

## On the Cover: Robby debuts in Atlanta Sports and Fitness

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By [Anna Cate Ridley](#)

In 2000, Marietta native Robby Ginepri was the first runner-up at the US Open Juniors, losing to superstar Andy Roddick in the third set. Inevitably, it was time for Robby to make that huge career decision—play tennis for a living? Why not! Ginepri finished up high school at Wheeler and signed on with the ATP Tour in 2001 at age 18. “I was doing really well and I thought, ‘if [Andy] could do it, I could do it,’” Robby recalls. “I’ve had no regrets since... I’ve enjoyed every minute of it.”

Indeed it shows, as Robby has made a significant leap up the rankings each year he’s been on the Tour. In 2003, he cracked the top 30, and as one of the youngest players, Robby’s presence is nothing less than threatening to the guys ranked above him. Fortunately, the top ranked American players are a pretty tight knit group of friends. An interesting parallel can be made between the previous generation of tennis icons (Agassi, Sampras, Courier, Chang and Martin) and the current intensely competitive group of rising stars. “That group of five have been referred to as the most successful, tremendous generation ever,” says Tom Ross, Senior V.P. of Octagon (Robby’s agent). “People have said nothing could ever match it. Well, this next group (Roddick, James Blake, Mardy Fish, Taylor Dent and Robby) have turned out to be pretty strong and pretty fast. That foursome I think will start to nip at Andy’s heels in the next few years.



“Robby is certainly one of my young stars,” Ross continues. “Each of the other guys have had varied degrees of success. Robby is the only one who has basically gone in one direction.” And Ross also believes that Robby is more adaptable to all the different playing surfaces than his American competitors, which makes him consistently intriguing to watch. “Despite having one injury a year in each of the last three years, which has cost him a big chunk of the season in each of those years, nonetheless, his rise has been pretty methodical,” Ross says.

Robby’s 2004 season started with a nice performance at the Australian Open where he made it to round 16. However, Robby’s Davis Cup debut will go down in history as the first American to ever be down two sets and come back to win the match. Team USA, made up of Robby, Roddick, and brothers Bob and Mike Bryan went on to beat Austria in true patriotic fashion. “It was so fun just to even be there,” says Robby. “The fact that I was actually on the team and to have won representing my country is so

exciting for me.”

Although traveling more than 30 weeks of the year can get exhausting, Robby doesn’t mind so much the tournaments held near the sunny beaches of the California coast and Hawaii, his favorite destination to date. And although Robby gets paid to do something he truly loves, it’s still a challenge day to day. But he stays motivated with a simple, focused attitude. “I love to compete and win and work hard, and every day you have to do that to succeed out here,” he says. As for his game, Robby is working on improving his serve, and transitioning forward to the net, and his volleys. Robby also understands there’s plenty of work to be done off the court as well. “The last couple of years I’ve been working really hard on my fitness and just putting in a lot of hard hours in the gym,” he admits.

When Robby is in Atlanta, he concentrates on working out off-court with his trainer, former Georgia Tech Men's Tennis Team Assistant Coach John Thompson, logging in plenty of endurance training on the bike and treadmill and adding strength with weightlifting. "He is clearly one of the fittest, quickest guys on Tour," says Ross, confirming Robby's reputation as an extremely fast, nothing's-out-of-reach player. And the strides he's made in the gym have definitely proved themselves on the court. Robby made a name for himself at last year's Wimbledon by being the first man to compete in a sleeveless shirt. This production might also have something to do with catching the eye of famous British actress Minnie Driver, with whom he shared a brief romance around the time of Wimbledon. "She was out there watching matches, and she saw me on TV the day before and said she wanted to meet me...We just hit it off from there," Robby confirms.

There's more to be said about Robby's life outside of tennis. He loves music and is learning to play guitar. But mostly, he enjoys spending rare time with his friends and his family, who are his greatest supporters. "They always come to the US Open, they came to the Davis Cup, they got to watch me win Newport (Robby's first ATP title), so they come to about five tournaments out of the year probably," he says.

Healthy, confident and very determined Robby has a solid focus on his goals for this 2004 season: "I'd like to win a couple more tournaments, and slide into the top 15 and even make the top 10. I just want to keep working hard and improve on my game, and I think the results will follow." And Ross agrees, "I think the top 20 is a realistic goal for him this year in one stage or another. He seems to be evolving in a really well-rounded manner. And he really does play for the right reasons, he's always trying to improve, he's not just playing for the money or the points...He's really on the right track."

Adapting to the pro Tour at such a young age is not only a challenge, it's intimidating as well. But those days are over for Robby, and hopefully from here on out, the guy across the net will be the only one intimidated.

—by Anna Cate Ridley