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a match made in heaven

Steve Furlong

I was born in: London in 1967

I arrived on the Gold Coast: on holiday from Sydney in 1978 with my parents after we migrated to Australia

I moved here: in 1990 after my parents moved up here

I started to call the Gold Coast home:

around 1994 – it was the lifestyle and climate plus I had become the head tennis coach at what was then Sports Mirage

Tennis coach Steve Furlong travelled the world with his sport but came back to the Coast to make a home

words: **regina king**

It is a dilemma very few people in this world have to handle – how do you tell Bill Gates, the richest man in the world, what to do?

For professional tennis coach Steve Furlong it had nothing to do with business or technology but everything to do with improving the tennis game of the Microsoft founder.

“He was here on the Coast for three days, wanted to work on some aspects of his game and came over every day for lessons,” Steve recalls.

“In terms of ability he would be a good club player but he adores tennis, loves playing and wants to improve.”

English-born, Steve came to Australia when he was seven years old.

“My father Frank was from Mauritius but moved to England. He hated the cold and came here with the family.

“We settled in Sydney and it was perfect for me. I loved sport and split my time between soccer and tennis.”

Steve doesn’t like to talk about his achievements but after some prompting admits that he made representative teams in both sports. His fate was decided when he received a tennis scholarship to the AIS in 1983.

The transition from gifted junior to seasoned pro on the tour is a difficult one and Steve set out to try his luck.

“I had travelled overseas with junior teams from the AIS so I wanted to try my luck. There are a range of lesser tournaments throughout Europe that give you prize money and the chance to earn some ranking points.

“In Germany they have a very strong club competition which helped to pay the bills so I could go off to try to earn

some points. In all I spent about six years in Europe with yearly trips home.

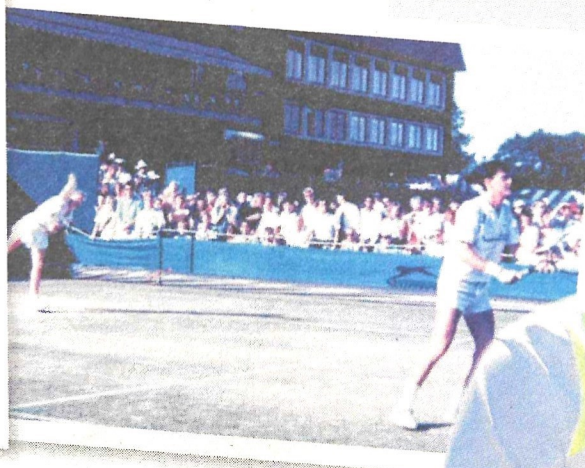
“With Christine Radford, I qualified for the mixed doubles at Wimbledon and we won our first round which was a real buzz. No matter what happens, I can say I played at the holy grail of tennis.”

The hand-to-mouth existence became wearing and when Steve’s parents moved to the Gold Coast in 1990, he too relocated here.

“My father was a computer programmer so I did a course and thought that would be my profession. After I graduated I got a job and was shown to my cubicle. I took one look and thought this isn’t for me and decided to be a tennis teaching professional.”

At that stage tennis was an incredibly popular pastime and Steve started work at Sports Mirage, next to the Sheraton





Steve Furlong had a racquet in his hand at three in 1970, Steve and Lani Furlong on their wedding day in 2003, Steve with Pam Shriver in 1992, Steve and Christine Radford at Wimbledon in 1989, and Steve today on the Gold Coast.

Mirage. Steve was enjoying his new life with forays into local tournaments.

He won the Gold Coast Tennis Championships seven times, his quiet demeanour hiding a competitive streak. He grins and says simply, "I love to win and really hate losing."

He was asked by top women's player Pam Shriver to travel with her as a hitting partner on the Australian circuit and once to Wimbledon.

"I had a great time travelling, had no major injuries and have some great memories, especially competing in the Australian Open."

In 2003 he married Lani Rae on the island of Rarotonga and together they

have continued to travel the world. "It is all about creating life memories and I'm doing that with the love of my life so life couldn't be better."

As someone who has experienced tennis on all levels, what does he see for the future of this sport?

"I watched a match at Wimbledon this year where Lukas Rosol upset Rafael Nadal in the second round.

"That's the future. The men's game is all about very tall, athletic players with incredible power and precision who can clock winners at any time."

For Steve it is now about continuing with the sport he loves at Golden Door Spa and Health Club.

