

PATRICIA HY – MY TENNIS JOURNEY



Flanked by her parents, 21-year-old Patricia Hy lifts the 1986 Taipei Women's Championships to become the only player from Hong Kong to capture a WTA title.

Criticized for lacking in size and power most of her career, she possessed an all-court game that is the embodiment of mental toughness, versatility, and superb anticipation – Her court coverage earned her the nickname 'Speedy Hy' on tour. Prior to the advent of the Internet, access to information was limited, and the fringe observer often had misconceptions about Hong Kong, its people, or at times even its exact whereabouts. Driven to prove the cynics wrong, she brought to the court a

combative determination every time she stepped up to the plate. Seemingly calm, cool and collected on the exterior, she was fuelled by a competitive fire burning from within. She reached No. 7 in the world as a junior and No. 28 as a pro. An Olympian and WTA Tour titleholder before her emigration, she not only put Hong Kong tennis on the world map, but her accomplishments have remained to this day the yardstick of excellence for succeeding generations of local talent. Her name is [Patricia Hy](#), and this is her story.

Hong Kong was where it all started

In 1971, the six-year-old left Phnom Penh and set foot for the first time on a British Colony she would call home the next seventeen years. When she first arrived, she never played a sport of any kind. She dabbled with squash in the rainy season to stay active, field hockey to improve hand-eye coordination and agility, and even a brief attempt at ballet to learn the fluidity and grace of the movements. Yet, none of those sports struck a chord. She did, however, come from a family of athletes, for her father was a Davis Cup player for Cambodia and served as the team's captain, while her mother was a national badminton champion.



The one who introduced her to the game was her dad. He became a teaching pro and later, as Tennis Director, at the Kowloon Cricket Club, and since the school she attended was just across the road from KCC, she would get more or less a one-hour lesson from him after classes most days.

Father and daughter watched tennis on TV together all the time and he used these matches to explain to her the intricacies of footwork, shot-making, and tactics, etc. She paid attention and soaked up all the knowledge that came her way. She then started to play local tournaments and quickly started to make a name for herself displaying incredible aptitude for the game. Unbeknownst to her, she would soon dominate the local tennis scene.

In 1976, at age 11, she was selected to the Hong Kong Junior Squad together with Kelvin Inge and nine others that trained weekly for three hours on Sundays under the tutelage of a coach. In the beginning, it was Tau Luu, then John Holsinger from Peter Burwash International (PBI), and Hy Ny. That year, she won the under-15 title at the National Age-Group Championships (now Hong Kong National Junior Championships) and finished fourth in the local under-18 rankings.



The following year, she rose to the junior No. 1 position after claiming the first of her four consecutive local under-18 girls' singles titles. Then, in 1978, at age 13, her dominance extended to the women's game when she captured the ladies' singles and doubles at all three local majors – Hong Kong Closed Hardcourt Championships (now Hong Kong National Tennis Championships), SCAA Open, and CRC Open. The summer trip to British Columbia, Canada and the Pacific Northwest, USA, also brought her a horde of trophies and her name was beginning to draw interests from overseas observers.



Former world No. 1 [John Newcombe](#) gave a special one-day coaching class to six of the more senior members of the Junior Squad that year and afterwards it was announced that Patricia, together with boys' No. 1 Kelvin Inge, would attend an intensive two-week, all expense paid training excursion in Australia in January 1979. After returning home, she captured the Invitational Age-Group (now Hong Kong Open Junior Championships), which was included as

part of the Peps-Cola World Junior Circuit for the first time, after defeating Korean counterpart Jin Myung Ui to take home the ranking points. She ended the year ranked No. 18 in the world. Locally, she won the Hong Kong National Junior Championships by repeating in both girls' under-18 singles and doubles and claimed ladies' singles and doubles at the SCAA and CRC Opens.

In 1980, she won the Hong Kong under-18 girls' singles title for the fourth year in a row but her biggest scalp was beating reigning Asian Game silver medalist, Mainlander Chen Juan, to capture the Hong Kong Invitational Hardcourt Championships, a tournament where China, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand were represented by their top men and women. Up until then, her father had been her coach all her life, but this was the year the Nick Bollettieri Tennis Academy (NBTA) came knocking on the door and offered her a full scholarship at the fledgling establishment in Florida opened just two years earlier.

