

VITAL STATISTICS

PRICES AND PACKAGES

LOCATION AND CONTACT

Tennis Academy Stobre
Svetog Lovre 45b
21312 Stobre, HR - Croatia
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PACKAGES

Junior professional programme includes:

- 1.5 hours of individual coaching / daily
- 1.5 hours of academy tennis training / daily
- Matchplay
- 1.5 hours fitness, footwork and conditioning / daily
- Medical surveillance

SUMMER TENNIS CAMP (IDEAL FOR TENNIS ENTHUSIASTS)

PROGRAMME A:
1.5 hours of academy tennis training / daily

PROGRAMME B:
1.5 hours of academy tennis training / daily
1.5 hours of fitness, footwork and conditioning / daily

ACCOMMODATION

Good quality apartments nearby range from between €20-50 a night, or for those seeking added luxury, there are numerous hotels in Stobreč and Split, just a short bus ride away.



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STOBREČ TENNIS ACADEMY, CROATIA



The Stobreč Academy boasts seven clay and two hard courts

Niksa Durovic and Sanja Milat make a formidable team



A CHAMPION FRIENDSHIP...

→ A former Davis Cup player for Yugoslavia and Croatian national champion in 1989, 48-year-old Dean Vuleta befriended Goran Ivanisevic when he began hitting with him in 1985, when the former world No.2 was 14 years old. The pair continued to play together throughout Ivanisevic's career, initially in Split, where they both grew up, and later in Stobreč when Vuleta opened the academy he had been building since 1991.

When Ivanisevic wasn't travelling on the ATP Tour, the duo played almost every day under the heat of the Mediterranean sun. Their partnership laid the foundations for Vuleta to become an esteemed coach, and Ivanisevic to claim 22 ATP Tour titles as well as the infamous 2001 Wimbledon crown, which he won as a wildcard ranked at No.125 in the world.

SPLIT STEPS

Birthplace of Goran Ivanisevic, Croatia has long been a hotbed of tennis talent. **Jamie Renton** visited one ambitious academy on the Adriatic determined to develop the next batch of Croatian stars...

» **“WILL, WORK AND** self-discipline is the formula for success,” says Croatian coach Dean Vuleta with a steely focus that seems alien to the swelteringly sunny surrounds in which he delivers his statement. “Talent, without these, will always be an unused talent.”

It's a well-versed line that slips from his lips as if delivered on a daily, perhaps even hourly basis to the players he mentors at his Tennis Academy in Stobreč; a small coastal town a few miles south of the Croatian capital city Split on the breathtakingly beautiful Adriatic shores.

Vuleta's words merit just as much attention as the stunning coastline and the mesmerising beauty of Diocletian's palace – the 1700-year-old construction that takes centre stage in Croatia's second-largest

city, just five minutes down the road. Inspired by the phrase and the region's historical splendour, my legs wilfully continue to pound the concrete alongside the inviting azure waters two tempting metres to my left a few hours later.

I'm just days into my visit to the Stobreč Academy – a base for developing aspiring young national and international-standard players – but I'm already firmly in the physical firing line. I'm tackling the academy's conditioning programme through a combination of my conscience and super-fit female coach Sanja Milat. A sea-front sprint is the opening test.

Milat is 41, but you'd never know it. Tanned, toned and with a near-permanent warm grin that belies her obvious penchant for inflicting pain, she is a Fed Cup selector for Bosnia and Herzegovina and plays a ▶

“I'M NOT PARTICULARLY HAPPY TO SEE MILAT HOLDING A STOPWATCH...MY GOAL REMAINS TO MAKE IT OUT OF THIS ALIVE”



The surrounding area is both beautiful and rich in history

▶ prominent role in bringing through youngsters on the Academy's junior tennis programme.

She's also a bit of a stirrer. I immediately feel sorry for the players who need to impress her enough to claim a place in her Fed Cup squads when, with mischief in her eyes, she points to a 15-year-old boy with legs the size of tree trunks and says: “He's worried you'll beat his time.”

For starters, I'm not particularly happy to see Milat holding a stopwatch. I don't need what I expect to be a less-than-inspiring few seconds documented in detail, and my goal remains to make it out of this fitness test alive.

Once Milat has completed her dramatic countdown (to my impending doom, no doubt) and bellowed “GO”, Vuleta's earlier words swim through my head while I chug along the harbour. It's the recurring thought of his formula for success that keeps me from leaping headfirst into the glistening sea as my 'rival' becomes a distant speck on the horizon. That, and the fact that I still have a good few metres on the 14-year-old girl determinedly closing in behind me.

