



KEI NISHIKORI

Few people in this world live the double-life of Kei Nishikori. He is an absolute rock star back in Japan, yet on the streets of Manatee County outside the gates of IMG Academy, he fits in like any other twentysomething.

But not many 26-year olds drive cars like he owns: a powder blue convertible Jaguar with all the bells and whistles. He's made over \$11 million dollars on the tour and much more than that in endorsements. He's come a long way since he won the Sarasota Open back in 2010 at the Longboat Key Club.

In just five years, Nishikori has been ranked as high as #4 in the world (as of this writing he is #7) and is considered one of the younger generation pros ready to replace the likes of Djokovic, Murray and Federer.

Nishikori was born in Matsue in Shimane Prefecture, Japan. His father, Kiyoshi, is an engineer, and his mother, Eri, is a piano teacher. He has an older sister, Reina, who graduated from college and works in Tokyo. He began playing tennis at the age of five and won the All Japan Tennis Championships for Kids in 2001. He graduated from Aomori-Yamada High School, and moved to Florida to train at IMG Academy in Bradenton. His hobbies include football, golf, reading, and listening to music.

In December 2010 – the same year he won the Sarasota Open - it was announced that Nishikori would be coached by Brad Gilbert for the 2011 season and by Dante Bottini from the IMG Academy. Gilbert also has coached Andy Murray and former world No. 1's Andre Agassi and Andy Roddick. Nishikori has also been coached by former world No. 2, Michael Chang, since January 2014.

A savvy, self marketer, the year Kei won the singles title at the Sarasota Open he hired a production company to shoot his matches so his fans back in the Far East could watch them live on the internet. And all this at the age of 20.

A few months ago, I had a once-in-a-lifetime chance to play a few points with Serena Williams, against her sister Venus and Kei. A vast majority of those who later viewed the video on YouTube were in the Pacific Rim.



While some pro athletes can tend to act bored, distracted or arrogant—I've never met a more grounded or accommodating person than Kei (pronounced 'Kay'). Here's a portion of a recent conversation:

HOW AND WHEN DID YOU FIRST START PLAYING TENNIS?

I started playing tennis when I was 5 years old. Both my

parents played tennis and helped me get started. I played mostly with my dad.

WHEN DID YOU FIRST REALIZE YOU HAD A SPECIAL TALENT?

I think around 12 or 13. I was starting to win a lot of junior tournaments in Japan.

WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU DO DIFFERENTLY THAN THE MILLIONS OF OTHERS WHO WANT TO BE A PRO? MENTAL? PHYSICAL?

Tough question. I cannot say what others do or don't do. But I can tell you that I work very hard. My usual day consists of two tennis training sessions of 2.5 hours each. Then usually another 2 training sessions in the gym.

WHAT'S YOUR THEORY ON WHY THERE AREN'T MORE STRONG AMERICAN PLAYERS LIKE IN THE DAYS OF COURIER, AGASSI, SAMPRAS, ETC.?

I actually think there is a really good group of Americans coming up. There are 5 or 6 young Americans who are doing really well. It is nice to see.

CAN YOU NAME THE TOP 2-3?

I'd rather not.

WHAT'S BEEN THE BIGGEST SURPRISE ABOUT YOUR CELEBRITY? THE WAY PEOPLE TREAT YOU? IS IT SURREAL YOU ARE STILL RELATIVELY ANONYMOUS WITHIN BRADENTON?

There have been some funny surprises. Last year someone sent me a marriage proposal. I had not seen that before. I like living in Bradenton because I can really focus on my tennis here. The IMG Academy has been my home since I was 14 years old and I feel really comfortable here.

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