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The Oranje world of Jacco Eltingh, hero of the Slams: “Former tennis players are not enough, we need the 'natives' of padel to grow”

Now that he holds an institutional role, the court is no longer his main stage. But **Jacco Eltingh**’s eyes still light up whenever he stands courtside to watch the **Netherlands**' team at the **FIP World Padel Championships** in Doha. The former world No. 1 in doubles tennis — winner of all four Grand Slams, including two titles at the Australian Open and Roland Garros — is currently the technical director of the **KNLTB**, the Dutch tennis and padel federation, where he oversees athlete and program development. It's a privileged position to understand where padel is heading in emerging countries like the Netherlands. *“In the short term, we're a team that aims to play in all the major championships”,* he explained after the "Oranje" men's team match against Paraguay. *“With the women’s team, we’re among the top 5 or 6 teams in Europe, and here we reached the quarterfinals. Overall, we have a team that can compete with the best nations and gain valuable experience, as we’re doing here in Qatar. In the long term, however, we're building a program from the ground up: we need to start from the youth level, where the youngest players begin to learn and then grow gradually”.*

Developing the new generation is vital for several reasons. The first, Eltingh continued, is that *“so far, many players have been transitioning from tennis to padel. But this won't be sustainable in the long term: at some point, we need players who are born into padel, true 'padel natives' who choose to play padel from the start”.* The path is long, but the progress made in six years — since the sport first gained ground in the country — has been substantial: *“Today we have 460 clubs and 2,500 courts”,* he continued. *“We have many students between 18 and 23 who play very well and have decided to dedicate themselves entirely to padel. The movement is clearly growing, and the future is bright”.*

THE TEAMWORK EXPERIENCE Another excellent example of this trend is Sweden, one of the most promising emerging countries according to Eltingh. *“I see young pairs who are incredibly skilled. Many come from junior tournaments, and here they're already playing at a high level, showing the right mix of youth and experience”.* It's no coincidence that another former doubles tennis great, **Jonas Bjorkman** - with whom Eltingh won one of his two Australian Open titles - is coaching the Swedish team and has reunited with him here in Doha. The teamwork experience on the court is reflected in their ability to convey it to young athletes: *“Yes, it influences my work. In doubles, you experience everything together — the tough times, the excitement, the fatigue — you always have to interact with your partner. It includes managing yourself, from waking up*

to the time of the match, which might be played late at night. I can teach the young players something: I see if they work well together, if they're connected, if they're nervous in important moments, if they make good or bad choices. That's what I try to do to help them and the coaching staff".

In addition to training, Eltingh enjoys getting on the court himself: *"I really enjoy playing padel; I often play with my sons, who are now 26, 25, and 23 years old".* And with his former partner Bjorkman? *"We played together once, a few years ago during Wimbledon. We were on a boat, guests of a well-known English gentleman. I'm not kidding — it was an enormous yacht, 95 meters long, and we were cruising the Thames. It was so big it even had a padel court. We played there, and it was a lot of fun".*

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