

RUBY: A CASE STUDY

RACQUET vs. RACKET



Antebi at the net, where a routine handshake can become a 45-minute conversation.

A surfer, a talker, a Gold-level forehand and a Silver-tier ranking. Inside the wonderfully unhurried world of Reuben Antebi.

BY NORMAN JEMAL FROM THE DRC WRITING DESK

A MIDDLE CHILD. AN AVID SNOWBOARDER AND SURFER. A RARE GRADUATE OF DEAL SCHOOL.

The voice that says, "Shalom, Hillel," when you call the school. A wicked serve. An unstoppable gift of gab. An accent - a twang, a dialect - described as half Californian, half Africana. Tall and lanky. Tardy and smiley.

This is Reuben "Ruby" Antebi.

Reuben was born the third child of Shelly and Albert Antebi. Most parents might have been disappointed to welcome a third consecutive child of the same gender. Albert was not most parents.

An old soul from Aleppo, Albert would eventually assemble a brood large enough to field a basketball team. But among the Antebi children, it was the middle child, Reuben, who always seemed to be charting his own course.

"He was a happy child, someone who never fought with anyone," said his younger brother, Elliot, in an exclusive interview with the DRC Journal. "He enjoyed X-sports like skating, surfing and snowboarding. He didn't only show interest in the typical team sports that most kids chased after. Ruby blazed a path of his own."

That did not mean he lacked traditional athletic ability.

A member of the Deal Dolphins basketball team throughout his tenure at the tiny school, Ruby was simultaneously eligible to suit up for the Ocean Township Spartans Pop Warner football team. In 2001, he helped the Spartans capture a championship as a star wide receiver.

Ruby graduated from Deal School in 2003 - a rare achievement for a Jewish student in the district - and his talents extended well beyond the football field and basketball court.

At just 15 years old, he earned a sponsorship from Lost Surfboards, which recognized his abilities atop the waves.

"Lost" may have been the company that sponsored him, but Gina Levy was the girl who would eventually find him.

Gina was friendly, smart and, from the earliest days of their relationship, someone Ruby affectionately referred to simply as "Babe."

The two would eventually settle in Deal, New Jersey, the ultra-exclusive Sephardic Jewish enclave along the Jersey Shore, where they would raise their three children: Shelly, Albert ("Allie") and Daniella.

And eventually, Ruby found tennis.

THE DRC YEARS

Upon joining the Deal Racquet Club, Ruby quickly began turning heads - for reasons both good and bad.

Reviews from around the club remain decidedly mixed.

"He lacks etiquette and talks too much during match play," fumed one anonymous source. "It's distracting. His behavior is better suited for a basketball court - or even a zoo - than a tennis court."

"He smiles the entire time. But he'll scream out 'WOW!' in the middle of your point because he saw a great shot on another court."

- AN OPPONENT, OFFERING A SYMPATHETIC ASSESSMENT

Another opponent offered a somewhat more charitable assessment: "Rube means well. He smiles the entire time. But he'll scream out 'WOW!' in the middle of your point because he saw a great shot on another court. I can see why people have complained."

Others see things differently.

Fellow player Elie Mamiye, speaking with almost childlike enthusiasm, described Ruby as "a true exemplar of tennis ethics and enjoyable to play with and against."

It should be noted that Mamiye infamously once missed a match due to what he described as "confusion," so his interpretation of tennis ethics has historically allowed for a bit more runway than most.

Then there is the issue of punctuality.

"Ruby is great - once the match starts," said Sean from the front desk. "The problem is, the match never starts. He's late, he's slow to get ready, and he requires the longest warm-up time on tour. When the clock hits ten, those lights are shutting off, and I hear Ruby saying his score is 3-2 or something."

FROM GOLD TO SILVER

Antebi began his DRC career in the prestigious upper Gold tier before eventually suffering relegation to Silver.

He insists the demotion has done little to shake his confidence.

"I'm here to play competitive tennis and to forge relationships," Antebi told the DRC Journal. "I know I can thrive in both Gold or Silver, but hopefully my fall stops here. I'm not interested in falling down to Bronze anytime soon."

Those who have shared the court with him agree that the talent remains.

"He's an upper-Silver talent with a Gold-level forehand. When Ruby is on, he's unbeatable."

- ELLIOT SAKA, FELLOW SILVERINE

"He can beat anyone on any given night. He's an upper-Silver talent with a Gold-level forehand," said fellow Silverine Elliot Saka. "When Ruby is on, he's unbeatable. I just don't know if he cares enough. The talent is there. The flashes of greatness are there. But the consistency and desire might be lacking."

Saka then recalled a moment that perhaps captures the Ruby Antebi experience better than any scouting report ever could.

"In a tiebreak match last season, with the score tied at six points apiece, I overheard Ruby inviting his opponent to his sauna after the match," Saka said. "I respect that. But I can't imagine another guy on tour thinking about a sauna with the match on the line."

WHAT COMES NEXT?

And so, another chapter in the story of Ruby Antebi is set to begin.

The ball of yarn continues to unravel as it rolls down the winding staircase of life - and through the doors of the Deal Racquet Club.

With a limited September schedule, Antebi's growing legion of fans may have to wait until October for their next glimpse of the tight shorts, trademark curls and masterful serve.

Will he prevail? Maybe.

Will he fail? Possibly.

Will he arrive on time? Unlikely.

But win or lose, one thing remains certain:

At some point after the match, Ruby will text Babe and tell her to fire up the sauna.

Because somewhere along the way, Ruby will have spent two hours talking to his opponent - and the tennis match itself will have become an afterthought.

FROM THE DRC WRITING DESK,
THIS IS NORMAN JEMAL.