After visits to John Newcombe, Harry Hopman, and Nick Bollettieri's academies and considering the offers they made, she decided to go to NBTA. Once there, it quickly became apparent that only the select few practiced on Nick's court, for there was a pecking order when it came to training. Her regular sparring partners included [Carling Basset](#), [Raffaella Reggi](#), [Pam Casale](#), and [Patty Fendick](#), players who went on to reach WTA rankings of 8th, 13th, 14th, and 19th respectively. The prominent Americans on the men's side who were at NBTA at the time were [Jimmy Arias](#) and [Aaron Krickstein](#). She only returned to Hong Kong briefly once a year for a short break. This is more than just a game, now.

"Thinking back, it's kind of amazing that I went to try out these three places on my own. My parents completely trusted my judgement from a young age, probably because I was determined and driven without even realizing it."

In 1981, she reached the girls' singles quarterfinals of the French Open before she exited at the hands of Hungarian No. 1 seed [Andrea Temesvari](#), who won the Italian Open women's singles the following year at age 16. At Wimbledon, she knocked out girls' singles No. 4 seed Helena Sukova in the opening round before she fell to eventual champion, American Zina Garrison in the last eight. The 16-year-old from Hong Kong wound up finishing No. 13 in the year-end ITF junior rankings. Her first taste of WTA tennis came at Eastbourne where she lost in the qualies to Canadian No. 1, Majorie Blackwood.



Federation Cup 1982, Santa Clara, USA.
L-R: Nancy Spelman, Patricia Hy, Ling Tsui Yuen Yuen,
and Janet Hardisty.

In November, she received a maindraw wildcard for the [Seiko Hong Kong Tennis Classic](#), a US\$50,000 WTA Tour Toyota Series (Category 1) event won by Aussie Wendy Turnbull for the second year running. The following week, Hy and the Hong Kong team made their debut in the Federation Cup. Then, she was all set to defend her title at the Hong Kong Invitational Hardcourt Championships against 19-year-old Li Xinyi, who went on to become China's first Asian Games women's singles gold medalist in Seoul 1986, but the final was called off due to inclement weather.

At the French Open Junior Championships in 1982, Patricia met [Steffi Graf](#) for the first time and it was a nail-biter in the German's favour, 6-2, 3-6, 6-4. This was the beginning of an intriguing 1-on-1 that no one could have predicted after having clashed twice more in three-set matches in the Federation Cup in due course, that in 10 year's time, she would finally defeat *Fraulein Forehand* when her opponent was the undisputed world No. 1, albeit in an [exhibition in Toronto](#).

Right off the bat, during the second week of January 1983, she reached the women's singles final of an ITF Pro Circuit event for the first time at the US\$10,000 San Antonio and netted her first WTA ranking of No. 201 (17 Jan 1983). The following week, she captured her maiden pro circuit title at the US\$10,000 Hallandale Beach. In March, her ranking jumped to No. 122 after she reached the [US\\$50,000 Nashville](#) tour event semifinals as a lucky-loser. She then got to round two at

Eastbourne as a qualifier and subsequently held a WTA ranking of No. 101 by the start of Wimbledon. She was a direct acceptance to the maindraw in women's singles and reached the second round. On July 4, she cracked the WTA top 100 for the first time in her career, going in at No. 90.

Seeded 5th in girls' singles for Wimbledon in 1983 she reached the final to face French girl Pascale Paradis, who had a WTA ranking of No. 174. Despite the runner-up finish, Patricia is the only player from Hong Kong to reach a Junior Grand Slam singles final to date. Her victor, Paradis, went on to be crowned Junior World Champion in a year that saw her win Roland Garros and Wimbledon before another final at the US Open.



Yet, not all was lost for Patricia, as she teamed up with a player she knew well from their NBTA days, American Patty Fendick, and beat French Open junior champions Carin Anderholm and Helena Olsson of Sweden, 6-1, 7-5, to lift the Wimbledon girls' doubles title. Her fifth appearance at the All England Club also marked the end of a junior career that saw her peak at No. 7 in the world. Then, following a third round finish in the women's singles at the US Open, at the end of 1983, at age 18, she held a WTA ranking of No. 68.



