

“A TRIP DOWN MEMORY LANE”

25 YEARS AT SEASCAPE

By Nate Abaurrea, photos by Joyce Tarter Rideout

It is hard to believe it has been a quarter century since the Comerica Bank Challenger began way back in 1988. As we venture into a new era here in 2012, it is time to take a trip down memory lane, and look back on some of the highlights of professional tennis on the Central Coast.

Since its' humble beginnings in the late 80's, the Challenger has gone on to become a highly anticipated and respected event on the professional circuit. Gaining that status was anything but easy. In a tennis climate where tournament hosts come and go quicker than John McEnroe's temper, maintaining a spot on the tour is something to be proud of on its own merits. Seascap Sports Club has epitomized the word stability through the course of the Challenger's 25-year history. Paul Kepler and Judy Welsh have been at the forefront since the early

days, and the tireless work of these individuals has yielded the number one thing that keeps a tournament afloat: a great event that features quality tennis.

When you take a look at the tournament alumni list, reactions can vary from an approving head-nod to a complete jaw-drop. Jimmy Arias, Wayne Ferreira, Patrick Rafter, Michael Chang, John Isner, James Blake, Robbie Ginepri, Milos Raonic, the Bryan brothers, and of course Andy Murray have all displayed their talents on the hard courts of Seascap. Of all those incredible names, Rafter, Bob Bryan, and the Scottish born Murray are the only ones to win the singles title, Rafter in 1993, Bryan in 2000, and Murray doing so in 2005.

“Andy was the first foreign-born player to be granted a wildcard berth,” Paul Kepler said. “I had to clear it with the USTA prior to the tournament. He and his coach,

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Mark Petchey, ate at the same restaurant every night. They were extremely superstitious, and clearly, it paid off.” The restaurant was called “Il Pirates”, and it was located in Capitola. For any players looking for that same lucky edge as Murray, you’ll have to look elsewhere. “Il Pirates” is no longer open.

Seeing Murray in the Wimbledon Singles Final against Roger Federer this past July was an awesome thrill for

anybody involved with Seascap. Despite the loss to the legendary Federer, Murray became the first British born player to make the final at the All England Club since 1938. He is well on his way to perhaps becoming the greatest British tennis player of all time.

American great Michael Chang played at Seascap on three occasions, and had an immense love for the area, and always seemed to be drawn back to it. His three appearances were part of his late career comeback effort, playing in 1999, 2002, and 2003. I served as a ball boy

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2005 Comerica Bank Challenger Champion, **Andy Murray** was the 2012 Wimbledon Finalist and the first British born finalist since 1938.



Michael Chang always took the time to sign autographs at Seascap.

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during his first appearance at the Challenger, and his down to earth nature was a marvel to behold. Seldom have we seen a player insist on staying after a match to sign an autograph for every single kid in attendance. He became one of the most respected figures at the Club, as it is so rare to see players of his stature for more than just the one year. While Chang showed much love and support for the grassroots of tennis, he was still a very cautious individual. "It was rumored but never confirmed that the first time Chang was at Seascapes, he had his own security team prepared to accompany him," Paul Kepler said.

Local sports broadcaster, and tennis enthusiast Hunter Finnell recalled a story of Chang that was especially endearing.

"I had my two young children interview him one afternoon for a piece that would be airing on the local news," Finnell said. "Everyone loved it, particularly because Michael treated my children like they were esteemed journalists."

Finnell, who has been around the tournament as both a broadcaster and a fan, had nothing but the highest praise



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for Chang. "He was truly dedicated to Seascapes. It was a pleasure watching him play."

Michael Chang even mentioned Seascapes in his book "Holding Serve", commenting on the breathtaking beauty of the Santa Cruz County setting. Prior to his appearances at the Challenger, Chang reached as high as #2 in the ATP World Rankings, and is still the youngest ever player to win a Grand Slam, taking the French Open title in 1989 at the age of 17. He is a member of the International Tennis Hall of Fame, inducted in the class of 2008.

