

[Home](#) > [Culture](#) > [Sports](#) > Israeli tennis coach and Jewish player lead Canada

[CULTURE](#) [SPORTS](#)

## ISRAELI TENNIS COACH AND JEWISH PLAYER LEAD CANADA

 By **Marvin Glassman** - November 1, 2015 > 16488 > 2 Comments

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The Canadian Junior Davis Cup winning team members are (from left) Denis Shapovalov, Felix Auger-Aliassime, captain/coach Oded Jacob and Benjamin Sigouin

There was definitely an Israeli touch to Canada winning its historic first Junior Davis Cup in tennis for boys 16 and under on Oct. 4 in Spain.

Led by 16-year-old Denis Shapovalov of Richmond Hill, Ont. who was born in Tel Aviv, and Canadian Junior Davis Cup captain/coach Oded Jacob, an Israeli who formerly worked with the Israel Tennis Association, Canada, went undefeated in teams from Colombia, Czech Republic, Germany, Great Britain, Hong Kong and Poland in a round robin competition to win its first Junior Davis Cup.

Shapovalov shined in the final tie against Germany. The tall 5-foot 10 in. lefthander defeated German Marvin Moeller 6-1, 6-4 to give Canada a 1-0 lead. After Canadian teammate Felix Auger-Aliassime lost his match to even the tie, the two Canadian boys teamed in doubles in the final match to emerge victorious with a 6-3, 3-6, 6-2 win over the German duo of Nicola Kuhn and Moeller.

"It's very exciting being the first Canadians ever to win Junior Davis Cup," said a jubilant Shapovalov, ranked 29th among the world's top juniors, following the historic win.

"Being the top seed, I am proud of what our boys accomplished. The competition was fierce over the six-day competition and I am glad to be part of the historical win for Canada," said Jacob, who was hired by Tennis Canada in 2011 to develop top Canadian junior players based in Vancouver.

Players from 47 nations took part in the regional competition in 2015 leading to the top 16 teams competing in the final week in Spain.

Many of the top professional players, such as Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal, competed in Junior Davis Cup

when they were teens.

"Our victory shows how far Canada has come in tennis. Canadians are no longer just talented in hockey and figure skating. We have an impressive tennis system in place that other nations wish to emulate," said Jacob.

Tennis Canada feels that hiring Jacob was one of the best moves made to develop promising Canadian tennis players in Western Canada.

"We are fortunate to have hired one of the best coaches in the world to identify talented youngsters in tennis", said Ryan Clark, chief executive of Tennis BC in Vancouver, who selected Jacob over other top candidates available.

Jacob has been held in high esteem in tennis circles for his stellar achievements in Israel. He nurtured Israeli tennis players Shahar Peer, Dudi Sela and Harel Levy from their teens into top world class players over the past 15 years.

Jacob was instrumental in achieving several high milestones for Israel. Two players he developed – Peer and Sela – led Israel to a World Group Fed Cup berth in 2008, and the 2009 Davis Cup semi-finals respectively.

Ironically enough, Jacob may again be taking an Israeli born tennis player, albeit now a Canadian, and help Shapovalov become a top tennis player.

Shapovalov has already produced an impressive resumé. He teamed with Auger-Aliassime to win the 2015 U.S. Open Junior doubles championship. Last April as a 15-year-old, Shapovalov won the Rogers Canadian national tennis championship. He was also named by Tennis Canada as the 2014 Junior Tennis Player Of The Year.

Shapovalov has joined Canadians Milos Raonic and Vasek Pospisil as winners of the prestigious national junior championship.

Winning the national junior title does not mean that Shapovalov is guaranteed to be a top tennis star for Canada on the pro circuit in a few years.

"At age 15, Milos Raonic was not the top Canadian as he is now. So, you never hope how good a young player can be on the pro circuit," said Jacob.

Shapovalov's parents are Russian Jews who emigrated to Israel before emigrating again to Toronto in 2004.

He credits his mother Tessa, who coached young Denis at five years old, for his love of tennis.

"She even opened up her own tennis club (Tessatennis) in Vaughan to give me a base to train in tennis," said Shapovalov.

Although he would probably earn a scholarship to an American university with a tennis program, Shapovalov is thinking of bypassing college to turn pro.

"My dream has always been to be a top tennis player and winning Grand Slam tournaments, so I probably won't go to college," said Shapovalov.

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