After considering scholarship offers from Stanford, Berkeley, and USC, she accepted a full ride to attend UCLA in the Fall of 1984. However, despite earning All-America in singles that first season, she did not perform well in tour events, losing in the first round at Indianapolis, Roland Garros, Wimbledon, and US Open. In the Summer of 1984, however, she became the only player from Hong Kong to compete at the Olympic Games. That year, the tennis event was held at the brand new Tennis

Center at UCLA. After accounting for Canadian Marianne Groat in the opening round, she lost narrowly to No. 7 seed Sabrina Goles of Yugoslavia, 6-4, 4-6, 9-7. Goles went all the way to the final where Steffi Graf, the 8th seed, came from a set down to win, 1-6, 6-3, 6-4. In retrospect, she recounted the difficulty of satisfying the minimum 9-event requirement in order to maintain a WTA ranking while being a full-time student-athlete. Although she won the US\$10,000 Tipton over in the UK in November, she fell to No. 213 by year's end.

Soon, devastating news came when she was diagnosed with a debilitating injury called *adhesive capsulitis*, more commonly referred to as 'frozen shoulder' that dramatically inhibited overall arm motion and caused severe pain, especially at night. The medical prognosis from 7 doctors in America was to have surgery but her parents did not consent to it because the X-rays did not show broken bones. They eventually found a Chinese doctor in Hong Kong and underwent an intensive treatment that saw her recover fully within 3 months. In all, she was sidelined for 18 months before getting back to competition. She still tried to get ranking points by playing qualies in the Brazilian Open, Australian Indoors, Melbourne, Roland Garros, and Wimbledon, but to no avail. She ended the year with three more losses in the Federation Cup in October. By the end of 1985, at age 20, she was down to No. 324. On April 28, 1986, her ranking plummeted to No. 381. The following week, she dropped off the rankings completely.

Historic first WTA Tour singles title

After some three months of treatment and rehab work, her shoulder saw dramatic improvement, so much so that she felt well enough to test the waters and get back in the game, remarkably. In September 1986, she competed in a pair of US\$10,000 ITF Pro Circuit events on clay in Portugal and Spain as tune-ups. She lost early in singles both weeks but captured the doubles in Spain with Finland's Anne Aallonen. Three weeks later, she entered the inaugural US\$50,000 Taipei Women's Championships as an unranked wildcard where she beat No. 1 seed Helen Kelesi in the quarterfinals, 6-2, 6-3, followed by a come-from-behind victory in the final against Argentina's Adriana Villagrán to capture her career-first WTA Tour singles title. It was an historic win to say the least, for no player from Hong Kong has managed this feat before or since. Her effort also netted her a winner's cheque worth US\$9,000.



The following Monday on October 13, she reentered the rankings at No. 126. Two weeks later, she gained acceptance to the US\$50,000 Singapore Women's Open via another maindraw wildcard and battled her way to the semifinal before Gigi Fernandez ousted her. The following Monday on October 27, she was back in the top 100 at No. 98. According to the latest WTA Media Guide, Mirjana Lucic (Bol, 1997) and Kim Clijsters (US Open, 2009) were the only unranked players to capture a tour title in the past 35 years, whereas the lowest-ranked player on record to win a WTA



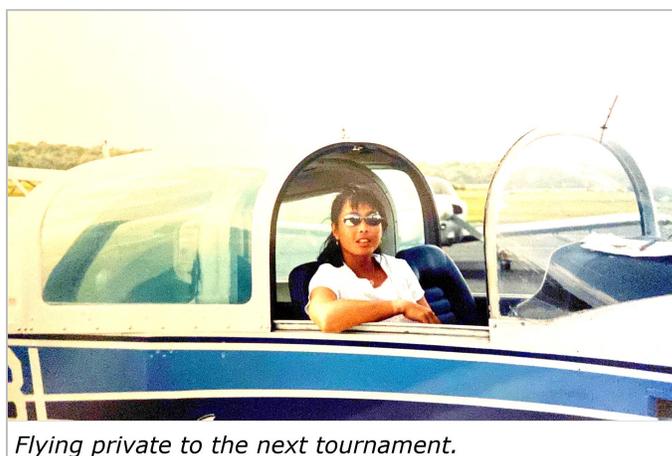
WTA Fashion Show featuring the likes of Carling Bassett, Patty Fendick, Peanut Harper, and Manon Bollegraf, etc.

singles title was Angelique Widjaja of Indonesia, who claimed the 2001 Wismilak International in Bali ranked No. 579.

