



Ray Collins goes

ONE ON ONE

with Cliff Drysdale

I was lucky enough to meet Cliff Drysdale five years ago while doing an article on Amelia Island. I took part in a clinic with him that weekend, and I can still hear his one-line critique of my game: "Ray, your strokes are mechanically sound, but give me a foot less on your toss."

This smooth South African knows a thing or two about the game. Drysdale was one of the pioneers of the new World Championship Tennis group that revolutionized professional tennis back in 1968. His skills (he was one of the first to use a two-handed backhand), his business acumen as President of the ATP and his subsequent announcing career earned him an induction in to the International Tennis Hall of Fame in 2013.

Drysdale lived, until recently, on Key Biscayne but has since moved to Austin, Texas.

RC: Why did you move?

CD: Austin is where we first moved from South Africa in the 1970's and my kids never left. So we are back home.

RC: Take me back 75 years ago to the town of Neispruit where you were born and raised. How did you first start playing tennis?

CD: My parents played and I tagged along. I loved hitting against the garage wall. Hours and hours and I never tired of it.

RC: When did it become apparent you were good?

CD: I was always better than my peers in bat and ball games. Eye-hand coordination is what it was. I did not have a special talent and never believed I did. I developed confidence though.

RC: Who was your idol growing up?

CD: Eric Sturgess. South Africa's best player. I was Sturgess and the garage wall was my opponent. (Note: Sturgess won six Grand Slam doubles titles before passing away in 2004 at the age of 84.)

RC: Are you surprised most pro tennis players don't know the struggle you and other others went through to revolutionize pro tennis?

CD: Neither surprised or frustrated. Athletes do what they do. They owe it to themselves to be as good as they can be. History makes a great story and it was nice that timing put our generation in the middle of it, but we loved it. No one owes us anything.

RC: Who were the real heroes of that movement?

CD: Lamar Hunt, Jack Kramer. Without them it would have happened but taken a lot longer.

RC: You and Arthur Ashe were friends. What was he like?

CD: Arthur was a prince of a guy. To me he was not the icon he has become. He was one of the boys. Stoic, smart, fun-loving. You meet some in life who seem to see some destiny or higher purpose for themselves. Only in retrospect do I see that now about Arthur. We were not on the same side of the tennis political battle of those years, but we worked TV together after we retired and become very good friends. I miss him.

RC: Greatest players of all time?

CD: Roger Federer and Serena Williams. Word of caution, I tend to think the best player of the time is also the best player of all time.

RC: Who are the best players of tomorrow?

CD: Taylor Fritz, Frances Tiafoe, Stefan Koslov. CiCi Bellis, Monica Puig, Naomi Osaka.

RC: What do you say to those who think the men's pro game has become dull and one-dimensional?**CD:** Generally disagree ex-



cept the big servers with little else are boring to watch. Dull is being kind.

RC: Is tennis "bad boy" and former Sarasota Open winner Nick Kyrgios good or bad for the game?

CD: Good. I hope he lasts.

RC: Any changes in the rules you'd like to see?

CD: Several: 1) Stop the shrieking. Mandatory decibel levels. 2) Time clock on court. Shorter matches achieved by shortened sets, no-ad scoring, abandoning 5 set matches. 3) On-court coaching. 4) Greater media access to players. 5) Start matches on-time Less down time. 6) Strict rules to stop players leaving the court for things

like 'panic attacks.'

RC: Is commenting on tennis generally easy or difficult for you?

CD: The close knit ESPN family makes it easy. No kidding. It's easy when you are having fun.

RC: What mistakes do you see many amateurs commit?

CD: Making excuses and not trusting the swing.

RC: Any regrets?

CD: Wish I had dedicated more time to getting in shape. Then maybe the tour would not have been as much fun?

Ray Collins is a local newscaster on ABC 7, media consultant, and the "Voice of the Sarasota Open." He lives in Sarasota. Please visit www.RayCollinsMedia.com.

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