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News

Dent, Philippoussis Draw Full House for RX Optical/National City Exhibition

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Taylor Dent left Kalamazoo with still more good memories after Friday night's National City/RX Optical Exhibition, which highlighted the opening ceremonies of the USTA Boys 18 & 16 National Championships at Stowe Stadium.

The 1996 16s singles champion made his second exhibition appearance a clean sweep, winning the doubles with partner Mark Philippoussis, then taking the singles set from the Australian.

"I have pretty amazing memories of playing here and being a part of this tournament," said Dent, now 24. "In the plane coming in, I got butterflies. It's always great to come back."

Ideal weather and marquee professionals drew a crowd approaching 3500 to Stowe Stadium and they were treated to tennis both inspiring and playful in the three segments of the event.

The initial set of the RX Optical/National City Exhibition featured Grand Rapids Wheelchair Tennis Association athletes Curt Bender and Dan Bolhouse demonstrating the one-up and one-down format. Bender and Bolhouse are among the nation's top wheelchair tennis players and displayed great skill in their pairings with Dent and Philippoussis that ended with each team winning two games.

Dent and Philippoussis then joined forces to take on the top seeded 18s doubles team of Jesse Levine and Michael Shabaz, who held their own before finally falling 8-6 in the pro set. "It was pretty cool playing in front of this many people," said Levine, who won the 16s doubles title in 2003 with Jean Yves Aubone. "

"At Wimbledon it was a big crowd," said Shabaz of their Junior Championship doubles match at the All-England Club last month, "but not as big as this. This was pretty large and I think it was good for us."

Levine and Shabaz, who have been playing together for nearly a year, cite this familiarity as a key to their success.

"We're comfortable together; we just know what each other is thinking now, so it makes things easier," said Shabaz.

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Once the professionals had disposed of the feisty juniors, they sparred with each other, Dent taking the set 6-3 with his classic serve-and-volley game.

Philippoussis did not share Dent's fondness or knowledge of Kalamazoo, as the Melbourne native had no exposure to the citadel of American junior boys tennis.

"When I was asked about doing this, I didn't even know where Kalamazoo was," joked the two-time grand slam finalist, who signed autographs earlier in the day at Stowe. "But it's a great place and I'm glad to be here."