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## Big Plans for Tennis Oasis on the Napeague Stretch

BY JACK GRAVES

Neal Feinberg, who's leasing the four Har-Tru tennis courts on the Napeague stretch that Doug De Groot owns, said at 27Tennis the other day that he got into the real estate business "at the worst time in the history of humanity."

"All of a sudden, with the crash, there we all were, former tennis players who'd become lawyers, stockbrokers, and realtors, now back on the tennis courts teaching. The universe was smarter than we were, for tennis was what we all really loved. My father had been grooming me to be a lawyer or a comedian — he became both — "but I thought going into tennis as a profession worked out better for me than any other plan. This is who I am."

As for stand-up comedy, "I've done voices on 'American Dad' and for videogames such as 'Celebrity Death Watch' and 'Grand Theft Auto,' and I did a 40-character [90-minute] one-man show that Becky Mode wrote called 'Fully Committed' at Guild Hall five years ago. The main character is Sam, the reservationist at a high-end city restaurant. Then there are 39 other characters, with a number of them sometimes speaking at once."

Asked how he squared lawyering, a sober profession by and large, with freewheeling comedy, he said, "I can be a comedian or a lawyer. So laugh at my jokes or I'll sue you."

He stopped doing stand-up two years ago, he said, to write a novel, "Service," about a tennis pro in the Hamptons, a subject he knows well inasmuch as he's been giving private lessons here for the past nine summers while also being the head pro at the



Neal Feinberg expects there will be 10 clinics a day at 27Tennis in July and August. *Jack Graves*

Yorkville Tennis Club on Manhattan's Upper East Side.

He learned the game in his hometown of Scarsdale, N.Y., beginning lessons as a 3-year-old with Jerry Ayleen, an African-American pro who had competed abroad because he hadn't been allowed into tournaments in the U.S. "This was before Arthur Ashe," Feinberg said. "He had converted an old lipsick factory in Hastings-on-Hudson into a real club. . . . He taught me about life too. The most important thing, he said, was to have fun."

As a teenager, Feinberg spent summers at the Welby Van Horn tennis camp in Pinehurst, N.C. Indeed, his mimicry of Van Horn attested to his talent for comedy. An internship at "Saturday Night Live" and a dual tennis and comedy career followed his graduation from Columbia University, to which he'd transferred from the University of South Florida.

As for the present, "I've created the cheapest and most popular adult tennis program anywhere in Manhattan, with almost 20,000 players. Tennis is stuck in a time warp the way it's marketed. The two biggest barriers to its growth is that it's too expensive and that there's no one to play with. I've removed both those barriers. Across the U.S., yoga, spinning, boot camp . . . all those industries have outpaced the growth of tennis. They're cheap and accessible, so I've made tennis the same way. Moreover, this is not a private membership club — it's open to all, affordable and accessible to anyone on any budget."

To further attract players, Feinberg has made arrangements with various resorts here, offering free trial classes to their guests. *Continued on D8*

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"Gurney's is one of them, the Seacrest, the Hermitage . . . the Atlantic Terrace too. We'll have a sleep-away adult camp there, our first adult tennis getaway. They'll spend the whole day here. The Clam Bar will deliver food, so lobster rolls are waiting when you get off the court, that kind of thing. We've got a patio deck now where you can sit around, socialize, and watch tennis. We've also partnered with the Y.M.C.A., offering clinics for kids and adults at a very affordable price. I've wanted to start giving back from the very first moment I arrived. Come July and August we'll

have over 10 clinics a day."

"Every day out here," he said, "with weather like this I feel like I've already won. . . . I love this location, with the mist blowing in off the ocean. It's like vaporized air-conditioning. It's kind of a serene oasis that busy people will want to come to to get away from the crowd."

Feinberg's already begun holding U.S.T.A. junior tournaments at 27Tennis. One of his students, Daniel Gordon, who plays number-one at Trevor Day School in New York City, won a boys Level 1B tourney here for 16-and-under boys last weekend.

As for interclub play, an idea he'd been toying with, "That sounded good to me until I realized I would have to provide one of the teams. In Chappaqua, where three of us tennis pros who are friends are all out here now" — himself, and Ted Diamond at Sportime in Amagansett and Rob Kresberg at Mashashimuet Park in Sag Harbor — "used to teach, we had the Northern Westchester Junior Tennis League. So interclub play is on the back burner for the moment, until I have enough players to fill a team."