I do indeed make it through the test alive – ahead of the teenage girl I'm happy, or relieved, to add – but it soon turns out that the mutli-kilometre 'sprint' was just the day's warm-up. Numerous footwork drills would follow, and by the end of the two-hour session I'm slumped on one of the five outdoor clay courts, squeezing cramp from my thighs and downing energy drinks by the truck-load. By this point, it has firmly struck me that the family-run academy is ▶

TRAVEL



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COACH VULETA HAS ONE ABIDING DREAM – TO TRAIN A PLAYER WHO GOES ON TO BECOME THE WORLD NO.1

The facility has a top class junior programme and boasts the No.1 U14 girl in Europe among its ranks

► not a place for the faint hearted. It's not your typical tennis holiday, laden with jovial rallies and fancy facilities.

Instead, the academy welcomes holidaymakers keen to develop their game in line with the principles of its junior professional programme, encouraging hard work and nurturing determination to reap winning rewards. Vuleta's sister Liana, who assists in running the academy, expands on their philosophy when I pull up a chair in her office after I've been rallied off court for the day.

"We work very seriously in the junior programme and the youngsters know that they can come here and get very good results," she says, pointing a finger in the direction of a far court where 14-year-old Ksenija Sharifova is blasting balls with formidable ferocity for one so young. "She's the No.1 under-14 in Europe," Liana tells me of the Russian, who also recently won the academy's Epetion Cup - a junior ITF tournament for under 18s.

As I watch her hit in Stobrec's simple surroundings, my thoughts drift to neighbouring Serbia to the north-east, where Ana Ivanovic and Novak Djokovic famously played tennis in an abandoned swimming pool during the conflict that blighted the Balkan states in the 1990s before each going on to win Grand Slam titles. I can't help but draw parallels between juniors at the academy and the Serbian duo's bleak tennis upbringing. Granted, the Stobrec facility is no oversized bathtub in Belgrade - its seven clay courts (two indoors) and two hard courts are ample foundations for a top tennis academy - but the mindset is undoubtedly the same. Mirjana Lučić, Jelena Kostanić Tošić, Petra Martić and Croatia's most famous tennis son Goran Ivanisevic all trained here for a spell, fuelling the notion that great players rarely spawn from elite facilities and sparkly surroundings. Hard work and intensity amid a more humble backdrop appear to serve as greater impetus for success.

"If people just want fun, they choose the Bahamas or something, where everything is beautiful and shiny," says Liana, as if reading my mind. "Here, it's the opposite: we don't have a massive infrastructure, but we work hard.

"Our business is to make professional players out of junior players," she adds, and it's clear that the Vuleta family have both the expertise and the drive to do exactly that.

They've already assembled a team of coaches who are as talented as they are educated. Two are former hitting partners of Marin Cilic and Mario Ancic, while Sanja has a PhD in the 'physical preparation of tennis players'. It's no coincidence that another coach, Niksa Durovic, has a strikingly similar playing style to Roger Federer, having graduated in the physiological analysis of tennis and painstakingly studied every aspect of the Swiss' action. He is now studying for a Masters in biomechanics.

No surprise, then, that the Stobrec Tennis Academy has ambitions far beyond its already firm foundations. Just like the on-court attitude they instil in the pupils they tutor, the Vuleta family are just as determined to see the academy break new ground. Plans are afoot to convert the facility into a major tournament venue that could rival the ATP Tournament venues in Zagreb and Umag one day.

"For that, we need a centre court. And we are looking for an investor in order to help us," says Liana, who reveals that preliminary plans for expansion have already been drawn up to include at least 12 courts, a four star hotel and facilities for the players. Financing the project remains the only, the crucial stumbling block.

"But we are open for all solutions," she adds. "We have reached a point where we cannot go further without facilities. At the moment, we are dedicated to the juniors, but in the future, we would like to get to the next level."

A professional tournament venue may be on the back burner for now, but the fire still burns brightly for head coach Vuleta's one abiding dream. "I wish to train a player who goes on to be world No.1," he says, and from what I've seen at the modest academy with colossal ambitions, I wouldn't bet against him doing just that. ■

For more information about the Stobrec Tennis Academy and details of holiday rates and packages visit www.tennis.net

