



Ray Collins goes

ONE ON ONE

with Stan Smith

When I first moved from the Northeast to the Southeast shortly after college in the late-80's, my car broke down on I-95 near the South Carolina-Georgia border. With no where to turn, I hitch-hiked to a rest stop and called my uncle up north who was VP of Sales & Marketing for Avis.

Coincidentally he was half an hour away on Hilton Head, SC. He brought me back to Sea Pines where I joined my uncle and aunt with Stan Smith and his wife, Margie. Stan couldn't have been nicer, and my head is still spinning about how that day began and ended.

Fast forward nearly 30 years, and Stan and I re-connected in Sarasota during the memorial service for our mutual friend Mike Davies. Stan was the same calm and affable gentleman I remembered.

Even though he's in the International Tennis Hall of Fame for his tennis prowess, many people know his name more for the Adidas sneaker that includes his name and image. He admits many kids think he's just "a shoe." He doesn't like to talk about it, but published reports indicate he's made a lot more on that sneaker deal from the early-70's than he ever did playing tennis. It's all part of his self-described "magical timing" you'll read about below:

RC: You were born 70 years ago in Pasadena, California. How did you start playing tennis?

SS: The Pasadena Tennis Patrons hired Pancho Seguro and I was lucky enough to get regular lessons from him every week. When I was 15, I was still playing basketball in high school. I won the national junior championships, which was kind of a fluke. I got lucky in the Round of 16. I didn't feel much pressure. I got a scholarship to USC.

RC: You make it all sound so easy. I understand you had a different Pancho that you admired?

SS: Pancho Gonzales was my size (6'4")--different temperament--but he had movement and finesse. My game was a little like that. I wasn't a huge power player, but I was aggressive.

RC: You seemed to come along at the right moment in tennis history, where the whole pro/amateur merger was complete.

SS: The pro tour began when I graduated from college in '68. My timing was perfect.

RC: You went on to be #1 in the world, two-time Grand Slam singles winner and became half of one of the best doubles team in history with Bob Lutz. What would you say is your career highlight?

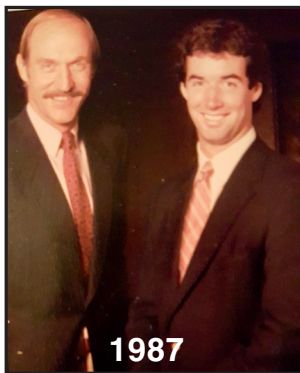
SS: Winning the U.S. Open in '71, Wimbledon in '72...seven Davis Cup teams was an overall highlight.

RC: Who were some of your teammates?

SS: Arthur Ashe, Bob Lutz...later John McEnroe, Brian Gottfried, Roscoe Tanner, Vitas Gerulaitis.

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

SS: He was a great player, but an even better individual. So many good things have been said. Not sure if it's overblown or not. When you die early and do so much as a pioneer, it's all pretty accurate. He was like (Roger) Federer. He was well loved and respected everywhere. Not as good a player as Roger, but really well-respect-



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ed. There were others who thought he was a racist and he was criticized on both sides. He was an outstanding person.

RC: What do you say to those who think today's men's game is boring and one-dimensional?

SS: It's funny you say that because when we were playing it was called boring and one dimensional for all the serving and volleying! It was fun to see the contrast of Borg-McEnroe, one attacking, one counter-punching.

But years later I do remember (Commentator) Tony Trabert saying that about Guillermo Vilas and Mats Wilander in the Finals of the French (Open). "Four-and-a-half hours and every point was the same."

RC: Who is the greatest player of all time?

SS: You mean 2nd? (Laughs.) Just kidding.

RC: Ha ha.

SS: Federer. Laver. Sampras. Borg. Nadal, Djokovich. Jack Kramer. Gonzales. Trabert. Kramer dominated players; he would have won a ton of Grand Slams (if tennis had been 'pro' during his peak).

RC: Do you ever wish you were turning pro now, during this bigger money era?

SS: My timing was magical in many ways. I had the advantage of being in the first wave of Open tennis. I have no regrets at all. I won 7 of 11 tournaments at one time, and today would have made \$10 million dollars, but at the same time I could have been 7 years older and not won anything. When Laver won Wimbledon in '62 he got a gift certificate to a sporting goods store named "Lilly Whites." A 25 pound certificate to buy anything he wanted! (Laughs.)

RC: When you see recreational players batting the ball around, what's the one thing you most notice we do wrong?

SS: Not preparing early enough. You don't want to have to rush.

RC: You were inducted in the International Hall of Fame in 1987 and returned to Newport, Rhode Island, to be President in 2011. Do you enjoy that?

SS: I do. The museum had a \$3 million dollar upgrade. We made a big change last year about the induction process. The tournament is in good hands. Todd Martin's done a great job (as CEO).

RC: You're living the good life on Hilton Head Island with your wife of 42 years, kids and grandkids. What else are you doing these days?

SS: Stan Smith Events...we help businesses entertain clients. We do about 7-10 events a year. We have the Smith Stearns Tennis Academy at Sea Pines. Our students have received over \$10 million dollars in scholarships to top universities. I'm also the Touring Pro for Sea Pines.

RC: Closing thoughts, advice, mantra?

Make the most of each day.

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.