

Melissa Parrish's Tennis: Europe Experience

Junior Coaching & Development

by *Lisa Stone* - September 30, 2019

Today's Guest Post was written by Melissa Parrish and is reprinted here with her permission.

As the summer leading up to my senior year in high school approached, I yearned for a summer filled with new adventures and lifelong memories. This summer was a time for me to challenge myself and grow my confidence before I headed off to college in a year. I was fortunate enough to hear of a program called Tennis: Europe, a three week trip to Europe filled with tennis and sightseeing was an experience I could not turn down. It would be a challenge to be so far from home, in an unknown place, without my family, but I knew that there would be amazing rewards and that this opportunity would help me grow as a person before I headed off to college. The trip exceeded my expectations and really opened my eyes to my future and what I wanted to pursue in college.

First, the trip solidified my decision to play tennis in college. Although soccer and tennis are both universal sports, tennis is a lifelong sport, whereas the physicality of soccer makes it a sport of predominantly youth. We witnessed numerous older adults participating in tournaments and matches throughout the trip. Further, Tennis: Europe taught me the value and benefits of being a part of a team. I, along with the 14 other players on the trip spent three weeks together in unfamiliar places, all with the common goal of gaining worldly experiences and improving our tennis skills. My coaches, along with fellow teammates, encouraged me to step out of my comfort zone and motivated me both on and off the court. Moreover, the experiences on this trip opened my eyes to the beauty of travel and the wonders of new places. Prior to this trip, I was unaware of the vast world we live in, and I was so lucky to be able to just get a glimpse of Europe. This trip not only inspired my college admissions essay, but also eventually lead me to study abroad in college.

I initially thought that my trip to Tennis: Europe was going to be a once in a lifetime experience. Little did I know, I would be going on a similar Tennis: Europe trip the following summer. However, this time to different countries. I was able to go back with the same coach and three of the girls (all who I still stay in contact with) from my previous trip the year before. I was concerned about having a new and different experience: one that may not live up to the trip the year before. Nevertheless, my experience was unique and incredible. Once again, I felt myself embracing new cultures, exploring new places, and challenging myself on the court. Playing different people from around the world and on completely new surfaces helped me become a more well-rounded tennis player. It made me excited to go off to school and be apart of a team. I am proud to say that since then, I have gone off to play four years of college tennis at Springfield College and spent the fall of my junior year living in Spain for four months. All three of the girls from my trip have also studied abroad and continue to play tennis during college as well.

When I am home, I work at the Longfellow Tennis Club in Wayland, MA and always encourage players to go on Tennis: Europe and to take advantage of the opportunities this trip can afford. Promoting and talking about the trip always made me want to go again. I was fortunate enough to go again, this time as a coach. I was ready to take on the full Tennis: Europe experience from a new perspective and was ready for a different kind of challenge. I figured since I have been on the trip twice, I would have it all figured out. As a player, I did not realize all the time and effort the coaches put into making this trip run smoothly in order for it to be successful. As a coach, it was much more challenging with a lot more responsibility trying to figure out all the logistics. However, I did enjoy having some control over our plans. The job was incredibly rewarding. My favorite part was witnessing kids develop a passion for tennis and travel. I also learned a lot about myself. I found a niche for coaching and working with athletes. After this trip, I was provided with the opportunity to take a girl from our club and travel with her to nationals.

I feel so fortunate that I took a chance and did something completely out of my comfort zone, because it truly framed the next few years of my life. The trips were unforgettable and will forever play a large role in who I am. For anyone with even the slightest inkling of doing something untraditional with their summer break, I highly encourage them to consider Tennis: Europe. Not only will your tennis improve, but also your appreciation for other cultures and people will grow.

For more information on Tennis:Europe, please visit its website at <http://tenniseurope.com/> or email Gary Weiner at garytenniseurope@gmail.com.