



Johan Kriek did me a huge favor 25 years ago—and he barely knew me. I was living in the Ft. Myers/Naples area, and I was trying to become a correspondent for a national tennis show. I needed to show the producers what I could do—so I dreamed up an idea to cold-call Johan and ask him if we could bring over a photographer, put a couple microphones on, and hit tennis balls back and forth while I interview him. He agreed. The producers loved it—and it led to many assignments over the next few years.



Kriek: I loved it. Sarasota is a big tennis community with all the academies around and the country club lifestyle, etc. Very vibrant and growing bigger. Sarasota is a beautiful small city. Had a great time there with many friends.

Collins: After you left Sarasota, you taught juniors in Roanoke and Charlotte—and now you've returned to Florida, but on the East Coast. What exactly are you doing?

Kriek: I run my own Johan Kriek Tennis Academy at the beautiful PGA Resort and Spa in Palm Beach Gardens. We are extremely

I've made a point to stay in touch with the affable South African as we've both moved around the country like chess pieces. These days Johan likes to joke that he's "58, 5'8"-- and shrinking."

But before he began shrinking, he had a wonderful tennis career that included winning the Australian Open twice in 1981 and 1982.

Collins: When did you first pick up a racquet?
Kriek: I started playing tennis at age 4 with my parents in Pongola, our farm town. They were just average good club players.

Collins: When did it become apparent you were good?
Kriek: I was always very athletic and as my parents said "very busy", so in order to keep me from doing serious mischief, they took me on the court at the end of their play and hit balls with me. At age 6 to 8, I was not missing balls. At age 12, I went to boarding school in Pretoria because of my tennis.

Collins: What do you think made you better than other kids?
Kriek: Honestly, ambition and hunger, that's it. Many people had perhaps more talent or more money, but I was a tougher kid.

Collins: Did you have any mentors?
Kriek: Growing up, this English man named Ralph Peddy, and another farmer friend who was also a doctor, (named) Siegfried Prigge, showed me the correct grips and played with me too. All I heard was "Rod Laver serves and hits like this" and "Ken Rosewall slices like this." It paid off!

Collins: Was South Africa a good place to grow up playing tennis?

Kriek: Tennis in South Africa was great, especially when I went to high school. I got to play the best juniors all the time. But being Afrikaans back then, and with tennis bosses from Johannesburg, it was definitely not as easy. They all thought I was going to go back to "the farm" and tennis is mostly for the "English." But all of it made me just tougher.

Collins: What was it like being a top world-class tennis player? Fun or a grind?

Kriek: It was not always fun. I hated jet lag and airports; and living out of a suitcase 10 months of the year is kind of abnormal. But it is what I chose, so you deal with it. Most of the time you got a table at your favorite restaurant. (Smiles.)

Collins: How did you enjoy your time in Sarasota?

happy and successful there with kids from all over the world joining our training programs. (**NOTE: See www.johankriektennis.com**)

Collins: What advice do you have for any amateur players reading this who want to improve their game?

Kriek: When in doubt, crush it! If all else fails grab a beer and try again!

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