



SHAPOVALOV BECOMES YOUNGEST CANADIAN TO WIN HALIFAX DAVIS CUP

By **Marvin Glassman** - September 26, 2016 > 12479 > 0



Denis Shapovalov at the Rogers Cup. VIDAL KESLASSY PHOTO

Denis Shapovalov of Richmond Hill, Ont., made history on Sept. 18 by being the youngest Canadian tennis player in the 100-years-plus history of Davis Cup to play his first match at age 17.

Canada has competed in the annual Davis Cup tennis competition between nations since 1913.

Shapovalov, who set the historic mark by one year, was victorious in his Davis Cup debut at Scotiabank Centre in Halifax. He defeated Christian Garin of Chile 7-6(5), 6-4 in the fourth match of the Davis Cup tie as part of a Canadian 5-0 sweep of Chile in the Davis Cup World Group playoff.

Shapovalov saved four break points in the first set before winning the tie-breaker to secure the first set. In the second set, Shapovalov was broken at 2-3, but rebounded immediately to break back at 3-3, winning three of the next four games to win the match in 83 minutes for Canada.

“It’s incredible to win. It was a lot of pressure to know I was going to play. It’s a different match playing for your country. I think I controlled myself really well, fought as hard as I could and I’m happy I got the win,” said Shapovalov following

his victory

Shapovalov was selected to the Canadian Davis Cup team as the third singles player of the four-man roster, replacing top ranked Milos Raonic of Thornhill, Ont. who is recovering from an injury.

Shapovalov is ranked No. 245, the highest ranking for any tennis player age 17, and in the past year alone, has won the junior Wimbledon championship and won the junior Davis Cup for Canada.

He had his most impressive win of his young career in tennis last August before his hometown fans at the Rogers Cup in Toronto. He upset top 20 player Nick Kyrgios of Australia in his opening match, raising his ranking a few hundred points.

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“Nick is an incredible tennis player, top 20 in the world, maybe even future No. 1 in the world, so obviously, I did not expect to win. I just go in and fight for every point. That’s what I did. The outcome was very good,” said Shapovalov at the time.

Because the tall 5-foot, 10-inch Shapovalov serves left and possesses a one-handed backhand shot rarely used in tennis, many are predicting that he will have a long future in the top ranks of tennis.

“I think Denis has a very bright future. He is much further on in his development than I was at his age,” said Raonic at the Rogers Cup.

The credit in developing Shapovalov’s one-handed backhand goes to his mother, former Soviet Union tennis player, Tessa Shapovalova, who taught him that shot while coaching him at age five.

“Denis is very athletic and I encouraged him to play an aggressive game with the one-handed backhand. His skills have given him outstanding results,” said Tessa.

“I emigrated to Israel from the Soviet Union because I am Jewish. Although my husband Viktor (Denis’ father) is Greek Orthodox, he was eager to go to Israel as well. I taught and played tennis while we were in Israel,” she said.

Just a few months after Denis was born, the family emigrated again to Toronto.

“We liked Tel Aviv, but felt it was dangerous, so we left for Toronto in 1999,” said Tessa.

She taught tennis for 10 years at the Richmond Hill Tennis Club before opening her own tennis academy, called Tessa Tennis in Vaughan.

Although still taking advice from his mother, Denis is currently coached by Adriano Panatta, a former manager of tennis development for Tennis Canada.

He is only the fourth Jewish player in history to play a Davis Cup match for Canada.

Because he was born in Israel, he also has the option to play Davis Cup for Israel, and given his current ranking at No. 245, would be the second-highest ranking player in Israel. He is currently the sixth-highest ranked player in Canada.

“I love playing for Canada and that is where I will be playing Davis Cup,” he said.

When he won the Junior Davis Cup for Canada earlier this year, ironically enough, the coach of the team was Israeli-born Oded Jacob, who developed top Israeli players Harel Levy, Shahar Peer and Dudi Sela.

