



Ray Collins goes

ONE
on
ONE

with Max Mirnyi

Max Mirnyi

Max Mirnyi is one of the most intelligent, interesting and well-rounded pro athletes of his generation. Besides winning over \$10 million dollars in prize money, he also has immersed himself into humanitarian causes and even graduated from law school in 2008 from Belarus State University. He's an imposing 6'5" tall, but is quiet, soft-spoken and a dedicated family man.

Max, 37, reached a career-high of 18 in singles (2003) and finished in the top 50 in the world for seven straight years. He has been #1 in doubles with three different partners. He has won ten Grand Slams as recently as 2013. He has represented Belarus in the Davis Cup 35 times since 1994 when he was just 17 years old. He's also carried the flag of Belarus at the



Ray Collins and Max Mirnyi

Olympic Opening Ceremonies in London in 2012 where he won Gold with Victoria Azarenka.

We first met before a Bryan brothers exhibition in Sarasota a few years ago. While all attention was on taking pictures with the twins, Max stood apart from the crowd with his partner, waiting patiently to play.

How, when and where did you first learn to play?

At the age of six my father brought me to the local sports club in Minsk, Belarus where one of his friends was a tennis coach.

At one point did it become apparent you were really good?

Never really. I always had high goals set by my family and coaches throughout my whole career. I was just going about achieving those goals.

Who were your tennis idols when you were growing up?

No one, due to the fact that I saw very little international tennis up to the age of 14. That's the time when I came to Florida. And then hitting a million tennis balls at the NBTA back then and now IMG Academy. I fell in love with basketball while watching a lot of NBA games on the off time. I was very motivated by performance and success of Michael Jordan.

What has been the highlight so far of your career?

Everyone of my wins at tournaments was a very special and different feeling. Even though winning at Slams and getting the Olympic Gold might seem above all, to me, it is absolutely every tournament that I have won that gives me a great sense of achievement.

Is being a tennis pro a glamorous life, or a grind?

It is far from glamorous. In fact, if that's (an aspiring) player's main vision, why he or she plays the game, (there's) a good chance that he or she will be disappointed. For one or two Serenas or Sharapovas of the world, there are thousands of broken careers and disappointing endings. Sure, probably the top 50-80 players on the men's and women's side of the world ranking can make a good living and have the celebrity status in their little parts of the world—but even that success comes with a very hefty price. It is thousands of hours of hard work on and off the court, continuous sacrifice, determination and army-like discipline from a very young age.



Max Mirnyi and family

Who are your closest friends on the pro tour?

Normally it's my doubles partners, but generally speaking, the whole of ATP player family is very respectful of each other and very easy going with one another on the daily basis.

What made you decide to go to law school?

The work I was already doing in Belarus as a UNICEF Good Will Ambassador. I wanted to learn more about it and perhaps get involved with it more in my post-pro tennis career.

You have a wife and how many kids?

Four kids. Our older daughter just turned 10, second daughter will be eight in a few weeks, and the last two are boys—five years old and six months old.

Do you plan to stay in this area?

Very much so. However, I love my native country as well and try to go every year with the family there too.

Why do you like it?

Life in Sarasota/Bradenton area is very convenient. From its year-round weather, to the size of town where there is never traffic, to many other aspects of life. We like it for its modest culture where you get the taste of native Americans, but also a blend of Latin American and other European influence. You get many choices here for great food, entertainment, and of course, the beaches are just fabulous!

Do you have a motto or a mantra you live by?

I try to beat my own performance of yesterday, even by a tiny bit, no matter what I do.

What's a secret most people would be surprised to learn about you?

That I love pizza to the point that I have my own pizza restaurant with a wood oven. Please come to "Breakpoint!" (34th St W. and 53rd Ave in Bradenton.)



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