

For 85-Year-Old Tennis Player, There's Still Work To Be Done

Bradenton's Fred Sarkis aims to be a winner on the court and a positive influence in kids' lives through his foundation.

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Bradenton's Fred Sarkis is just as busy as he ever was, even well into his retirement.

In addition to publishing a book, giving motivational talks at local schools and prisons, and spending 30 hours a week working on his charitable foundation, the 85-year-old Sarkis also competes in national senior tennis tournaments and is one of the top 85-and-over players in the country.

“I want to be an example of retired people who give back and do things,” said Sarkis. “So many of my retired friends just play golf or tennis and have so much to offer, but don’t give back to the community.”

Introduced to tennis in his late 20s, Sarkis didn’t compete in his first tournament until the age of 75. Despite competing against former professionals and players who had been hitting balls since childhood, the wins quickly piled on for Sarkis. He finished last year ranked No. 13 in the 80-and-over division nationally. Last week, he reached the finals of a major sectional tournament in the 85-and-over division in St. Petersburg.

However, Sarkis said it's his charity work which gives him the most pleasure. He started the Yes Pa Foundation a decade ago, which provides free educational and character building tools to schools across the country.

“My inspiration for tennis is consistent with the mission of my foundation,” said Sarkis. “No matter how old we get, we should have a goal. In my case with tennis, it's to be among the top 10 in the country for every age group I’ve competed in.”

Over the last 10 years, Sarkis has given 400 talks to sixth-grade classrooms throughout Florida and his summer residence of Canandaigua, N.Y., using his Yes Pa book, which can be downloaded for free off [his website](#) as a PDF.

“Kids are amazed that I still have competitive goals,” said Sarkis. “It shows them you need to have patience and perseverance to achieve what you want. Tennis players start to make errors when they get impatient, and a lot of kids quit sports because they lost in high school or whatever it is.”

Sarkis said that much of the book also has a focus on bullying, which he believes is a subject that is necessary to discuss in schools.

He was on the receiving end of bullying growing up as a youth, where his difficult upbringing also consisted of working over 80 hours a week as a child on his father's truck.

“This isn’t a fiction book,” said Sarkis. “A lot of the references are based on my life, and it addresses the issue of what kids do when they’re bullied, as well as those who witness bullying. Seeing it and not doing anything about it is almost as bad as committing the act itself.”

Sarkis said he ultimately hopes to draw the attention of talk show host Ellen Degeneres and promote the foundation on her show.

“I have a feeling we could have some fun together,” said Sarkis. “I engage in a lot of humor in my work with kids, and think she would enjoy the act that I put on.”