

MARCUS JACKSON

PUSHING THE LIMITS

For most of 2009, Maryland's Marcus Jackson was the top-ranked junior in the USA. Early in the year, he broke into the Top 20 Men's rankings. With his eighteenth birthday approaching in January, Marcus is looking forward to a stellar 2010.

In most weeks, seventeen-year-old Marcus Jackson splits his playing time between three different table tennis clubs; JOOLA Club, Baltimore Table Tennis Club, and MDTTC. Each of the clubs is about a 45 minute commute for the Jacksons. On a typical day, Morris Jackson, Marcus' father, drives to a club while Marcus sleeps. On a return trip, Morris drives again, and Marcus catches up on homework. This ritual is repeated four to six times each week. Marcus has a real commitment to the sport — and that commitment to table tennis (and to Marcus' development) is unconditionally shared by Morris.

In order to balance school work and his athletic pursuits, Marcus must manage time very carefully. Due to scheduling constraints, training is usually limited to just two hours per session. But this cautious metering is time well spent because Marcus' success doesn't stop at the table tennis court. He maintains a 3.8 grade point average and was chosen to be a

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Presidential Inaugural Scholar Athlete. When asked about his demanding and hectic schedule, Marcus replied, "Dad expects my best — I always try to do my best."

Marcus has many of the attributes that create success in demanding sports. He has strength and speed; He is currently 6'4", but still growing; he has an even temperament in competition; and he has fortitude. In 2009, he proved this toughness — struggling



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through the early rounds of the Cary Cup, but rebounding to defeat Canadians Pradabehn Peter-Paul (World No. 208) and Wang Zhen (World No. 181) before losing in the semifinals.

Marcus has achieved his level of success without any international training. In fact, his only international play to date has been in Canada. He does have an international coach; Boris Shafir, the coach of the 1988 Russian Olympic team. Shafir and Marcus train twice a week in Baltimore. A normal session includes footwork drills both with a partner and in multiball drills, serve and return practice, and games or modified game scenarios. Common game scenarios, or "popcorn matches" as he calls them include one player serving the whole game, playing games to five points, and starting games at deuce.

Though Marcus hasn't yet had opportunity to travel, he would like to train overseas someday. He could imagine living in Europe, playing against tougher competition and finding time to practice 8 to 10 hours each day — that is about the same number of hours he currently plays in a normal week.

Marcus says that the U.S. should consider

Marcus Jackson

Age: 17 (18 in January, 2010)

Hometown: Riverdale, Maryland

Current/Highest Rating: 2537 / 2574

Under 18 Boys Ranking: No. 3

US Men's Ranking: No. 25

sending younger players to international competitions. More international exposure and competition will help the younger players improve. "Our top players should still be in their youth."

Marcus' game features a double winged attack. He is offensive minded and tries very hard to press the pace of the game. "I don't want to be the person with my back against the wall — I want to be the one pushing my opponent against the wall."

Marcus is currently working the hardest to improve his footwork and his backhand in general. Rhythm and momentum are the two keys to his performance, and he works to establish both early in a game. He has been watching videos of top international players in an effort to further develop as a player. One favorite video right now features Bastian Steger showcasing his backhand technique at the Polish Open.

Turning to table tennis in the United States, Marcus would like to see the sport marketed better. "In the rest of the world, table tennis is comparable to basketball or baseball — It is at that same level." He sees table tennis as a great sport that just needs more exposure.

Speaking about the recent Hardbat Classic, Marcus believes the exposure was good but that there was something wrong with the format of the event. "How can those that practice their whole lives in the sport have no chance to win?"

Currently a senior at St. John's College High School in Washington, DC, Marcus is considering attending college at American University, Fordham University, or Penn State University. He plans to study business, marketing, and management. He hopes to eventually integrate table tennis with his profession. Among his motivations to continue in the sport even as he transitions to college and beyond is that, "If I stop, there are a lot of people that I'll never see again — lots of friends, lots of great people."

When asked about his potential, he responded "If everything went perfect, if I moved to Europe and practiced all the time, if all the pieces fell perfectly... My goal would be to make the top 100 in the World."