



ON-THE-JOB TRAINING

Internships offer positives for students, your business, and the tennis industry.

BY MARY HELEN SPRECHER

It's all about the American Dream: Kid comes out of college, lands an entry-level job and starts working in his or her chosen field.

But what if the kid's dream is a job in the tennis industry? Maybe this grad loves the game but is realistic about his or her ability: a competitive career isn't in the cards, but another tennis-related job could be. Maybe as a teaching pro. Maybe in media coverage of the sport. Perhaps in tournament management, sales or service of equipment, design or construction of facilities. There are a lot of job possibilities out there, but how can you get a foot in the door?

"It's interesting," says Glenn Arrington, who manages the USTA's Tennis On Campus program. "We keep getting notes from kids, saying, 'This is what I'd really like to do, work in tennis, so what can I do to get a job?' We do want more people to be teaching professionals, but we also want to be able to say, 'Did you know that there are lots of opportunities in tennis, and how much you can make?'"

The question, then, becomes how to get from Point A (loving tennis) to Point B (having a full-time career in it). The answer, say members of the industry, is for the student to seek out an internship in a segment of the tennis industry that interests him or her. The dynamic, they add, is that in many cases, a down economy, combined with a desire to grow the game, has resulted in a number of opportunities for grads and students. Internships are out there, and in all probability, will multiply in number.

"I think the market for internships is

growing," says David Benjamin, executive director of the Intercollegiate Tennis Association. "I think it's infinitely harder for people leaving college to find positions, and the people who are in those positions are holding onto them longer, and companies are hiring fewer people. A lot of companies are downsizing, and internships offer the opportunity to have a good person work for you and learn."

THE CHANCE TO DO MORE

The ITA offers one full-time internship position that lasts for a year. It is a paid slot, adds Benjamin, but the pay isn't extravagant. The intern, therefore, has to be devoted to the field, and has to be interested in making the most of the learning experience. The ITA, he adds, as a relatively small organization, is able to provide interns with a variety of experiences in the tennis industry, including the organization and management of national and regional championships, working with rankings, interacting with members and watching the day-to-day workings of the office and its personnel, and the way employees work with other organizations and governing bodies in the sport.

And that, says Jodi Neuhauser, sales and marketing manager of Tennis Company (which publishes Tennis Magazine, Smash Magazine, USTA Magazine and others) is one of the chief appeals of an internship. Her company offers summer internship programs in both its editorial and business departments.

"Internships offer students the ability

Offering Internships

Want to give a kid a peek at the tennis industry? Here are a few tips:

- ▶ **Credit Risk:** Establishing an internship program isn't hard, but getting colleges to give credit for it can be challenging. A local college may be able to help you develop a program, or can at least make you aware of those who are interested.
- ▶ **Just Do It:** Alternatively, non-credit internships (for work experience only) can be offered during school breaks or over the summer.
- ▶ **The Job:** Have enough meaningful work to keep an intern busy and learning. Talk with staff beforehand to create schedules and responsibilities.
- ▶ **Learn Interns' Interests:** "We find out what they're interested in—marketing, event planning, etc.," says Schaechterle, who then tries to help customize a learning experience with Wilson.
- ▶ **Marketing:** List your internship on the TIA's Careers In Tennis website (careersintennis.com).
- ▶ **Spread the Word:** Talk to coaches of college tennis teams, to pros at clubs and others who would have contact with student-athletes who might be interested.

to explore a number of career opportunities in the safe environment of a college education,” says Neuhauser. “Students who have had multiple internships by the time they graduate from college not only have a more defined career path, but also have had the experiences needed in the publishing world to contribute immediately.”

Some programs, which run during spring or summer months, can be accomplished while students are still enrolled in college. World TeamTennis used the USTA's Tennis On Campus program as a recruitment tool for its internship program, and was able to find a number of undergrads who were exactly what organizers were looking for.

“The idea was to attract and retain the best and brightest young minds for the tennis industry,” says Bill Mountford, senior vice president of WTT. “This is a tricky business to break into, and providing foot-in-the-door opportunities for young people is part of the responsibility to our sport that WTT takes seriously.”

