

Agassi visits Boys & Girls Club, Nevada Legislature

BY GUY CLIFTON • GCLIFTON@RGJ.COM • APRIL 2, 2009

Tennis great Andre Agassi wore a suit and tie instead of a sweatsuit Wednesday during a visit to Carson City.

The former world No. 1 player and Las Vegas native spoke to the Legislature about charter schools and visited the Carson City Boys & Girls Club's tennis facility.

"These hours of a child's life are so important," Agassi said after touring the club with Assemblywoman Bonnie Parnell, D-Carson City. "These after-school hours really are important. I learned that when we opened our Boys & Girls Club and that really lead to the opening of our school."

Agassi, 38, built a Boys & Girls Club in West Las Vegas in 1997 and opened the Andre Agassi College Preparatory Academy, a K-12 charter school for disadvantaged and at-risk children, in 2001. The school graduates its first senior class, 34 students, this year.

His charitable foundation has raised more than \$60 million to benefit at-risk children.

"Helping children really became my real life's work," Agassi, who retired from tennis in 2006, told legislators.

Agassi gave a presentation on his school to a joint session of the Assembly and Senate education committees.

Officials thrilled

Boys & Girls club officials were thrilled with Agassi's visit.

"It's fantastic that he's here," said JoJo Townsell, a board member of the Boys & Girls Club in Gardnerville-Minden and former professional football player for the New York Jets. "When you think of Andre Agassi, obviously you think of his wonderful, hall-of-fame tennis career. But the things he has accomplished with his philanthropy shows that he's a bigger person than he ever was an athlete."

Hal Hanson, director of the Carson City Boys & Girls Club, said he hoped Agassi's visit would draw attention to the value of the club and perhaps aid its capital improvement efforts for its new facility.

"As a tennis fan, I'm going crazy like a little kid," Hansen said, adding Agassi's willingness to support Boys & Girls Clubs "shows he puts his money where his heart is."

Agassi toured the tennis courts with coach Bob Phelps. Though he didn't pick up a racket, he did shout encouragement to one player: "Don't be afraid of that ball."

The Carson City Boys & Girls Club has raised about \$5 million but still needs about \$50,000 to complete funding for the new facility.

Parnell donated \$5,000 to the Boys & Girls Club effort during Agassi's visit.