

MADE IN AMERICA

Marcus Jackson: On The Move

One of the top stories of the Cary Cup tournament was an American junior who struggled to advance from the second round (there was a three-way tie in the round robin with only two players advancing) but then found his stride in the single elimination. On the final day he defeated Canadian Olympian Pradabean Peter-Paul (US Rating 2739, World No. 208), and Wang Zhen (US Rating 2719, World No. 181) before falling in the Semifinals to Gao YanJun, who with a rating of 2636 is currently rated fifth in the U.S. Marcus, who has trained entirely in the U.S., entered the tournament with a rating of 2472. When the ratings are processed, this home-grown talent should move comfortably into the Top 25 U.S. players.

Last summer, Coach Boris Shafir decided that a good practice partner was needed to bring Marcus Jackson up to the next level of competition. Shafir was looking for a player 2500 or better who could give lessons while coaching and who could also practice with Jackson on a regular basis. Marcus, for whom school is a number one priority, plays table tennis one and a half hours twice a week (weekdays) and a total of six hours on the weekend. Though Marcus plays in an elite league of Maryland players where no one is ranked under 2100, neither Marcus father Morris Jackson, nor Coach Shafir, could find a player in the Maryland area to work one on one with Marcus.

As the 2008 Matthew Murad Table Tennis Tournament approached, Marcus' father began making calls hoping to find a player over 2500 who was planning to visit the region. Marcus received a text from his father noting that Barney Reed Jr. planned to play in the tournament before leaving for Germany. Reed was willing to spend time working with Marcus. At last the Jacksons had found their man.

Marcus was thrilled to be working with Reed and had the good fortune not only to practice with Barney, but also to use him as a sideline coach in other tournaments including the Joola Tour Finals, Baltimore Teams, US Nationals and the Cary Cup.

Reed made several suggestions which Jackson incorporated into his style of play and he soon began to see improvement in tournament results. Jackson says training with and receiving coaching from Barney Reed Jr. has been a valuable learning experience. He adds that although Coach Boris Shafir (former national coach for the Russian Team) is excellent, nothing beats the value of having a highly ranked player to practice with.

When not playing table tennis, Marcus is focused on school. This most recent academic year saw him inducted into the National Honor Society. Even more exciting, Marcus was selected as a Presidential Inaugural Scholar. With this honor, he attended the Presidential Youth Inaugural Conference in January where he witnessed the Oath of Office, Swearing-in-Ceremony and Inauguration of the 44th President of the United States, Barak Obama. Jackson participated in educational activities and attended the black tie Inaugural Ball. For Jackson, education is number one— until it's time to try to make the Olympic Team and represent America.

In this year's Cary Cup Barney Reed provided insight and advice on how Jackson should approach his matches. He told Jackson first to believe in himself, and taking that belief to heart, Marcus had the best tournament of his life. Marcus Jackson: a U.S. player on the move.

Marcus wishes to thank Richard Bowling and Ragu who have been and remain his most reliable practice partners as he continues his journey to achieve his goals.

