



# MIC HUBER

**M**ic Huber has chronicled pro and amateur tennis for nearly 40 years for the Sarasota Herald- Tribune. But when he began at the newspaper, it was as a security guard and he didn't have much interest in tennis. Since that time he has witnessed the tennis explosion that has taken place on the Gulf Coast and all of Florida. He was here in the early days of Bollettieri and The Colony and the birth of the Nick Bollettieri Tennis Academy and the many players and #1 professionals that have emerged. If there are facts and secrets in tennis in our area, Mic Huber knows them. Recently we sat down at Bath & Racquet Fitness Club to find out how he became the Dean of Sarasota tennis writers.



## WHERE DID YOU GROW UP?

I was born in Ohio in a tiny one stoplight town called Milan, known as the birthplace of Thomas Edison. It is located near Cedar Point, a well-known amusement park on Lake Erie. After high school and during the Vietnam War, I joined the Air Force and spent three and a half years in Germany. After that I enrolled in Miami University in Oxford, Ohio for undergraduate and graduate studies with an emphasis on education. My motivation ran out around the same time as my GI bill.

## HOW DID YOU WIND UP IN SARASOTA?

My wife at the time had family in Florida and that's how I first fell in love with the area. I moved down for a teaching job and after substituting in the spring of 1976 at Sarasota Middle School, I had a job offer for the fall. I needed a summer job, so I applied at the Sarasota Herald-Tribune to be a security guard. I got a break working on the "women's pages" before moving into

sports. When I was given the tennis beat in 1978, I decided I'd better find out more about tennis. I started taking lessons and writing columns about rackets and equipment. (Laughs)

I got a phone call from a guy with a booming voice who told me I needed to learn more about the local tennis community. It was (coach) Mike DePalmer who invited me up to his club on 75th Street in Bradenton. Not long after that, a man named Joe Rizzo called and suggested I go out to The Colony on Longboat Key to meet someone named Nick Bollettieri.

I was talking to Nick at the restaurant, and he was saying (imitates gravelly voice) "Boy, this is what you should write, this is what you should write," but he also said "you gotta see this kid here," and he brought in Jimmy Arias. (Arias rose to #5 in the world in 1983.)

## COULD YOU TELL RIGHT AWAY THAT JIMMY WAS BOUND FOR GREAT THINGS?

I knew he was different. Certain people have that 'It' thing, you can tell right away. Another one like that was Carling Bassett. It was just the way she talked and reacted as a 12-year old.

## IS NICK BY FAR THE SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT TENNIS FIGURE IN THIS COMMUNITY?

Yeah. It would be interesting to find out just how many people are here because of Nick. And how much this area has been talked about around the world in relation to him. It's incredible. He is a magnet.

## IT WAS PROBABLY EASIER COVERING HIS TENNIS ACADEMY BEFORE IMG TOOK OVER?

You could go up there and walk around the courts. I talked to Andre Agassi that way, Jim Courier, Monica Seles, the Williams sisters, Maria Sharapova and all the staff. It was like being in a candy store. Now it's tougher to get through the gate. It's overwhelming how big it is now with all the sports.

## TELL ME YOUR FAVORITE STORY ABOUT NICK.

(Pause.) There was a tennis player named Hu Na who defected to California in 1982. I called Nick and said, "I know you're going to get your hooks into this girl. When it happens, let me know." Months later he called late at night from California and spoke in a whisper. It was all very dramatic. He told me what flight they were taking. I went to the airport and got a picture of them coming off the ramp. I sold it to the AP and UPI.

## DO YOU HAVE A FAVORITE PLAYER OF ALL TIME?

Monica Seles. I've known her since she was 11. She's truly a nice person. She'll stop and talk to a child and their parents on the street or someone with a pet--and she remains in contact with people she has met on the street and befriended. I remember that I used to get a handwritten Christmas card from her when she was a teenager. Over the years I could call her anytime and if she didn't answer, she'll call back. After

her stabbing, when she was finally thinking about making a comeback, we met out on Longboat Key for an interview. I remember that she drove out there by herself.

There was another player who would always call back. You didn't have to go through three layers to get to them. They knew what your job was: Martina Navratilova.

#### **MONICA'S STABBING WAS TRAGIC.**

She was at the top of her career. You just wonder, the 'what ifs'. She had Steffi Graf's number and Steffi became the best in the world winning two Grand Slams.

#### **WE RECENTLY LOST ANOTHER HALL OF FAMER IN THE AREA, MIKE DAVIES.**

Fun guy. Great stories. He did so much that people don't know. The yellow tennis ball! You can stop right there.

#### **WAS THERE AN ERA THAT WAS THE PEAK OF TENNIS IN THIS AREA?**

Participation-wise, it was the late 70's, early 80's. The newspaper held an annual tournament and it had over 1200 entries and we tried to play it over the long Memorial weekend. It was amazing!

#### **YOU WRITE A COLUMN PER WEEK. IS IT EASY TO FIND MATERIAL?**

It depends on the time of year. But you can always find something. This is such an incredible area for tennis. There are also some local players who always are good to write about. Jane Lutz is an amazing person. (Age 87 and winning world titles.) It also helps with the two tournaments here, the WTA event at The Oaks and the Sarasota Open.

#### **HOW OFTEN DO YOU PLAY TENNIS?**

Right now, I typically play five matches a week.

#### **ARE YOU GOOD?**

Not really. (Laughs.)

#### **TELL US ABOUT YOUR FAMILY?**

My first marriage was 25 years, and now Maryanne and I are on 11 years. We each have children and grandchildren.

#### **DOES YOUR WIFE PLAY TENNIS?**

No, she doesn't play tennis. She's a Certified Nurses Assistant and a talented artist.

#### **DO YOU HAVE ANY COLUMNS THAT STAND OUT IN YOUR MIND?**

I've had some participation columns that I really enjoyed: I played Anna Kournikova when she was 11. I lost. I did a column where I tried to return the serve of Mark Philippoussis who, at the time, had the fastest serve in professional tennis.

#### **AND DID YOU?**

I got my racket on a few. After hitting about 25 serves, he said, 'Last one mate.' He wound up and cranked a huge serve. I guessed correctly which way the serve was coming and dove out of the way. Just then the person who helped set up the session walked in and asked Philippoussis how it went. He said, "I missed him."

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