THE ELECTRONIC AGE

WTT interns wrote press releases, did grant applications, and researched venues for events. They also helped with websites and player blogs. In other organizations, such as Tennis Company, interns manage Facebook profiles, Twitter accounts and interact with junior players online. The fact that a younger generation has a better grasp of technology than many established executives has made their skills especially marketable. Other media outlets also have found having tech-savvy interns to be an asset.

“It's valuable for employers, given how fast communication is changing. Younger folks are so embedded with technology that they can bring a lot to the table,” says Jennifer Arianas, director of tennis industry public relations at the Tennis Channel. “In our department, all interns have played tennis, and they like to stay connected to the tennis world.” Like WTT, the Tennis Channel uses a number of interns, and spreads them among various departments, including production, marketing and others.

Tennis manufacturing companies also offer opportunities. Wilson Sporting Goods Co. offers two types of internships: one during the summer and one during the school year. Its three-month summer program uses an application process that the ITA coordinates. According to Adam Schaechterle, Wilson's tour and juniors manager, Americas, one of the summer internships is open to a student-athlete who has worked to promote tennis in the area. A second is offered to a team manager.

“There are opportunities in marketing, sales, promotions, product development, event planning, graphic design and more,” Schaechterle says. “And while you're interning, you have the opportunity to be exposed to many of these different career paths. This is a great opportunity to open a college student's eyes.”

For students already on a career path in tennis, internships

can offer real-world experience that supplements their curriculum. Derek Ameel, the Professional Tennis Management program director at Ferris State University in Big Rapids, Mich., notes that each student in the program is required to complete three internships in order to graduate.

“One of the internships is ongoing with our Ferris Racquet and Fitness Center, accumulating 400 hours in the four years as a student,” he says. “The two outside internships are mainly done during the summers at various country clubs, resorts, private and public racquet facilities, park and recreation departments, manufacturers, tennis companies, and tennis industry organizations.”

EXTERNAL CHALLENGES FOR INTERNSHIPS

Internships vary greatly among organizations in terms of pay (some do, some don't), complexity of the application process (some are formal and rigorous, others less so) and willingness of a college to promote the internship to its students, or to offer academic credit for it. Schaechterle was successful at establishing a relationship with Northwestern University, and as a result, the college's career center forwards resumes of qualified students who are interested in Wilson internships before the start of each academic quarter.

One of the problems for those seeking internships has been the fact that many colleges and students remain unaware of the programs offered because there has been no centralized location where such information is stored. The Tennis Industry Association, in its Careers In Tennis initiative (www.careersintennis.com) is

working to create a mechanism that will make interested students and grads aware of the various opportunities in the tennis industry, including internships.

The website creates a pipeline to help move potential industry members toward opportunities. (While the segment of the site that relates to available internships is still under construction, TIA Executive Director Jolyn de Boer is working with organizations and corporations in the industry to supply information that can be posted.)

Ultimately, says Arianas, internships can and do lead those who are interested back into the industry. She should know.

“I think it's an extremely valuable experience, and I'm speaking from personal experience,” she says.

“My first job was as an intern after college. I was working with the Virginia Slims Championship, and one of the things I wound up doing was following the tournament director around and doing everything she needed. That meant making sure all the flowers and trophies were in place, that the music was cued up, that the nameplates were on the box seats—everything. I had experience with doing everything from sponsorship services to operations.”

Bill Mountford, who expects to expand the WTT internship program in years to come, doesn't doubt the value of the program, nor its potential impact. “I expect that someday there will be an industry leader who eventually emerges from this internship program, and we will be able to say, ‘Do you remember when...?’”

No Business is Too Small

Think your business is too small to offer internships? Think again. Whether you run a tennis facility or a retail shop, or are a court construction company, CTA, NJTL or park and rec, an internship with your organization can offer students a wealth of experience, and a leg up in getting started in this industry.

No matter what size your business is, bringing in an intern can provide you with an affordable and enthusiastic worker, and they get a chance to gain valuable experience in a field that they hope to grow into. And, you'll be helping this industry build for its future.

Check with local colleges to see if there are programs that could offer college credit, and again, make sure you have meaningful work for an intern.