



The Andre Agassi
Charitable Foundation®

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TENNIS

Agassi Makes His Point Off the Court

By: Liz Robbins

LAS VEGAS, Feb. 16 — Andre Agassi walked from room to room in the same purposeful manner he used to stride from side to side on the baseline.

Only now, five months into his retirement from tennis, Agassi is no longer fiercely focused. He is relaxed and smiling. He is comfortable in this environment because he is creating a legacy for others.

“Hi, Mr. Agassi!” squealed the students at Andre Agassi College Preparatory Academy when he passed through the hallways and stopped to visit classrooms Friday morning. The Andre Agassi Charitable Foundation opened the charter school in an at-risk neighborhood here in 2001.

With the NBA All-Star Game in town, Agassi, Las Vegas’s native son, was trying to keep a low profile. But in conjunction with the NBA Cares outreach program, which donated T-shirts to the school, Agassi had a ribbon-cutting ceremony in the new gym where NBA rookies and second-year players practiced Friday morning for the All-Star Rookie Challenge later that night.

Playing the role of honorary principal, Agassi asked the 540 students, from kindergarten through 10th grade, to stand and recite the school’s code of respect before watching the NBA players take the court.

“They’ll never forget this,” Agassi said.

In five-plus years, Agassi Prep has grown in endowment and enrollment. In June, the final phase of the \$41 million construction project will be finished, and the first senior class will graduate in 2009.

Agassi gave a tour, where he was joined by an enthusiastic former basketball star, Bob Lanier, and an awestruck

Memphis rookie, Rudy Gay. At the end of the tour, Agassi brought his visitors to an unfinished space on the second floor. He pointed upward to what will be his favorite place on campus.

“When the first class graduates, they will walk across that bridge and they will peel off decals that show where each one will be going to college,” Agassi said. Then, he added, the students will write in a book their thoughts for the next graduating class.

The image of transition is a powerful one to Agassi, who joined the men’s Tour at age 16 and never attended college. He walked across his own bridge when he retired



at last year’s United States Open, and he has not looked back. “Here’s the good news: I get all the good stuff without the bad stuff,” said Agassi, who won eight singles titles in Grand Slam events. “I get to enjoy the game without worrying about what and why. I love watching the game; I love talking about the game. It still grabs me in many ways, just not personally.”

Agassi, 36, last played competitively in the third round of the United States Open, when he suffered from sciatica and two bulging disks in his back. On the tour Friday, Agassi grabbed his back and winced.



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“Oh no, I’m fine,” he said, assuring that the sciatica was gone. “I went snowboarding two days ago and fell. Then I was on a plane for six hours yesterday.”

Agassi took a break from his schedule to watch nearly all of the Australian Open, marveling at the dominance of the champion, Roger Federer.

“The guy’s the best in the world at four or five areas of the game,” Agassi said. “That’s absurd.”



Agassi said he did not think Federer’s lack of competition took away from the drama. “If anyone knows about sports, they know they’re watching history,” he said.

Agassi said he could not wait for the French Open, the only Grand Slam event Federer has not won.

There is only one picture of Agassi in his school. It was taken at his 1999 French Open victory and joins a wall of pictures of inspirational leaders and their quotations.

At the end of the tour, Gay told Agassi, “I hope I can open a school like this.”

Agassi visits the school about once every two weeks and spends his time, he said, “raising money for the foundation, going to Washington, D.C., and starting to present our case for federal grants.”

Agassi will not be at Sunday’s All-Star Game because he and his wife, Steffi Graf, have to fly to Europe to make appearances for Genworth, which underwrites his foundation. He still has \$9 million to raise for the school’s endowment, which supplements public funding for each student.

The school lacks one facility – by design, there are no tennis courts.

“That part of my life is over,” Agassi said.