

STORIES FROM NATIONALS

New Teams Join The Action

JUNIOR NATIONALS CHAMPS

Jake Karetsky and Christian Lizardi won the Boys 18 & Under Viking Junior Nationals on Saturday, February 24, in New Jersey. Less than two weeks later, they were in Chicago, competing in the APTA Men's Open Nationals. The partners only learned about the opportunity while they were celebrating their victory at the Short Hills Club.

An initiative created by the APTA five years ago, via an anonymous donor, the Girls' and Boys' 18 & Under Champions are given a free berth in the Nationals draw (when there is room).

Karetsky said, "It was short notice. We didn't really plan for it and we didn't really think it was going to happen."

Lizardi added, "We had to make sure it was okay with our schools and our coaches. We both play spring sports."

The boys are an unlikely pairing. They live in different states: Karetsky in Connecticut and Lizardi in New Jersey. They have only played together a handful of times. This is Lizardi's first year in the sport, but he is a tennis player. Karetsky has been playing for a few years, making it to the 2017 Junior Nationals finals, yet he is not a tennis player. His spring sport is baseball, which may explain his sidearm serve. "It's consistent, and consistency is the name of the game," Karetsky averred. His coach is Gabi Niculescu, a pro at the Milbrook Club in Greenwich, and a two-time national champion.

Lizardi plays at Lake Valhalla Club in Montville, NJ, and is coached



Jake Karetsky/Christian Lizardi

FORMER JUNIOR NATIONAL CHAMPIONS PLAYING IN 2018 NATIONALS

Marc Powers (2004, 2005) Jill Estes Feher (1989, 1987)
Blake Anderson (2011) Mike Stulac (1989)
Scott Estes, Jr. (1987, 1986)

by Sean Welcome. The two boys met via text through mutual friends. They have a great chemistry on court, smiling at errors as well as their funky spin shots. While not scoring any victories at Nationals, one opponent admitted, "They had better drives than we do."

Karetsky said, "Everyone was super nice and super accommodating. After our last match on Friday, one of the guys—a big tall South African, not Johan—served where it hits off the screen and dies. So, we asked him, 'How would we go about returning that?' And he gave us some pointers."

Karetsky is off to college, while Lizardi has one more year of high school. They would both like to play Junior Nationals again, as well as join the men for another shot. Overall, the boys said, "It was an awesome experience."

FUZION SPORTS

When APTA Tour Director Shannon Vinson overheard Jody Herzog and Matt McClure deliver their spiel to the Glenview Club racquets pros about taking over the ordering for their pro shop, she interrupted, "Can you do that for tournaments?" That was the beginning of the relationship between the APTA and Fuzion Sports, bringing easy ordering and desirable swag to the biggest paddle tournaments.

The idea of Fuzion Sports started last year at a paddle tournament in Cleveland. Herzog, McClure, and Brad Pulver were having a chat around a bonfire about entrepreneurial opportunities. McClure talked about the difficulties of running a pro shop. "I was happy if I didn't lose money," McClure said. The three wrote up a business plan for outsourcing the management of tennis pro shops. Five days later, they were on a plane to Chicago. By the end of the weekend, Vinson had Fuzion Sports signed up to take care of the favors and logoed retail at the 2017 Chicago Charities.

Herzog, who has years of retail experience, said, "We had to prove ourselves. Charities was the first tournament we handled for the APTA, and things went smoothly." Vinson signed them on for the 2018 Boston Open, Philly Open, Open Nationals, and League Nationals.

TOURNAMENT SERVICE

Fuzion Sports was put in charge of ordering, embroidering, inventory control, financial oversight, and customer service

for all favors and other tournament apparel. They set up a website connected to the APTA online registration for personalized ordering and assembled a physical retail store during the events. Herzog said, “We pride ourselves on our organization and presentation—players are not just being thrown a large t-shirt.”

Fuzion’s service is the biggest reason why they have succeeded so quickly in the paddle world. “Choosing the favor can be the bane of the tournament director’s existence. We take it off their plate. Lucy Taft has a great eye—she’ll pick a few items with minimal direction. We also introduced upgrades,” said Pulver, “About 40% of the players will order a higher-end product.”

Vinson added, “Fuzion is dynamic in their thought process.”

PADDLE COMMUNITY CONNECTION

The Grand Prix and Nationals tournament contract has created an easy connection between the company and the pros. Herzog said, “Here’s an example of how our pro shop model resonates with the pros playing in the tournaments. Mark Parsons found us and said, ‘Johan (du Randt) said I had to sign up with you.’ After our conversation, he wanted to hand over his shop problems to us and offered to connect



Team Fuzion: Lucy Taft, Matt McClure, Jody Herzog, Brad Pulver

us to a host of pros. That was great validation of our business model.”

McClure added, “Paddle is a tight community. Us pros talk about how we do things and know our limitations. Our time is better spent on the court teaching and building programs.”

Pulver said, “It’s all about scale. If we do it right, we choose the right pieces for the tournaments or best brands for the pro shops, then all we have to do is tweak it a little for each client.”

Vinson said, “The team from Fuzion are fun to work with. I haven’t heard ‘no’ yet from them—no problem is too big, and no order is too small.” The APTA and Fuzion Sports have a great connection. Swag never had it so good.

For more information, go to www.fuzion-sports.com. <>



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