



I didn't recognize the "310" area code on the incoming call, but for some reason I still answered the call even though I didn't know who would be calling me from Southern California.

"Hello?" I said flatly, ready to rumble with a telemarketer.

"Ray, this is Ken Solomon of Tennis Channel."

It wasn't a telemarketer. In fact, it was someone I had read about--and known of--for years, but never had any contact with prior to this call.

He was calling for information about a mutual friend's memorial service for which he was flying in a few days later. Never one to miss an opportunity, I thought quickly and offered to pick him up at his hotel, and take him to lunch before the ceremony. We hit it off instantly and have stayed in touch ever since.

Solomon is married, with children, graduated from UCLA and worked in several television networks before joining Tennis Channel ten years ago, where he is credited with its subsequent and phenomenal growth.

RC: When and how did you first get interested in tennis?

KS: Tennis in my family was like going to the dinner table every night. It is what we did, and still do, ever since I could walk. My dad, Steve, is 83, and Mom, Abby, is...well...younger. They are both still amazing players, and run me ragged when we play. Together for decades, they beat every challenger from Westhampton Beach, NY to Palm Springs, CA. They founded clubs, launched tournaments and were always leaders in whatever they did in the game.

RC: So you grew up in Palm Springs?

KS: Yes, and growing up in the desert, I was a ball-boy for Davis Cup (USA v Mexico) and also---what became---the Indian Wells pro tournament. I had a chance to meet all my tennis heroes there.

RC: Did you stick with tennis?

KS: No. As kids often do, in my late teens I forsook the "family game" to find my own sport and that was water skiing. I was also a professional magician and Club DJ.

Joining Tennis Channel, I quickly realized that as CEO and Chairman everyone automatically assumed I was a great player! I couldn't fake it, so I came back to tennis, had to really raise my game and now truly love playing in a way I never thought I would. Full circle.

RC: How good are you?

KS: Most of my opponents will tell you that I'm not as good at tennis as I am at building TV Networks. (Laughs) I played tournaments as a kid, but didn't have the focus to bear down under pressure and look adversity in the eye back then. The "life lesson" I get from tennis is---the more pressure on the line, the better I tend to play or perform in virtually all things. Youth really is wasted on the young!

RC: Were you a huge tennis fan intent on starting a tennis channel, or how did that come to be?

KS: I had enjoyed a pretty cool career helping run and build



some of the most amazing media companies in the world...Paramount, Disney, the Fox Network and DreamWorks (with Steven Spielberg, Jeffrey Katzenberg and David Geffen).

When I was approached by the founding investors of Tennis Channel, I told them it was a horrible idea that would never work, but then sure enough woke up the next morning with a clarity of vision for the opportunity as if it were carved in stone. The mission was irresistible and important. The network today is essentially that vision realized...only even better.

RC: Why do the major networks carry golf and not tennis?

KS: Golf has a clearly defined, usually limited broadcast window over just two days a week. Tennis, unlike any major sport, has no clock and that indeterminate match length is a killer for traditional television. Plus, it's played all day, every day, all year long in multiple locations around the globe, simultaneously. It's virtually unmanageable for general entertainment and multi-sport networks that's schedules demand precision to the second.

Golf has the PGA, tennis has no single governing body, but rather an alphabet soup of fractionalized leadership.

The good news is, all those things that hurt tennis in the old media world are advantages when we have a dedicated, dynamically programmed multi-platform channel/brand. Now, people know that pretty much 24/7/365 they can find 95% of the world's most important matches and best players and announcers right here on Tennis Channel, tennischannel.com and direct to subscribers on Tennis Channel Plus.

RC: What are your goals?

KS: For Tennis Channel, to help tennis level the playing field with every other major sport, both here in the US and around the world. This is the sport people can watch and play for life, and we are here to help people enjoy watching and playing with friends and family for a long healthy one.

We are on our way: Earlier this year, SNL Kagan (media research) declared Tennis Channel the fastest growing TV Network in America. While most other networks are declining, we are exploding on every popular platform, and are projected to grow to over 70 million subscribers by 2020.

RC: Closing advice?

KS: Work hard and play harder.



TENNIS CHANNEL

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