



Edwardsville Futures Winner Rinky Hijikata: Teammates, Coach, Provide Him Inspiration For Success

by Brandon Harris
July 27 2021 10:41 AM





EDWARDSVILLE - Professional fighting and golf are the two individual sports with the most notoriety in North America. While tennis is not as heavily reputed, it is certainly as tough. It could be argued that tennis is the loneliest sport of individual sports. Rinky Hijikata, the 20-year-old Australian and most recent Edwardsville Futures Champion, is no stranger to this physical and mental isolation.

Hijikata is from Sydney, Australia, and is currently ranked 648 in the world. On top of traveling the world and getting to pick the brains of some of Australia's top talent, he is also a sophomore at North Carolina University. According to the University's website, Rinky "earned All-America honors in singles, reaching the NCAA Round of 16. Finished the year ranked No. 22 in singles. Posted a 14-2 singles record at No. 2 and No. 3 singles despite fighting a midseason ankle injury. Overcame the injury to post his first All-America season. Was named first-team All-ACC. Earned a spot on the Academic All-ACC Team and the ACC Academic Honor Roll."

In tennis, there is no corner to have discussions with a coach, there is no caddie to assist with a game plan, there is just you, your opponent, and your mind. While we credit the loneliness of the spot, Hijikata credits his experiences as an athlete for North Carolina University, his team of fellow players Tristen Schoolkate, Dane Sweeny, and former professional Australian player turned coach, Mark Draper for his second consecutive professional title.

“Tennis is an individual sport, but I definitely wouldn’t be able to do what I do without the guys around me. Whether it’s all the guys back home that have put in the hours to get me here, all the guys at North Carolina who have helped me improve my game and my body over the last few years, then then the guys here this week – life is easier when you’re traveling with a good bunch of mates and I have known these guys for years and years, and Sharky, the coach, who has been great here as well. I’m really thankful for all those guys.”

His appreciation for his teammates was on full display at the match’s conclusion. After the timeless ritual of the match handshake, Hijikata would immediately jog back to fist bump his team to also recognize their efforts. A truly special site that encapsulates the importance of teamwork for what is another remarkable Edwardsville Men’s Futures Champion and hopefully a rising star for Australian tennis.

Hijikata joins an impressive list of players to pass through Edwardsville to play in the summer Futures event. The most recent player to be seen on a big stage was Sebastian Korda, reaching the Round of 16 at the prestigious grass-courts of Wimbledon. Over the weeklong tournament, Hijikata provided hope that he could be the next big name with success on television's biggest stage.