While Chang and Murray are brilliant players, there is not a shadow of a doubt that the most successful singles player to ever take on Seascapes was Patrick Rafter. The Australian is the only Challenger alum to ever hold the #1 overall singles ranking in the world. After winning the singles title here at Seascapes in



©Joyce Tarter
Michael Chang reached as high as #2 in the ATP World rankings.

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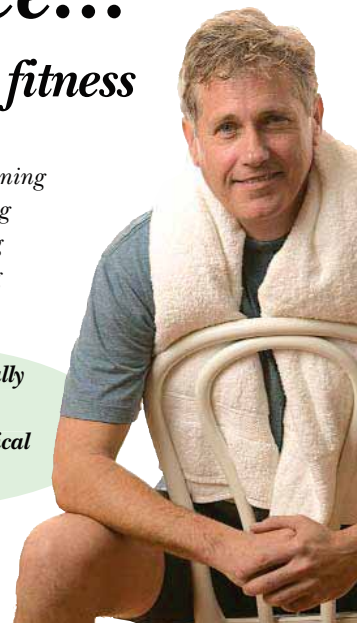
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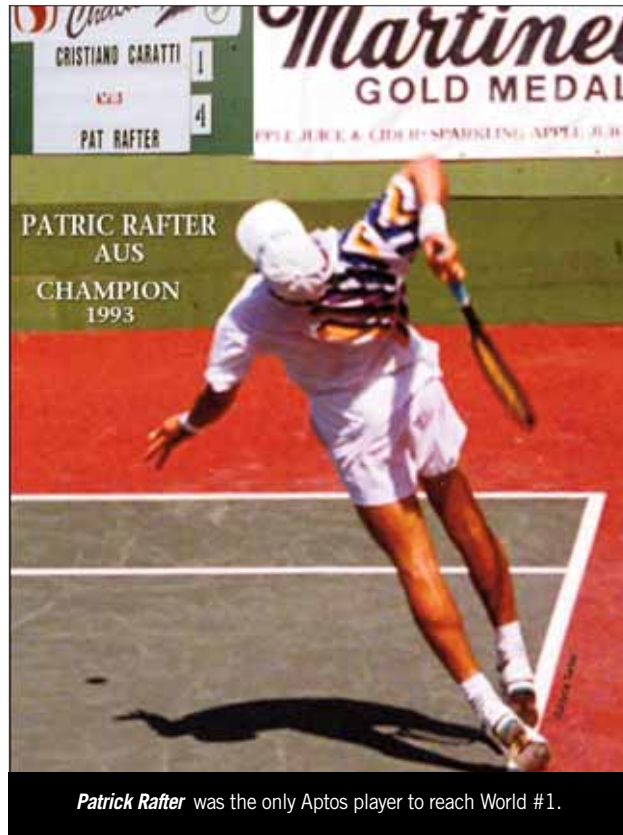
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1993, Rafter went on to become one of the greatest Australian players in history, twice winning the U.S. Open in his illustrious career, and appearing in two Wimbledon finals as well. However, the most remarkable story about Rafter is that back in 1993, he jumped into the limelight by upsetting American icon Pete Sampras, just 6 weeks after winning at Seascap.

Now if you are a doubles enthusiast reading this, surely you must be waiting for a tribute to the Bryan brothers. Bob and Mike Bryan have won an unbelievable 11 Grand Slams as a tandem, and have held the #1



Patrick Rafter was the only Aptos player to reach World #1.

overall doubles ranking in the world on multiple occasions. They were both selected to the ATP “Team of the Decade” in 2010.

