

Death, Taxes and... The Annual Buffalo Tennis Players' Trip to Sarasota



--1,290 MILES--



For the past 26 years, about twenty tennis players from Buffalo, NY, have come down to Siesta Key for a long weekend of tennis. While a core group remains, hundreds of names have come and gone over the years.

Together the group has gone through births, deaths, marriages, divorces—and a lot of tennis.

On any given morning during that first week in December, the courts at the **Siesta Key Surf & Racquet** are booked and more players are waiting on the sidelines to play the winners.

But it's not just tennis. Players also bring golf clubs, rent bikes, and pack bathing suits for the pools and adjacent beach.

The Sarasota area became a favorite of Buffalo vacationers in the 1970s when former Buffalo orthodontist **Murf Klauber** relocated to Longboat Key to takeover **The Colony**. The destination became even more top-of-the-mind when Klauber recruited **Nick Bollettieri**, who in turn made Buffalo's **Jimmy Arias** his prize pupil.

Interestingly, many of the guys Arias used to spar with when he was barely ten years old are part of this annual escape to Siesta Key. Some of the players have stories of playing—and losing—to Jimmy when Arias was still in single digits and they were 10-20 years older. (Jimmy hasn't forgotten his roots. As you'll see in the picture on this page, Arias attended one of the dinners. He's 3rd from the left in the back row.)

One of the highlights of the long weekend is dinner at the home of **Earl** and **Sue Tomkins** in the Landings. They're snowbirds from Buffalo, and Earl was also one of the originators of the trip.

"It's been great how the tradition has continued and grown over the years," Tomkins said. "Much of the credit for getting started goes to Henry and Patty Porter who let half a dozen of us stay in their home (near the north bridge)."

While hundreds of guys have come down, only one lady has infiltrated the group. It's an unusual situation that seems to work: **Jenny Schneider** is not just the only female, she's also the youngest in the group, and by far the best player! But to the guys, she's either a little sister or a daughter—and in a few cases, a granddaughter!

For me, the visit is special for a variety of reasons. I'm from Buffalo and used to come down with the group before I re-located to Sarasota ten years ago. It's a treat to catch up with a couple dozen friends—and meet new ones—in a single weekend so far from "home." I used to fly 1200 miles to join the group, now I just drive a few minutes!

Rest assured the first weekend of December is already blocked off for me, and a couple dozen other guys—and one woman—in 2014! Another reason to love tennis! It brings people together.



Ray Collins is a Sarasota-based media consultant. Details at RayCollinsMedia.com



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