled singles and doubles in one shift on Saturday. With Ponovo giving us music to bowl by, fun was had by all. There were some good scores, too!

Sunday found all teams at the New Berlin Ale House. Where else, but at an SNF tournament, can you sing, dance and bowl to your favorite Serbian melodies? And where else, but at a tournament with fun-loving and spirited teams, would you

find your tamburashi draped in neon colored feather boas as they sang to you? That's what happened to Ponovo—and they never missed a beat.

Memories for some will include a Saturday afternoon trip to Old Town Serbian Gourmet House for more music and delicious food. A large group of bowlers enjoyed their impromptu trip to one of Milwaukee's finest Serbian restaurants. What a great way to while away an afternoon!

Other memories will include evenings at our Cultural Center. Kolo dancing, singing, great food and sweets and a beer or

two were heartily enjoyed by many.

We had bowlers from all over the country join with Milwaukee Serbs to have a good time. Let's not forget Rudi and Zoran's ribs—finger lickin' good!!

Memories for others will include the Sunday banquet, where Val Medich Sr. was presented with the Peter Drobac Sportsmanship Award for his dedication to the sport of bowling, both in and out of the SNF. Peter's youngest daughter, Linda Drobac Rehfeld, presented Val with his trophy and a hug and kiss. Val was humble in his acceptance and his son, Val Jr., spoke on his behalf. Other moments at

the banquet included the California Serb women winning big, as well as one of Milwaukee's own, Kathy Petrovich, taking home many prizes. Look for specific results in your Srbobran.

Milwaukee is grateful for all who traveled to our fair city to bowl, make memories and new friends. We worked hard to show you all a good time and look forward to hosting another SNF event in the future. Puno Hvala to all!

Pictures on page 10

Serbs Shine Bright in Tennis

continued from page 1

- "I have played for Serbia for 12 years, from the lowest categories and we came to the finals. I won two awards, and I left my heart on a tennis court. I love team work, and it is an amazing feeling to play for your country, bring wins, to be part of the team, and share losses and wins with other players. I love and enjoy that. It is an absolutely different feeling when you play for yourself and when you play for your country. Playing for your country is team responsibility and comes with a kind of pressure that I like. So many years I have played and given myself more beyond my limits to help the team to win. I think that we are a very qualitative national team and that we can do a lot in the future."

When you represented your country, you promoted a positive picture of Serbia. What is the most important thing in promoting Serbia that you always do in your career?

- "I think that tennis players are among the best ambassadors of our country. It is really amazing what we achieve in this sport. With our talent and behavior we try to present our country in the world in the best way."

How many supporters do you get from the Serbian Diaspora in America?

- "There a lot of Serbian people who support us throughout the world. I am very grateful for that support, and I am very glad when I hear our language and our people support us. My heart is full. I am that kind of player who likes to play when supporters are loud. They give me wind to my back, motivate and inspire me in some difficult and hard moments of a match so I can go beyond my limits, fight to the end, and win a match."

What message do you have to young Serbian-Americans who for some reason may have started to lose contact with their cultural heritage and homeland?

- "It is very important to preserve your identity, to be yourself and consistent. I am Serbian and I love my country. I hold my head up high, play tennis around the world, and I am proud to be Serbian and on country from which I come."

After the interview, I congratulated and thanked her. She was very polite and still full of Serbian pride playing for the National Team of Serbia. She also dis-

played her Serbian pride, as the UNICEF National Ambassador to Serbia named in 2007, in many occasions.

Her teammate, Ana Ivanovic, WTA#6, also played great games during the tournament. She reached the quarterfinal against Serena Williams, WTA#1. She had a lot of Serbian supporters during her matches and like Jankovic, she showed her determination to fight and win. Ivanovic started to play tennis at age four when she watched Monica Seles, another Serbian tennis player, whom she admired. Ivanovic won the Grand Slam title at the Roland Garros in France in 2008 and became No. 1 player in the world. As Jankovic, she played in the Serbian Fed Cup Team many times. She was named the UNICEF National Ambassador to Serbia for child safety in schools in 2007. Nenad Zimonjic, ATP #6 in doubles, had great reason to celebrate at the Western & Southern Open Tournament. Like Novak Djokovic, Zimonjic also reached the final match but in doubles with Marcin Matkowski. The audience was cheering them during their match. It was a pleasure to watch them on the court and see their strength and watch them win. Zimonjic started to play tennis at age nine. He was the No. 1 tennis player in dou-

bles in 2008 when he won his first Grand Slam title with Daniel Nestor. He played for the Serbian National Team during the Davis Cup a number of times. In 2013, he received the Davis Cup Award of Excellence. He is married to Mina Knezevic in 2008, and they have two kids.

Viktor Troicki, ATP #25, is also a great Serbian tennis player who reached the first round of the tournament. He played on Serbia's Davis Cup team and reached final in 2010. His best ranking in the world was ATP #12 in 2011.

All the Serbian tennis players got extraordinary support from the audience at the tournament.

We can be proud how they represented their cultural heritage and country with sportsmanship and integrity. They have already proved themselves as the best Serbian Ambassadors in the world. Wherever they go, whatever they do, we can be proud of them. The Serb National Federation will continue to support our great Serbian Ambassadors.

Translation from Serbian into English, and photos by Milos Rastovic



Marcin Matkowski and Nenad Zimonjic



Novak Djokovic
(Photo by Dragan Veselinov)



Ana Ivanovic



Jelena Jankovic with Milos Rastovic of the SNF;



Nenad Zimonjic;



Viktor Troicki for the American Srbobran.
Photos by Milos Rastovic.