



James Blake

later became the **Arthur Ashe Safe Passage Foundation**) went on to college on either academic or athletic scholarships. It was one of the programs that made Arthur most proud. Before Arthur died, he got a glimpse of **Venus** and **Serena Williams**, two young girls that would, for a period of time, take

over the reins of leadership after his voice was silenced. But, Arthur would not live to see the emergence of **James Blake**. James possessed many qualities that would enamor him to the tennis community at large. He is handsome, articulate and Harvard University educated. More importantly, he is thoughtful, non-confrontational and non-threatening. James, if he is so inclined, will be the heir-apparent to Arthur's throne; the voice of Black tennis.



Bob Davis was the CEO of the Arthur Ashe Safe Passage Foundation, CEO of Black Dynamics, Inc., and is currently President of the Panda Foundation, a local organization that uses tennis as the hook to teach the importance of proper nutrition, fitness and remaining in school, in the Manatee County School System and other youth serving agencies.



Playing at LaPlaya

Even the name sounds like fun. LaPlaya. It's one of the few resorts literally ON the beach between Naples and Ft. Myers in Southwest Florida.

Original portions of LaPlaya Beach & Golf Resort have been around since the '60's, but a national advertising push—including one of the potential prize trips on *Live with Kelly & Michael*—is making the 15-story high-rise even more well-known.

There are more formal places nearby (Ritz Carlton) but LaPlaya seems to combine the best of both worlds: Fun and classy. The property is not big. In fact, tennis and golf aren't even on the primary properties. To get to my tennis lesson, I had to get in my car and drive a mile and a half to a public park.

LaPlaya has a working relationship with the management that runs the tennis courts at the popular Pelican Bay Community Park. I was lucky enough to have Jason Thomas, Director of Tennis, as my teacher on a recent weekend morning (\$65 per hour for a private lesson).

- Jason pointed out I was nearly standing straight up when I hit my ground-strokes. "Rather than be 6 feet tall, be 5 feet tall when you hit your strokes," he suggested. Good idea.
- He had a breakthrough idea for my backhand: In a previous "One Tank Trip" lesson, I learned I was stepping sideways too much on my two-hander, but I've found stepping toward the net to be awkward. Jason focused on my back foot and told me to step out wider—and that made all the difference.
- He also re-enforced keeping your arms loose to ensure better racquet-head speed.
- "Get out in front and accelerate," he said more than once.

He watched my strokes so intently as he fed me balls from his basket just across the net, thus allowing himself to get nailed in the torso a few times with my returns. "Good shot!" That's dedication!

I was sore after the lesson and went straight to SpaTerre for a Swedish Massage. I was able use a shower in the actual treatment room and then slide under the soft blankets to wait for

my therapist. The spa is also in the same building as the fitness department that includes a 2nd floor aerobics/stretching room.

All this overlooks one of several pools at the resort. If you prefer the beach, cabana boys will set you up with chairs, towels and an umbrella at no extra charge. Service at LaPlaya is excellent.

The bar/restaurant, "Ba-leen," overlooks the Gulf and has tables inside or outside. I had lobster tails one night (\$45) and a seafood medley the next (\$65). Vegetable and potatoes were 'a la cart.'

The rooms are well-appointed and all have wall-size sliding glass doors that look out on the Gulf of Mexico providing a stunning view. Architects thought ahead and installed windows IN the shower that look out toward the sliding glass doors and the Gulf. (If you don't want others in the room to see you showering, the blinds can be closed—but . . . *prankster-alert*: They're operated from the other side!)

The view, the pools, the beach, the food and the service—all combines for a fun weekend in one of the most beautiful cities on the Gulf Coast of Florida.

More information: 9891 Gulf Shore Drive, Naples, FL 34108
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