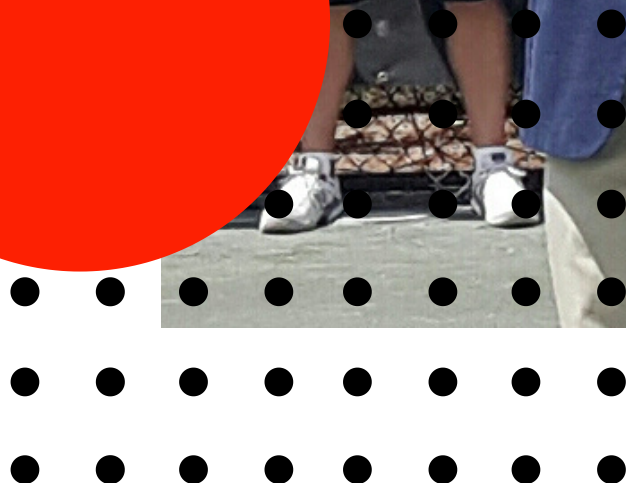
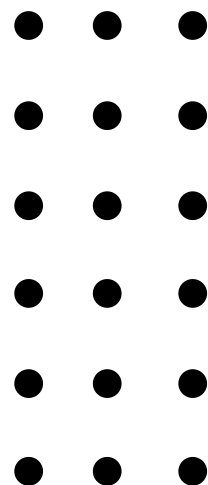


Sarasota Open





It usually happens before the start of the annual Sarasota Open. People who know I'm the Public Address Announcer will say, "So which big-name tennis players are coming for the tournament this year?" And I usually say, "Most of them you haven't heard of—YET." I've had the honor of meeting, researching, and then introducing hundreds of players since 2013, and now when I look at the biggest name in the game—chances are they came through Sarasota on their way to the top. I look forward each year to the Sarasota Open. When I was a local TV news anchor, I took the week off from work—but now that I'm a Realtor, that's not necessary.

Here's a look back at some funny and/or interesting moments:

*Top 50 in the world player Frances Tiafoe may be the most popular in tournament history. He came to Sarasota three years in a row, each time getting better and finally winning the title in 2017. Better yet—he charmed everyone with his easy-going manner and quick laugh. He was so likeable, I was moved to play a harmless prank on him: The Assistant Manager at United Tennis Club, Eva Teitlebaum and I approached him as he came back in the clubhouse with his trophy. She said, "Hey Frances, great job. How about a picture?" As he put down his bag, she handed him her camera and she and I posed! He laughed hard—and took the picture. You can see in our smiles that we had been up to something.

*Frances was also involved in one of the most infamous incidents in tournament history. During a nighttime match that ran late, a neighbor near the courts protested the late-night activity by producing their own noise out the window—a full-volume adult video. Tiafoe cut the confusion and tension by yelling, "It can't be that good!" That made worldwide news.

*Maria Sharapova, who lived on Longboat Key at the time, caused a buzz the year she quietly came to watch an afternoon match

*Some players are superstitious. University of Virginia champion Somdev Devarmann of India said to me "I heard you mention in your introduction of me that I'm a big fan of the Miami Heat." I said, "Right. Aren't you?" He laughed, "No, I don't know where that came from but keep using it, I'm winning!"

*Australia's bad boy Nick Kyrgios came through town just before he emerged on the international scene and blew through the competition. A man among boys. There was little doubt he'd win that year –and he did. He wasn't much fun—but he didn't break any racquets or yell at anyone as he is prone to do now.

*Another notorious sour puss, Tennys Sangren, showed his softer side the night a little boy approached for an autograph between sets. Sangren initially told him to come back after the match, but when Sangren noticed the little boy heading to the exit with his mother, he called him back over and signed his hat. (I took a picture of that sweet moment and shared it with Sangren who posted it to his social media pages.

*During one of the trophy presentations, something kept blinding me as I attempted to read the names of the winners. Turned out one of the doubles finalists, Peter Polansky of Canada, was playing a little joke on me by reflecting the sunlight off his runner-up trophy. Ouch.

Luckily, I don't have to wait until next year's tournament to get my tennis announcing fix. I'm fortunate enough to also be the Public Address Announcer for the Women's Pro Tournament this month in Naples.

Ray Collins is a former college tennis player and now an award-winning Realtor in Sarasota. More information at www.raycollins.cbintouch.com