In 1987, the Australian Open was played on grass for the last time at Kooyong, the spiritual home of Australian tennis. Hy held a doubles ranking of No. 144 but she and her partner, Etsuko Inoue, the 1982 Asian Games singles gold medallist, did not get in the maindraw as a direct entry. After qualifying, the HK-Japanese duo upset No. 5 seed Elise

Burgin and Rosalyn Nideffer in the first round and fought all the way to the semifinals before they fell to top-seeded eventual champions, Martina Navratilova and Pam Shriver. She went on to register a career-high WTA ranking of No. 36 in doubles (30 Mar 1987).

At the Federation Cup that was held in Vancouver in July, Hy arrived ranked No. 79 in the world. After a first round defeat against West Germany, Hong Kong won the next four on the trot, defeating Finland 3-0, Belgium 3-0, Brazil 2-0, and Sweden 2-1, a team that was spearheaded by world No. 14 Catarina Lindqvist, to reach the Consolation Final before they were upended by the Netherlands 2-1 in the deciding doubles. That year, Graf led her country to its first-ever



Flying private to the next tournament.

Federation Cup triumph in superb form, brushing aside the likes of Gabriela Sabatini, Hana Mandlikova, and Chris Evert in straight sets. The No. 2-ranked German's, 6-7, 6-2, 6-4, victory against Patricia was the lone set she conceded that week.

On her battle royale against Steffi Graf: "Tennis is funny that way. I always knew that she knew, and I knew, that she knew, that I was a threat."

From 1991, she was able to maintain a year-end top 75 ranking for the next seven straight seasons, and finished in the top 30 in 1992 and 1993, before she retired in 1998. During that span, she experienced many standout moments. For instance, at the US Open in 1992, she beat No. 6 seed

[Jennifer Capriati](#), 7-5, 6-4, in the third round and then No. 13 seed Helena Sukova, 6-1, 7-6(2), in the last sixteen before she was finally ousted by eventual champion and No. 1 seed Monica Seles in the quarterfinals. The victory against the American was doubly sweet since the wunderkind had knocked her out of the US Open the past two years.

Moreover, Capriati was the talk of the world since she came from a set down to topple Steffi Graf in the gold medal match at the [Barcelona Olympics](#). Heading into Flushing Meadows, the young American was unquestionably exuding confidence, but she ran into a player who was sporting a prized fighter's edge ever since she squandered ten match points in a 6-2, 1-6, 12-10, second round loss to eventual bronze medallist, Mary-Jo Fernandez, in Barcelona earlier that summer.

As it turned out, Patricia was the last Canadian to reach the US Open quarterfinals until [Bianca Andreescu](#) equalled that feat on her way to the title in 2019.

In 1993, Hy peaked at No. 28 in the world at the start of Key Biscayne and with the WTA Tour event in Hong Kong making a comeback for the first time since 1982, she was ready to play. Now called the [Digital Open](#), a US\$100,000 Kraft General Foods World Tour Tier IV event, as the top seed, she sailed through the opening few rounds but was then upset by American No. 3 seed Marianne Werdel, 7-6, 6-1, in the semifinals. She never got another opportunity to win her hometown tournament again for there was another 21-year gap before it returned in the form of the [Prudential Hong Kong Tennis Open](#) in 2014, sixteen years after her retirement from professional tennis.

