

TOP 10

STORIES FROM BEHIND THE MIC

Ray Collins



With the Sarasota Open starting April 7, Tournament Announcer Ray Collins counts down some memorable moments around tennis:

10) Covering the Miami Open in 1993, a fellow-reporter asked Andre Agassi how difficult it would be to get back in the Top Ten in the wake of his wrist history. Like a wise old sage, and not a 23-year old, the future Hall of Famer easily said, "It will be as difficult as it's important to me." Profound.

9) While covering the Senior Tour in Naples, I was determined to get a picture with my childhood idol Bjorn Borg. When it seemed the press conference was ending, I went outside the back of the tent and had a friend hold my camera waiting with me for Borg to emerge. He was too surprised to say no.





8) Back in the early 1990s, I was enamored by a national tennis show on the Prime Network. I reached out to the show's host who said "Produce a story and if it's good enough, we'll air it." I was doing the news in Ft. Myers and found out that tennis legend Johan Kriek lived in Naples. He agreed to an interview that I conducted while rallying with him. The producers loved the story and it led to many more opportunities. Years later we teamed up in the chair to co-emcee an exhibition in Sarasota.

7) While covering the Easter Bowl in Miami that featured the best junior players, the Prime Network said they'd pay me "per story." I saw twin teenage boys, dressed identically, with their parents sitting nearby. "Can I interview your kids?" Sure. Those little boys grew up to be the best doubles team in the history of the sport. I reconnected with Mike and Bob Bryan twenty years later where they told me that was their first TV interview.



6) As Tournament Announcer of the Sarasota Open, I've seen dozens of anonymous kids become big names in the tennis world. But there was an Australian player who came to the Sarasota Open one year who barely talked to anyone. He was like a man among boys. That player was the controversial and flamboyant Nick Kyrgios who is no longer quiet.



5) I grew up at the Buffalo Tennis Center playing next to a kid who was a year younger but much better. This 8-year old was hitting with all the adults and even won the City Open at age 12 before moving to the Sarasota area. He helped some guy named Nick Bollettieri launch-- what is now-- the IMG Academy. That kid on the next court was Jimmy Arias who went on to be the fifth best player in the world. Coincidentally he also lives in Sarasota and I've announced several of his exhibitions.





4) I interviewed Mike Davies, a Wales native who retired to Sarasota. He was inducted into the Hall of Fame for being a premier tennis promoter. (He invented yellow tennis balls for the TV cameras.) While planning an exhibition in Iran, he asked the government liaison who they would use for line judges. "We have some military snipers with excellent eyesight, and no one questions their calls." (I was honored to be the moderator of his Celebration of Life that drew a Who's Who of the Tennis World to The Landings Clubhouse on a Sunday afternoon a few years ago.) Mike and I posed by the sign where The Landings named court 1 after him, weeks before he passed away

3) Teenager Frances Tiafoe played in the Sarasota Open three years in a row before finally winning it in 2017. By then we had become familiar with each other and I knew he liked to laugh. A friend and I approached him after he received his trophy and said, "Great job, Frances, how about a picture?" As he took his bag off his shoulder and pulled up his shorts, we handed him my camera and posed for him. "OH, you want me to take it off you? You got me, ha ha, you guys got me."



2) As a member of the media, I was invited to play in an exhibition at the Key Biscayne Ritz Carlton during the start of—what is now—the Miami Open. Each reporter had the privilege of playing a point with the pros. Serena Williams and I played her sister, Venus, and Novak Djokovic. We actually had a long rally but eventually Venus hit a volley to my feet and we—well, I lost the point. I can still hear Serena chiding me to get to the net, “Come in, Ray.” I was so distracted that she used my name I missed the shot.



1) At that same event a year earlier, I played with Andy Murray against Novak Djokovic and Anna Ivanovic. During an exciting fast-paced rally at the net, Novak hit a shot down the middle—but I stuck my racquet behind my back and somehow volleyed it back just over his head to win the point. Murray laughed, "Good shot, mate." Novak smiled and shook my hand. I said, "Sorry about that." He said, "No, good shot." (Google: Ray Collins + Trick Shot to see the video.)

Ray Collins played Division I tennis for St. Bonaventure University. He's an award-winning Realtor, elected official and frequent MC of area events and galas. This will be his 10th year as Public Address Announcer of the Sarasota Open.

For information on tickets, go to www.SarasotaOpen.com

