

## **Johan du Randt HOF Acceptance Speech (Clean Track)**

I want to thank this yellow club on the hill called TCC. They put up with me for seven years and I learned tons here. They handled every problem with grace and, boy, can they run an event.

I would lie if I said I did not lose any sleep over this speech. I am going to have to swear three times for effect. The title of this speech is “Just F’in Play.”

First, and I am only going to say this once, it is extremely humbling to be up here and have so many people here to support me. I have not been in this position before and it’s hard to explain how I feel. Thank you for coming and for this induction—it is really special.

### **THE BEGINNING**

About 15 years ago, I had a hot date, but a guy named Drew Sawyer invited me to play paddle. It was hard to get anywhere to play and I just wanted to friggin’ play. I immediately passed on the date and went to play paddle. At this point, I knew I had issues. [Looking at his wife] Honey, I am sorry you had to find out this way.

The things I remember—I feel like my mind is still like a kid. Not long after that, I played paddle with two guys and Drew Sawyer. One guy served me in the chest when the ball cut and his partner said, “Welcome to paddle!” I turned and thought to myself, “What an a\*\*hole.” Two points later, I drilled the guy who had said that and muttered to Drew, “Welcome to paddle, a\*\*hole.” After the match, Drew Sawyer, who rarely gives compliments, similar to me, said, “You will win Nationals one day.” This thought had not crossed my mind. One of them vomited all over that by saying, “Well, I would not be so sure, as lots of tennis guys don’t.” I thought to myself, “Who are you to tell me what I can and can’t do?!” So, like most competitive people, I just needed someone to tell me I can’t.

From there, it all began and I couldn’t be more thankful for being hit in the chest and for the guy who vomited over Drew’s comment. If he remembers, I actually like him, and he has been good to me over the years.

### **MANY THANKS**

On a more serious note, I am so thankful for all that happened to me due to paddle. Opportunities, relationships, jobs, and experiences. In my opinion, this can’t be measured. I never played for the National Championship for the recognition but for the process of getting there. The memories I have and the friendships I have made are what I can keep and will remember. The rest, in my opinion, will be forgotten fairly soon. That is very deep for me but very true. Before I make everyone cry, let’s go to my family and partners. We will go bottom up and family first.

Thanks to Ivy, my sister, for all the emotional warfare. It prepared me for any a\*\*hole on the court.

Thanks to Blair, my middle brother, for grinding me every time I lost and making me hate losing, and also for being my playing buddy when nobody else would.

Thanks to Reinhold, my oldest brother, for always being gracious in defeat or victory. It taught me a lot.

I have to thank them because people have told me in the past, I might be slightly competitive; I take that as a compliment. As the youngest kid, I apparently just cruised through everything but being the youngest can be tough. I was always getting beaten up one way or another by the older crowd. I am not complaining. I am thankful for this and nobody is to blame, but indirectly that is probably what made me competitive. They could go fishing and I was too little. They could go golfing and I was too little. They could go camping and I was too little. They could go play tennis and I was too little. Wait a minute, if I practiced really hard, and started whipping them, maybe I would not be too little!

Thanks to my old man, for never showing me any mercy when he was winning at anything. Killer instinct, baby. My dad is not around anymore but would have been very proud no doubt but would have hid it well until I left the room. He was also a little more scary when he watched me play tennis and did not love my attitude. Once, when I was 11, I took my racquet and let go of the handle, and it fell over. Well, he had seen enough. I knew I was pushing the envelope. I had two coolers full of water and Game sports drink on my bench. My dad came to the fence, stuck another bottle of water under it, and called me over to disguise what was coming my way. He not so politely told me that if I didn't start behaving right away he was going to take me off the court and kick my you-know-what and it was not in English but I knew I wanted none of that. If you were wondering where my aggressive side comes from, wonder no more. My dad was a stud and very good to me and I am sure he is proud and watching from somewhere. I have some great memories of the old man.

My mom was a class act and probably taught me the most sports-wise: she was always a clean competitor and always took the high road. I have this picture in my head when we used to play golf. She used to have the yips on chipping and when she shanked one at an important time, she would go and hit her club halfheartedly, and say, "Moer." She would have a laugh; she was really throwing this tantrum for my entertainment. This is the one time she did not practice what she preached—she would say a job worth doing is a job worth doing well—because that is a lame swear word. I think this induction would have made her the proudest. This one is for my mom.

