

MAXENCE IMBERT HAS HIS FUTURE AHEAD OF HIM

Recently crowned at the U13 French National Squash Championship, Maxence Imbert also celebrated his first cap. The young boy from Reunion Island is looking for sponsors who could support him so that he can keep improving.

Maxence Imbert recently won the U13 French National Squash Championship but as the saying goes "The apple does not fall far from the tree". As a matter of fact, his father belonged to the French top 15 in table tennis and crossed paths with Jean-Philippe Gatien - former World Champion and silver medalist at the Olympic Games - during his time at the National Centre. After his career, Jean-Jacques Imbert settled in Reunion Island, and it was at the ASCAC club that his son discovered squash alongside him. At the age of 5, Maxence joined the Jardin Squash Club academy run by Kevin Tomas, who was replaced by Matthieu Huin in 2017. "It's already been five years since Matthieu arrived, time flew by," he says smiling.

"There are a lot of things I like about squash, such as meeting other kids my age," Maxence says. He participated in his first regional tournament in 2016 but overall he did not compete as much as he could have, mainly due to the pandemic that put all sports in a standstill for almost two years. His first National Championship, at the end of 2021 in Lille and where he featured in U13, was kind of a breakthrough for Maxence. Seeded 22, he caused an upset beating Lysandro Joneau, who had been a bronze medallist in U11 two years before, in the round of 16. He was defeated in the quarters ("I was a little stressed," he admits), but nevertheless finished fifth, which was a great achievement. "Before the championship, I didn't know the other players at all, it was a great experience," Maxence adds.

He relied on this experience at the Youth French Intercounty Championship a few months later in Bordeaux, where he showed his fighting spirit. Maxence won three matches in five games on the same day, including one against Théo Baudry - the player who had beaten him in Lille - and helped Reunion Island clinch the silver medal. "Maxence really made a name for himself during this tournament," his coach Matthieu Huin says, so much that he earned a first cap at the 5 Nations tournament. "I didn't even know there was a French National team in U13, it was a nice surprise when I received a message from the coaches," said the young college student. Even though the Bleus were defeated by England, Maxence added another silver medal to his résumé. As mentioned above, it turned into gold at the French National Championship in Clermont-Ferrand, in May: After saving one match ball against Lysandro Joneau in the quarters, he defeated teammate Clément Leperlier in the final. "If I had been told a few months ago that I would be French National champion and picked to play for France, I wouldn't have believed it," enthusiastically says the boy who trains five times a week, including a few fitness sessions.

Maxence Imbert took another step this summer, while featuring in his first European tournaments. "I can't wait to compete against the best, and it would be nice to finish in the top 10," he said to us before flying to Europe. He achieved his goals, finishing 9th in Germany and then 10th in the Netherlands, winning 7 of his 10 matches. "I am fully aware that to reach the top one has to work a lot," he adds. On the other hand, I am young and I still have time to decide if I want to make a career in squash. The most important thing is to have fun on court."

THE EYE OF THE COACH (Matthieu Huin): "Maxence possesses great natural abilities in terms of power, whether it is muscular or his strokes. Technically, his forehand is now very solid and we'll now focus on the backhand as well as the front of the court - where he's already good at counterattacking thanks to his physical abilities. He's like a sponge, he's always trying to replicate what he sees others do - for example Baptiste Legrand, a slightly older player from the club, he really likes his game. There's still room for improvement in terms of shot selection, but it's nothing to worry about because that's something you learn in matches and after all he hasn't played that many. It wasn't his priority when he was very young and then the pandemic happened. His passion for squash has grown steadily since he started, and his father just bought him a SquashTV subscription! To conclude, I must mention his mental toughness,

which he displayed on several occasions – at the Intercounty Championship when he won three matches in five games on the same day and then at the U13 French National Championship when he saved a match ball in the quarters before going on to win the title."

Maxence Imbert

Born on the 18th of April 2010 in Sainte-Clotilde (Réunion Island)

Plays for the Jardin Squash Club

Coach: Matthieu Huin

Rankings: French #3 in U13, French #1529 in senior

Achievements

- U13 Individual French National Champion in 2021/22
- Runner-up at the Youth French Intercounty Championship in 2021/22

- Reunion Island Champion in U11 (2020/21) and U13 (2021/22)

- Silver medalist at the 2022 U13 5 Nations tournament with the French National Team