



Ray Collins goes

ONE
on
ONE

with the biggest names in local



I was nervous like I was preparing for a first date. I got up early and researched her background so I could ask intelligent questions. I even grabbed a video-camera to show us in action. I don't usually do that on dates. But I also don't usually have a chance to play tennis with a woman who won four Grand Slams and is a member of the International Tennis Hall of Fame.

HANA MANDLIKOVA

"Ray!" It was Hana, yelling my name over the din of the lawn mowers near the clubhouse deck.

"I can't play, I hurt my back last night," as she held her lower back, wincing. "We'll play again sometime," she promised. Clearly someone had told her I played 1st singles in high school in Buffalo and she didn't want to risk her reputation. It gave me more time to talk to the 52-year old mother of twins enjoying life in Bradenton.

RC: You're from Czechoslovakia, how did you wind up here?

HM: We were living in Boca (Raton) since 1981 and my twins got a scholarship at IMG. I wasn't so happy there after a year, so we left and came to "United" (United Tennis Academy at El Conquistador). That was three years ago.

RC: Do you like the West Coast of Florida?

HM: Love it. Love it. The people are so much nicer and more laid back here. I wouldn't dream of going back. Boca is all about money. This coast is much more real.

RC: Are you recognized often?

HM: As I get older, it's less and less which is great.

RC: I bet a lot of these younger players have no idea how much you accomplished.

HM: They don't. When I grew up, I wanted to know all about great players of the past, Rod Laver, Ken Rosewall, Billie Jean (King) but a lot of these kids don't even know who Kim

Clijsters is. If you want to be a great player, you should know about players in the past.



Ray Collins and Hana Mandlikova

That bothers me and scares me.

RC: You rose to #3 in the world in 1984, won 27 titles and were inducted in the Hall of Fame. What separates the top tier from the other pros out there who are also great players?

HM: I think it's the will to work hard. The seriousness. The talent. And technique. I saw a lot of good players growing up who became too satisfied too easily. They'd be happy to win one or two rounds of the Grand Slam and that's it for them because they know they had enough money to buy a nice car and nice house and they're satisfied. For me, I wanted more. My goal was winning Grand Slams, not just having a good living.

RC: Were you nervous when you played?

HM: I was always nervous because I wanted it so much. I put so much pressure on myself. As I look back now, if I hadn't taken it easier on myself, I would have won many more Grand Slams. That is one of the things I wish I had done differently.

RC: What would you have done?

HM: I would have gone to talk to someone (sports psychologist), but in those days they weren't as available. It wasn't nerves—they went away in a couple games, it was more in the Finals of the Grand Slams. When I was in the Finals of Wimbledon in '81, I lost to Chris (Evert) because I was overwhelmed.

RC: You coached fellow-Czechoslovakian Jana Novotna for nine years—including during her infamous melt-down in the Finals of Wimbledon when she lost to Steffi Graf after being just a few points away from victory.

HM: It happens. She choked. It was her first final. She was a fighter and she eventually won Wimbledon years later. (1998)

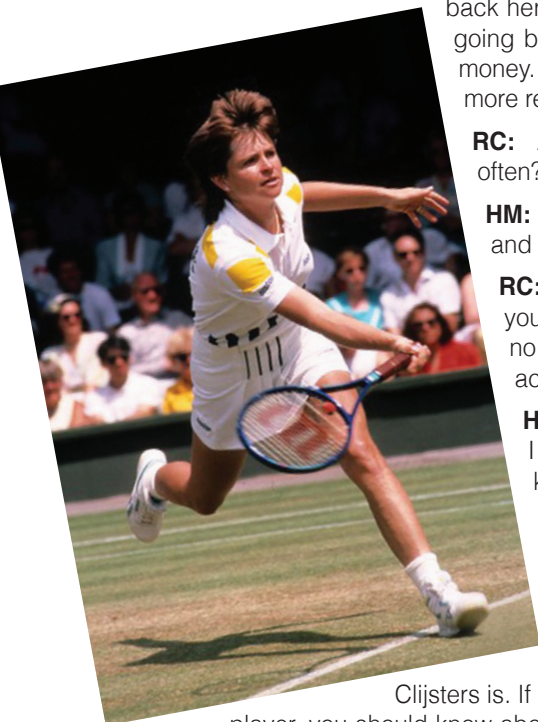
RC: Did you enjoy coaching?

HM: I enjoyed it very much, but when I started coaching Jana, she was very lazy and overweight and it was very hard. After she won Wimbledon, I said, "I can't do it anymore." I was done.

RC: Your twins just turned 12. Your daughter is already Top 25 in Florida in the 14's. Any idea how far they can go in tennis?

HM: It's hard to say, they both have talent. I can give them the best preparation and coaches, but in the end it's up to the player.

RC: Who is your favorite player of all time?



tennis in Sarasota/Bradenton.

HM: Roger Federer is the greatest player to have ever touched a racquet. The way he plays—the smoothness, the feel, what he does on the court nobody else can do. And he backs it up as a titlist. I mean, look at what he's done. I think he still has another Grand Slam in him. I think he can still win Wimbledon, that's his best chance.

RC: Women?

HM: I liked when (Justine) Henin played. She'd come in (to net), she had a nice backhand, good volley. I like the all-around player, I don't like the ones who just stay back and hit the ball.

RC: We aren't seeing much serve-and-volley these days, are we?

HM: No, and it's because the ball is hit so much harder. And (players) are so consistent from the back. And it takes longer to develop a chip-and-charge game and parents and coaches don't have the patience.



RC: Why aren't there more strong American players these days?

HM: Everybody is asking that question, and I think it's....(pause)...personally, I think they're spoiled. I don't think they know how to work hard, they get everything handed to them on a platter. It's difficult even with my own kids. I grew up in a middle class family and my Dad had two jobs. We had to fight for everything. Kids now don't have enough will and desire to reach their goals, and they're not going to reach them with excuses. It's in every business, not just tennis.

RC: What goals do you have left?

HM: I have twins, I'm trying to show them the right way to become good players. My Dad always said, "I'm so proud of you, not just for

tennis, but for the person you've become. I'm not ashamed of you. I don't have to go to prison to visit you." That's what I want to give my kids too. I don't want to be proud of them as tennis players, or as a doctor or whatever, as a human being. That's number one for me.

Ray Collins is a TV newscaster on ABC 7 and a media consultant. More details at www.RayCollinsMedia.com

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