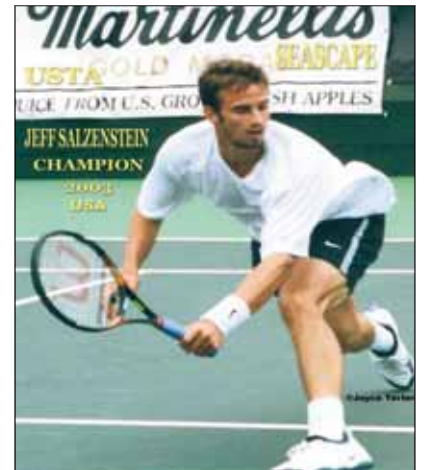
Their Seascap track record includes two doubles championships, coming in 1998 and 2000. The 2000 edition of the Challenger was essentially a Bryan family party, with Bob Bryan taking the singles title in a legendary three setter against Kevin Kim, winning 6-4, 6-7, 6-4 in the Sunday finale (Kim of course went on to win in 2004 and 2008, joining Jeff Salzenstein as the only two-



Alumni *Bob and Mike Bryan* were both selected to the ATP “Team of the Decade”



Kevin Kim won the Singles Championships in 2004 and 2008 .



Jeff Salzenstein was a two time Singles Champion at Seascap.



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time singles champions.) Bob Bryan's improbable week back in 2000 was just the second time in tournament history that a player won both the singles and doubles crowns (Alex O'Brien was the other, winning both brackets in 1992). Chris Guccione became the third to accomplish the feat in 2009, with help from fellow Australian lefty, Carsten Ball.

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Chris Guccione won Singles and Doubles in 2009, the third Seascapes player to achieve this.



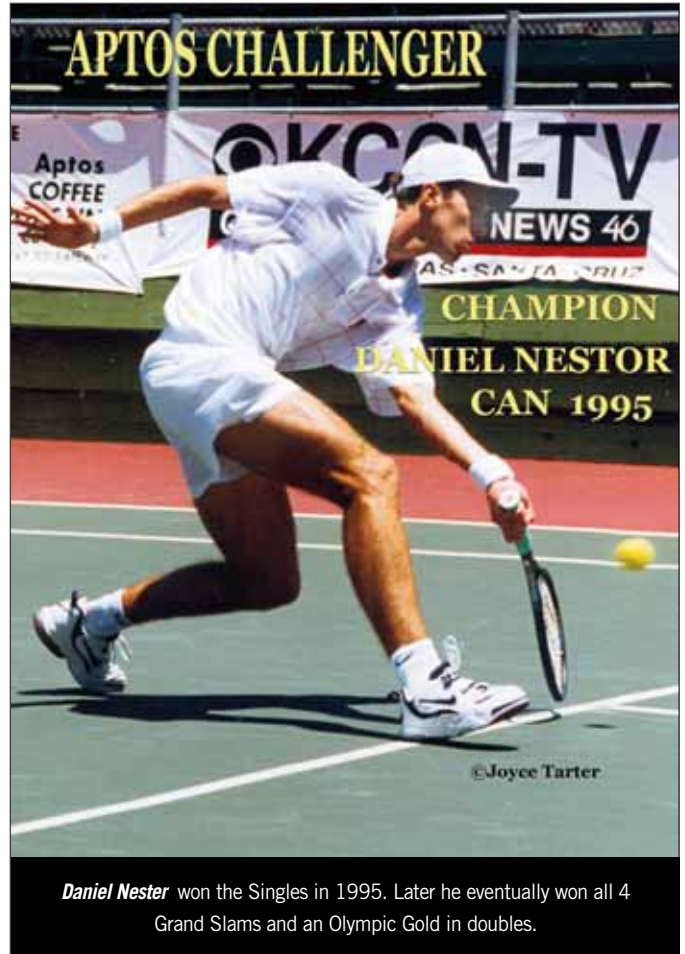
Carsten Ball won the 2009 Doubles with Chris Guccione.

