

Jane Young Cooper

Jane Young first played tennis in the Canadian Nationals with a racquet she borrowed from her brother. It wasn't long, however, before the Waterloo native was the first local tennis player to become a Canadian champion in 1985, and to be respected across the country as a player with "grit and guts to burn."



"Playing Jane is almost like getting ready to go to war," an opponent said once. "You know she'll stay out there forever and run down everything. Against her, you have to be patient and wait for the short ball, but you can't miss."

Young learned to play at the Waterloo Tennis Club at the relatively late age of fourteen. She rose quickly in the ranks and first became noticed when she pushed Carling Bassett to a three-set quarter final in 1984 before bowing out. The year before, Young was the Canadian Junior National Champion.

Young went on to play internationally; a highlight in 1986 was her victory over a number 35 world-ranked player at the Swiss Open. During her career, Young played in tournaments around the globe including Japan, Switzerland and Australia.

During the Canadian National Championships in 1985, a Toronto sportswriter commented: "She's a southpaw who hammers heavy topspin shots from both sides, has more natural athletic talent than any woman in this competition and has guts galore. . ."

Young eventually competed in tournaments that included players like Chris Evert Lloyd and Martina Navratilova. After participating in a qualifying tournament for the U.S. Open one year, Young told a reporter, "I've never been in a tournament with all the big guns but it was quite an experience. It's hard to think about playing with them when you sort of idolize them."

During a match against the world-ranked Carling Bassett, spectators were awed by Young's tenacity. "(Young) was playing her hard, running down shots all over the court, sprawling several times onto the court, trying for impossible returns. Before the set was over, Young was covered in green clay dirt, with her hair hanging in damp tendrils around her neck."

She attended the University of Mississippi on a full scholarship and became their number one player between 1984 and 1988. During these years, Young also represented Canada on the Federation Cup Canadian National Team. She was ranked as high as 130th in the world, however when she didn't reach her goal of being 50th in the world she decided to go back to school, studying law at the University of Ottawa and graduating in 1995.

Jane Young, who married Mark Cooper in 1997, began working as an assistant crown attorney in Waterloo Region that same year.

Her many honours include the 1984 Canadian National Female Sportsmanship Award; 1986 Outstanding Young Citizen Award; 1986 Kitchener-Waterloo Oktoberfest Woman of the Year and the 1987 Tennis Canada Special Achievement Award.

Photo courtesy of David James.