

FERNANDO BELASTEGUÍN

Fernando Belasteguín is considered a legend of padel. One of the main reasons is his longevity and consistency at the top of the this sport. He has been a dominant force in padel for two decades, ranking number 1 of the world for 16 consecutive years, the most winning player in history.

For 13 years played in couple with Juan Martin Diaz and they were considered as one of the best doubles teams of all time.

Belasteguín is well known for his powerful and accurate shots, his tactical mastery and his ability to dominate the court and dictate play.

He is also known for his humility, despite his many achievements and success in the Padel and he surely is one of the most charismatic figures for the padel growth.

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

16 Consecutive years as the world's Number 1 player: 2002 to 2017 inclusive

6x World Champion with the Argentine National Team

230 Finals won over 285 played

28 Years as a professional padel player

1 The only athlete in history to be the number 1 for 16 consecutive years

What is the secret of your sports career longevity?

I think the secret is my life habits. When I was young and going out with my friends, I already had good habits. I was not smoking or drinking, for example. That was not for the sake of sport, but because I wanted to always be healthy and feel good. Then, when I started with sport, it was even more important feeling at the maximum of my possibilities all the time, whether I was training or playing. And these good habits helped me to compete, at 43 years of age, with players who are 20 years or more younger than me.

Are the champions born or made?

I think it's a mix of the two; you have to be born with skills, with a



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nature of a champion, with a talent, but then you also need hard work. None of the big champions such as Jordan, Messi, Federer, or Nadal, have been made by talent only. But they worked hard every day. I think that is the case not only in sport but in any profession. You also have to give it all to your profession in order to be the best. Otherwise, the profession itself will cut you out.

How does your training routine change during the year, in line with the tournaments and camps?

My training routine has changed a lot throughout the years, but that is more related to the age than the year cycle, because that doesn't change much. When I was in my twenties, I was training

twice a day – morning and evening – and now when I'm 43, I train only once. Otherwise, there is no time for me to recover. I know my body and I know that this change was necessary.

What are recovery strategies that you rely on?

The recovery strategies I rely on the most are quality of sleep, both 'siesta' – a nap after a lunch that in my small town in Argentina was a must – and the sleep during the night. Other strategies include nutrition, massages, and the cold-water immersion; I like a lot cold water as a recovery strategy. But for me the best recovery strategy is spending time with my family. That is incredibly recharging for me.

Did you have any major injuries during your career and are you following any prevention strategies?

Yes, I had a few major issues during my career. One of them was an elbow injury which costed me the number one ranking in the world, after 16 years and 8 months. At my age, after many years of playing sport, taking care of my body is necessary. I follow some specific prevention strategies for tendons, and more general ones, for my whole body.

Does nutrition play important role in your life?

Yes, it does. A few years ago, I did some genetic and food intolerance tests and after that I changed my diet. I choose specific food to avoid the inflammation. For example, I had to give up desserts and to significantly reduce grilled meat – that is a big sacrifice for an Argentinean! But following that new regime I was feeling much better, I lost 2 or 3 kilos, and I think that had a positive effect on my performance.

Do you and how prepare yourself psychologically?

I prepare myself psychologically every day. Every time I train, I train like if that was my last day of professional career. This has helped me a lot because during competition, when I'm in the game, I can have some technical mistake but never a preparation mistake. I feel that I did everything I could to prepare for the match and this gives me a big, big tranquillity, which it very important to me.



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In your book you mentioned that one day your uncle didn't want to bring you to the padel club anymore because you were bad at accepting the defeat and you were fighting with everybody. What do you think of people who don't know how to lose now? And what would you do if your son was like that?

As a father I must teach him to accept losing as a part of life. On the other hand, I am happy that he strives to be better and improve his results all the time, which is not only important in sports, but life in general. I always say I prefer to have with me someone who is crazy but with a desire to win, then someone 'normal' who is not motivated.

How many people do you have in your medical team?

I have a medical doctor of reference, the surgeon who operated my elbow. Then I have a physical coach whose duty is to prolong my career as much as possible. I have a padel coach who's been with me for the past 16 years, and then from time to time, I have a contact with a nutritionist to follow up on my nutrition. That is the group around me.

Do you have more confidence in doctors who directly recommend a specific therapy, or the ones that give you options, with risks and benefits, so that you can choose one?

No, I prefer that a professional gives me his recommendation on one specific treatment but I always want to know why he chose that one, the risks and benefits of the advised treatment, and one alternative. I am not a medical doctor, so I don't want to make that decision myself.

Image top left: Fernando Belasteguín playing with Juan Martín Díaz at the Madrid Padel Pro Tour Master men's doubles match against Miguel Ángel López and Matías Díaz. December 2010, Madrid, Spain.

Image right: Belasteguín with his teammate Arturo Coello from Spain playing against Miguel Ángel López and Miguel Ángel López at NewGiza Premier Padel P1 in Giza, Egypt. October 2022.

Image bottom left: Belasteguín playing at the NewGiza Premier Padel P1.



How can sports medicine help professional padel?

I think it can help with research, especially on specific injuries, risk factors, and prevention. There is not much on it at the moment as this is a relatively new sport and collecting data takes time in order to be meaningful. So, I think that is what is needed now.

Do you believe in early specialisation, or you would advise parents to let children practice different sports, in order to become champions?

I strongly believe that physio-motor skills of children need to be developed and the childhood is the phase when you shape future champions. I myself tried many different sports when I was young. I did the same with my children who are all playing tennis and the oldest one has just started playing padel.

What advice would you give to the young generation if they want to become professional athletes?

My advice would be the same one I give to my children daily: in life, you can cheat many people, but you cannot cheat yourself. When you come home and look at your reflection in the mirror, especially at night, if you feel in peace with yourself that means that you did well. That is the right way to live.

How do you cope with being away from your family during camps and tournaments? How does your family cope with that?

That is a big sacrifice made by my family and myself. My parents in Argentina are still taking care of me like when I was 10. For example, my mother would send me a message before each tournament, the

same message she has been sending me since the time I was playing the tournament in Buenos Aires at 13 years of age. In it, she wishes me the best for the tournament, but I never reply immediately; even as a child I would not reply until the tournament was over.

There is also my wife and my children that have to spend a lot of time far away from me. Because of that sacrifice that they and my parents had to make, at each match I give my best, out of respect for all that they are doing, which allows me to be a professional player.

What do you like to do when you are not playing padel?

As I mentioned, my family is the most important thing to me, so when I am not training or competing, I just want to spend my time with them, doing whatever; the activity is not that important, but I want to do it with them. So, drinking mate with my father or my children, watching television, or playing together. I just want to spend time with them.

Cristiano Eirale M.D., Ph.D.