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Wouldn't that be a dream doubles match? The Bryan brothers in their prime, head to head with Guccione and Ball, the only players to ever win three straight championships at Seascap, going for an unprecedented fourth in a row in 2012. Who would win that hypothetical, dream doubles match? If only we could find out...

It is quite noteworthy that this past June, the Bryan brothers were overtaken in the world doubles rankings, being temporarily surpassed by Max Mirnyi and Daniel Nestor. Nestor ironically is also a player with Seascap history. The Canadian won the singles championship in 1995, culminating with a three set final against former NCAA National Champion Chris Woodruff. Nestor is the only doubles player in the history of tennis to win all four Grand Slams, every Masters Series event, and an Olympic gold medal. Originally born in Belgrade, Serbia, Nestor moved to Ontario as a young child, and at the Sydney Olympics in 2000, he stood tall on the 1st place podium, as the sounds of "O Canada" greeted his gold medal victory.

As we look back on the last 25 years, there are so many great matches that come to mind. A truly memorable match of tennis should hold the test of time, and intricate



Daniel Nestor won the Singles in 1995. Later he eventually won all 4 Grand Slams and an Olympic Gold in doubles.

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details should stay planted in the minds of audience members for years on end. In that regard, there is one match that most definitely takes the cake. It was played back in 2009, a first round affair between Frenchman

Arnaud Clement, who came into the tournament as our highest ever ranking player at time of entry at #53 in the world, and Alex Bogomolov Jr. The three and a half hour epic match had everything that you could ask for in terms of drama. Some of the finest tennis was accompanied by outrageous theatrics from both players. Clement lost a tight first set, and at one point, down 4-1 in the second frame, threatened to



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The final score was 13-11 in a tie-break with "Bogey" winning.

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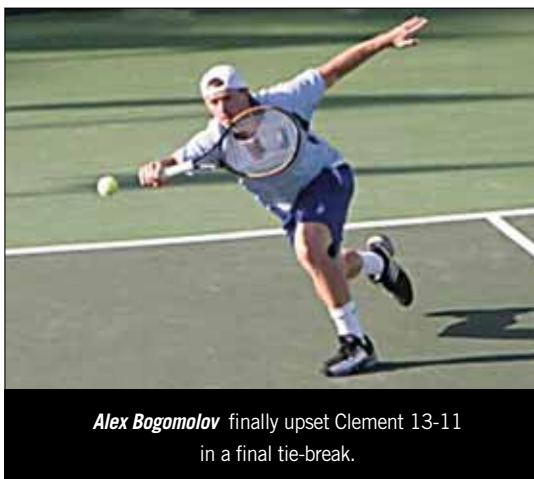
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leave the court, even beginning to pack up his racket bag, after a close call from the umpire went in favor of the man affectionately known as “Bogey”. An irate Clement eventually calmed down, at least enough to miraculously fight back and take the second set, all while frequently voicing his extreme displeasure with the match official. In the third and final set, the Frenchman took Bogomolov the distance, eventually losing in a 13-11 tie-break. That finale still remains one of the most intense, pressure packed ten minutes of tennis ever seen at the Challenger. The spectators who stayed late into the evening to watch it play out took in one of the greatest spectacles the tournament has ever offered in 25 years.



Alex Bogomolov finally upset Clement 13-11 in a final tie-break.

running Challenger event in the world. Take a good look at these young men. Remember these players that you are getting to watch. You never know which one will follow in the footsteps of Rafter and Murray, and use Seascap as the ultimate stepping-stone to tennis stardom. ■



Arnaud Clement entered Aptos with the highest ever ranking.

All of these players and stories are what make up our history here at Seascap Sports Club. The 2012 edition of the Comerica Bank Challenger is sure to be another exciting week, and come Sunday, we will all have another chapter of stories to include when we take our next trip down memory lane. Who knows, you could be watching a future Wimbledon champion, or a prospective U.S. Open king. One of these players could easily go on to become one of the best in the world. That is the beauty of this tournament, now the longest

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