

by Kathy Geels

ROJAS: I'VE GOT NEXT?

The 2010/2011 season is looking good for the International Racquetball Tour (IRT) and its fans, as well as for up-and-coming rookie Jose Rojas of Stockton, CA. He is one of a number of new faces likely to shape the tour over the next few years. Less than two years ago, the 20-year-old turned his sights on his ranking and by the end of last year's 09/10 season had climbed to #10 in the world. By most accounts, this talented college junior has not only "arrived" but is running ahead of schedule, focused on elevating his ranking even higher in the upcoming season as he continues to successfully balance academics and the pro tour.

In September 2008 at the Motorola World Championships, Rojas decided to make his move in the pro ranks after dominating juniors internationally since he was a small child. It was there in Denver that he demonstrated his readiness for the pros by getting past three rounds of veterans to the round of sixteen before #4 Alvaro Beltran stopped him. Six months later at the Canoga Park Open, while still a teenager, Rojas again stunned the competition with consecutive wins over IRT's #6 and #5 players, Shane Vanderson and Jason Mannino, before Rocky Carson put the brakes on his run.

Such early composure has drawn some initial comparisons between Rojas and the sport's biggest names. While also still in their teens, Sudy Monchik and Kane Waselenchuk took a leisurely four tries in the pro division to reach the semifinals. Maybe the pressure of such comparisons was a distraction to Rojas at his next pro event in San Diego, where he lost in the Round of 64 to Mexico's Polo Gutierrez. However, apparently undaunted, he finished the 2008/09 season with U.S. Intercollegiate and Junior National titles and returned in '09/10 to make the sixteens in every appearance. His season was punctuated by an impressive quarterfinal showing at the 2009 U.S. Open.

Rojas is highly touted in part due to his extensive achievements as a junior, and he has spent most of his life in what has turned out to be successful preparation for a grand entrance to the pro level. In addition to his obvious physical and mental gifts, he has been getting excellent training and support for years. He was introduced to the game at age six by his dad Miguel Rojas, from whom he has received continual guidance and encouragement. Around that same time, he began working on game fundamentals with Coach Jody Nance, an experienced and successful junior instructor in Stockton. Rojas still has Nance's support, enhanced by close mentor relationships with Coaches Dave and John Ellis and physical fitness trainer Jessie Serna. All play a large day-to-day role in Rojas' professional training.



Coach Dave Ellis, whose influence now spans three generations of successful pros, speaks highly of Rojas, saying, "Jose brings to the IRT a lot of experience, tremendous skill, and personal charm. He comes to the pro tour with the support of his coaches and his friends from his hometown. His game is reaching new levels, as it must to be able to compete with the professional talent that is

the IRT. Yet, in spite of his success as a junior, he remains very humble and very approachable."

For the time being, in breaking into the top ten, Rojas has already made it to a level many players aspire toward for years but do not achieve. In doing so at such an early age, he has increased his opportunity for continued success and record-breaking in the sport. But like any rookie, he is going to have to work his way up an intimidating ladder of veterans as well as compete against a field of diverse incoming competitors. It will take some time to see what percentage of his initial promise is realized, but so far, especially for Rojas and the IRT fans, the prospects are good.

International Racquetball Tour 2010-2011 Schedule

August 27-29	WPRO TEXAS OPEN IRT SATELLITE - DALLAS TX (T5)	February 4-6	CINCINNATI OPEN - CINCINNATI, OH (T4)
September 9-12	GHOST OF GEORGETOWN - KANSAS CITY, KS (T1)	February 11-13	KEYSTONE CLASSIC - WINNIPEG, CANADA (T4)
September 15-19	CALI COLOMBIA GRAND SLAM - CALI, COLOMBIA (G5)	February 9-13	U.S. NATIONAL DOUBLES - PHOENIX, AZ (USAR)
September 30-Oct 3	SAN DIEGO RACQUET HOUSE IRT Pro/Am - SAN DIEGO, CA (T1)	February 17-20	SEATTLE OPEN, SEATTLE, WA (T1)
October 1-3	KITCHENER CLASSIC - KITCHENER, CANADA (T4)	February 17-20	TORNADO ALLEY OPEN - WICHITA FALLS, TX (T4)
October 8-10	AUBURN VV OPEN - KENT, WA (T4)	February 24-27	SAN DIEGO OPEN - SAN DIEGO, CA (T1)
October 15-17	WEST MICHIGAN OPEN - GRAND RAPIDS, MI (T4)	March 3-5	CARL MYERS MEMORIAL - GARDEN CITY, KS (T2)
October 20-24	U.S. OPEN - MINNEAPOLIS, MN (G5)	March 3-5	LEAMINGTON RACQUETBALL CLASSIC - LEAMINGTON, CANADA
October 29-31	NEW MEXICO Pro/Am - ALBUQUERQUE, NM (T3)	March 10-13	FLORIDA SPRING BREAK Pro/Am - FL (T1)
October 29-31	68 INSIDE SPORTS Pro/Am - KANSAS CITY, KS	March 17-19	SALT LAKE CITY Pro/Am - SALT LAKE CITY, UT (T1)
November 4-7	CORONA OPEN - CHIHUAHUA, NEW MEXICO (T3)	March 18-20	NORTHWEST OPEN - BELLINGHAM, WA (T4)
November 5-7	POMONA VALLEY OPEN - POMONA, CA (T4)	March 24-27	ST. LOUIS OPEN - ST. LOUIS, MO (T1)
November 18-21	LONG ISLAND OPEN - LONG ISLAND, NY (T4)	April 1-3	TOPEKA OPEN - TOPEKA, KS (T4)
November 18-21	16TH ANNUAL TURKEY SHOOT - GARDEN CITY, KS	April 7-10	SOUTH CAROLINA OPEN (T4)
December 3-6	ROSE CITY Pro/Am - PORTLAND, OR	April 14-17	MEXICO OPEN - TIJUANA, MEXICO (T1)
December 3-6	ST. NICK SPAT - MILLERSVILLE, MD (T3)	April 28-May 1	ALISO VIEJO Pro/Am - ALISO VIEJO, CA (T1)
December 9-12	MARKET AMERICA Pro/Am - GREENSBORO, NC (T3)	May 5-8	BOSTON Pro/Am - BOSTON, MA (T1)
December 9-12	COAST TO COAST CALIFORNIA OPEN - LOS ANGELES, CA (T1)	May 6-8	CINCO DE MAYO SHOOTOUT - PUEBLO, CO (T4)
December 13-16	NEW YORK CITY Pro/Am - LONG ISLAND, NY (T1)	May 12-15	CANADIAN RACQUETBALL CLASSIC (T1)
January 13-16	LAWLER SPORTS Pro/Am - TERRE HAUTE, IN (T1)	May 19-22	COSTA RICA OPEN - SAN JOSE, COSTA RICA (T4)
January 20-23	NEW JERSEY OPEN - FAIRFIELD, NJ (T4)	May 25-29	IRT PRO NATIONALS/USAR FINALS - LOCATION TBD (G5)
January 21-23	CONCORD OPEN - CONCORD, CA (T4)	June 10-12	MARYLAND OPEN CHAMPIONSHIPS - LAUREL, MD (T4)
January 21-23	WICHITA OPEN - WICHITA, KS (T4)	July 22-24	TAMPA OPEN - TAMPA, FL (T3)
January 27-30	LEWIS DRUG Pro/Am - SIOUX FALLS, SD (T2)		

Dates subject to change. Check <http://irt-tour.com> for the latest updates.