I also want to thank Rimante, my wife, for sticking with me through all the tournament travel. She would probably have had me retire five years ago, and although the engine light was on, I thought that this old dog still had a little bite left. The light is turning bright red currently. (If Dr. David Boisver, a body genius and my chiropractor, has his way I will be playing paddle until I am dead.) Honey, I love you and Johan and Wyatt for making me feel like a superhero. Wherever we go, before the kids introduce themselves they

say, "My dad is the #1 paddle player in the world!" I always wondered why I was not making any new friends.

### **QUICK GEMS**

My kids love this story. When my dad passed away, everything was chaos as we had a farm. My brothers had jobs to finish out and my sister was doing other things. I drew the short or maybe the long straw and had to help run the farm for a bit. I loved farming, but I was never very handy. One day, I had to do some welding, which I could actually do, but this was a tricky kind of weld. My mom told me to ask Uncle Casper to come help me. He was a great guy, always positive, and knew just what to say. Bear in mind, I was maybe 21 and he was 72 or so. He took the time out of his day to come help me and I was kind of embarrassed. I said, "Sorry I am not that handy." He looked at me and said, "Johan, you are darn handy with a tennis racquet!" Over the years this has been my skill, and I am very proud to have stuck to being darn handy with a tennis racquet and a paddle. So, find out what you're handy with and stick to it; it will serve you well.

In 2020, everyone was calling me old and impatient and we started joking around the house that I was old. Long story short, Stephen and I won Nationals (probably because everyone called me old and impatient) and the next morning at breakfast, Johan says, "Mommy, maybe Daddy is not that old after all." Pretty sharp for a four-year-old. Every time we play a tournament, the boys leave me a message. After I lose, Johan would say sweet things, like, "You're still our number 1," etc. Wyatt, on the other hand, would get on the screen and say, "Daddy I don't understand. Why do you keep losing?" Needless to say, we started winning more since tough love is the best medicine for me.

Another good reason for me doing well is that Rimante is not really tuned into paddle. We were at Owl's Nest running camps and she was speaking to Tyler Fraser's wife, Olivia, and asked her, "Does he also play in these tournaments?" She nearly fell on her back. Honey, that was an FYM, and I secretly love that about you.

### **PARTNERSHIPS**

I want to thank all my partners.

Rob Pierce –I have to give him some love. Always a great supporter and taught me everything I know, according to him.

Jerry Albrikes—For leading by example and teaching me the most without saying much. One of the toughest competitors around!

Matt Porter—A great talent and all around great guy and friend. We could never bring home the title. Dare I say we were too similar.

Mark Parsons—For always being classy, positive, good for a few jokes, and that backhand was sick. Loved playing with you and I learned more from you than I will ever admit. Also, thanks for the National titles.

Stephen Mitchell—The man who can't win anything without being injured. Let's dig into that quickly. At Nationals in Darien, he had Achilles Tendinitis. Wherever we drove he had a boot on and was icing that thing and the diligence was impressive. I would say I learned a lot. At Canoe Brook, in NJ, he suffered from a mental disease called precipitation. Doctors might not know it yet but it's a thing in paddle. He got through that with flying colors—it's all on YouTube. At Long Island, he wasn't injured so we lost in the semis. Mostly my fault but I blame him for being healthy. At Chicago, he had some infamous groin issue. Let's not forget in the middle of matches when he leaned against the fence with his eyes closed and one leg in the air. Some said it was pain, but I asked which god was he praying to because that god listened.

Stephen is an all-around nice guy, which offsets my personality beautifully. On the court, whatever I say generally goes with Stephen and that is a great tip for all you partners. The first year I played with Stephen, I kept myself to saying one thing per set or I would drive him nuts. Even though he did some really stupid things the first year, I still did not talk too much. Now as years have gone by and we have played more, I talk more and he is not doing stupid stuff anymore. We played in a match and I said, "Let's do this, let's do that," maybe five things a set instead of one and he looked at me and said, "Let's just f'in play!" I giggled. I knew I talked too much and getting him fired up is kind of funny. But I got the point and we turned that match around rather quickly because 'Just F'in Play' was right up my alley.

Honorable Mentions—Dick Wright, the steadiest paddle league partner I ever had, and Greg Saunders, aka King Khaki. It did not last long but it was memorable. Jon Karlen, we were match point down and pulled out the league championship. There are many more to thank. I had the best time in the league and that was harder to win than Nationals.

## **FINAL WORDS**

As far as the old FYM goes, I think I might have lost a few Nationals since I kept that shot under wraps—I probably care more than you think. But now I am too old to care. Soon one of these guys, Nunez, Alvi, Salazar, and others will FYM me off the court.

There are so many people I could thank but it will take forever. I can't be more grateful for all this sport has given me and I will leave you with the most important thing I have learned from this sport—Just F'in Play.