In 1994, Hy captured her maiden WTA doubles title when she collaborated with Argentina's Mercedes Paz to beat No. 1 seed Ines Gorrochategui and Caroline Vis, 6-4, 6-3, in the semis, and then No. 2 seed Jenny Byrne and Julie Richardson, 6-4, 7-6, in the final to win the Auckland Open. Other notable results include reaching the finals at [Indian Wells](#) in 1993 (w/ Ann Grossman) and the British Clay Court Championships in 1995 (w/ Kerry-Anne Guse), as well as the quarterfinals of the Atlanta Olympics (w/ Jill Hetherington) and US Open in 1996 (w/ Rosalyn Nideffer). At the beginning of the year, immediately preceding the Australian



Jan 1994, Victoria Park Tennis Stadium, Hong Kong. Patricia Hy entertains world No. 2 Arantxa Sanchez-Vicario in the First National Bank Challenge.

"The thing I remember the most was that I could never play well at 'home' in Hong Kong. I just wanted to do so well so bad."

Open, she took part in an exhibition in Hong Kong called the First National Bank Challenge that featured players the likes of Arantxa Sanchez-Vicario and Iva Majoli.

Patricia reached her second career singles final on the WTA Tour at the US\$100,000 British Clay Court Championships in 1995 and finished runner-up to Czech Republic's Ludmila Richterova, 6-7, 6-4, 6-3. She also teamed up with Kerry Anne-Guse to reach the doubles final but came away second best against Mariaan De Swardt of South Africa and Romanian Ruxandra Dragomir, 6-3, 7-5. The event was held at the West Hants Tennis Club in Bournemouth, scene of the first tournament in the Open Era back in April 1968.

Moving to Canada



Atlanta Olympics, 1996. L-R: Yves Boulais, Patricia Hy, Team Physio, Jill Hetherington, and renowned doubles guru, Louis Cayer.

It was during the Fed Cup in Vancouver in August 1987 that the idea of immigration resurfaced after initially discussing it with her family a year earlier while she was playing college tennis at UCLA. For all those who called Hong Kong home at the time, The Handover was a dilemma and a constant distraction especially given its nonstop coverage by mainstream media. It was an Ambassador from the Canadian Consulate who approached her father that initiated the discussion and possibility of such a move. All the while, tennis remained her sole focus, and so it was her dad who handled the negotiations. Her family had to make a choice not so long ago, though the circumstance in Phnom Penh back in '71 was that much more imminent, but another opportunity had presented itself now. In less than four months, it was a done deal. Her parents, her sister, the whole family, would move to Canada.

Although she had to sit out the Fed Cup until 1991 and the Olympics till 1992 before she could represent her newly adopted country, her nationality became (CAN) on tour starting from January 1988. Tennis-wise, she had gotten to No. 58 in the rankings, won her first WTA singles title, and reached a career-high No. 36 in the world in doubles. A significant amount of tour events was held in America, a stone's throw away from Canada, and she no longer had to travel thousand of miles just to see her parents. Age-wise, she was 23 and her future was ahead of her, but still young enough to take a chance in life, one that was free of political and social upheaval. A decision had to

be made, and the rest, as they say, is history.

Since retirement

Patricia and her husband, Yves, operated a successful junior tennis academy for more than a decade in Hilton Head Island, South Carolina. In 2013, they joined the Junior Tennis Champions Center (JTCC), a private tennis training establishment and preparatory school in College Park, Maryland, the first high performance Regional Training Center certified by the USTA.

At the inaugural WCTA Conference in 2017, Patricia was among a number of familiar names, such as [Judy Murray](#), Lindsay Davenport, Gigi Fernandez, Mary Pierce, and Kathy Rinaldi, who spoke on the various issues of coaching professional women on the WTA Tour. In 2019, she was invited to do live commentary for the Rogers Cup where she analyzed 24 matches non-stop over the course of four days. Her latest project is Hy-Performance, mentoring tennis parents, working independently as a mental coach, and helping underperformers develop the skills necessary to perform at their best.



"There's a lot of disconnect between parents and coaches but existing literature is mostly written by authors who don't have a playing background and therefore lack the ability to grasp the athlete's mindset."

As recently as the US Open 2021, she was asked by the USTA to join their Broadcast Team, commenting on the progress of young Emma Raducanu, a player she is familiar with since the days when the young Brit was training briefly in Canada.

She is happily married for 27 years with two teenage children, Isabelle and Justin, who are currently playing for perennial NCAA Division I powerhouse Ohio State University, with both having aspirations to become a full-time touring pro.

Patricia Hy was inducted into the HKTA Hall of Fame in 2016.
