

College Sport

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Dual titles for Becroft in New Caledonia

ANDRE CHUMKO

Karori tennis whiz Isaac Becroft has won the singles and doubles finals at the recent BNP Paribas Junior ITF Tournament in New Caledonia.

The 16-year-old Wellington College student was runner-up in both the singles and doubles finals of the New Caledonia ITF Junior from June 6-11, but a week later won both titles at the BNP Paribas Junior Open from June 12-17.

On his way to the singles top prize in the second week he beat his close friend and doubles partner Finley Hall of Scots College in the semifinals.

The pair teamed up for the doubles final, which they won 6-2 and 6-3. Becroft then went on to win the singles title against Hong Kong's Denton Ho in two straight sets of 6-4.

Becroft, whose father is New Zealand's Children's Commissioner Judge Andrew Becroft, shared two coaches with Hall at Planitpro Tennis, Clint Packer and Tristan Stayt.

Despite discussing the possibility of facing each other, Becroft said it was difficult to move on from his match with Hall.

"That was a hard match because obviously we were rooming together. We're pretty good mates off the court and it was just hard because we had to play the doubles final 25 minutes after we finished.

"It just had a weird touch knowing that you were going to be enemies now but friends in 25 minutes and going into another match together."

He had increased his training, through Planitpro at the Renouf Centre in Brooklyn, including strength and psychological work, in the lead-up to the events.

This was done five days a week, with tennis training in the morning, a gym session at lunch then more tennis training after school.

Becroft said he had played tennis overseas when he was younger, but it was "more for experience".

"I've just slowly been trying to get better here in Wellington and it was cool to be deep in those tournaments which I would have lost first round really easily two years ago."

Becroft hoped to be selected for the upcoming B2 grade of the Oceania Junior Closed Championships in Fiji in August, and would find out the result in a couple of weeks.

Coach Clint Packer said Becroft was a rising star.

"He's always flown under the radar in New Zealand. He's really committed to try to practise and compete as an adult.

"It's starting to pay off for him and it's good to see him get a few rewards from it. I'm happy he's done really well in the last couple of weeks."

He said Becroft's training regime was adult-focussed, and



Wellington College tennis player Isaac Becroft stands with his trophies for his wins at the BNP Paribas Junior ITF Tournament in New Caledonia earlier this month.

PHOTO: ANDRE CHUMKO

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Isaac Becroft

included aggressive racket-head speed and positioning.

"We're trying to make him a great 23-year-old rather than a great 16-year-old. The important thing for me wasn't that he won that title, the important thing was how he won it."

Becroft was also captain of Wellington College's senior tennis team, for which he had been playing in since year 10. He also hoped to captain the team for his final year next year.

He said his success was due to Packer and Stayt, as well as his supportive parents.

"For a while I was never that good, I was never that good of an athlete, I was lost. But recently I've just been working specifically on my athletic ability and [Packer] is

just persistent with me."

Becroft has played tennis since he was five, but began competing about age nine. His interest began by watching then-neighbour Finn Tearney, now New Zealand tennis No 1, on his journey up national then international tennis rankings.

"I just remember him going through the college system and he gave me a couple of grips and I guess it just started from there.

"I've still got one of the pairs of pants he gave me."

Tearney (26) is the country's top ranked singles player, currently sitting at 361 internationally.

The two shared several similarities, including being coached by Packer. Tearney also attended Wellington College.

Becroft said Tearney's support has been invaluable.

"I benefit heaps from Finn's support. He's encouraging and gives me lots of good tips. He went to college in the [United] States and got a scholarship over there and that's definitely the path I want to take."

Becroft was starting to scope out potential universities now, but had his eyes on the University of Washington or Pepperdine University, which Tearney attended from 2009-2013. Packer said he sees a lot of Tearney's talent and resemblance in Becroft.

"They look the same, they move the same, they play the same, they wear the same clothes. He's like Finn's mini-me."

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