

# “FIND YOUR NICHE”



**TENNIS ANNOUNCER ANDY TAYLOR HAS BEEN WORKING AT THE QATAR EXXONMOBIL OPEN AND QATAR TOTAL OPEN SINCE 2014. HE IS ALSO A RADIO AND VOICE-OVER ARTIST.**

**BY UDAYAN NAG**

Serbia's **NOVAK DJOKOVIC** is congratulated by a young fan after beating Czech Republic's Radek Stepanek during the quarter-final of the ATP Qatar Open tennis competition in Doha on January 5, 2017.

KARIM JAAFAR / AFP



**A**s the country celebrated the 25th anniversary of its premier tennis event, the Qatar ExxonMobil Open, there is an individual who continues to make his presence felt at the stadium court of the Khalifa International Tennis and Squash Complex. And he is not one of the players, but is closest to the action, albeit his role quite often starts at the end of a match. Andy Taylor has been introducing players and conducting post-match interviews at international tennis tournaments for 15 years now.

And there's more to him than that. He is also a radio and voice-over artist. Taylor, in fact, started off his career in Springfield, Missouri, with the KTTS radio station in 1997 and continued to work with them till 2011. Commitment towards the community was what attracted Taylor to that particular job.

"We covered news, played music and focused on families. In the US, morning radio shows are more about being entertaining and helping people get to work with smiles on their faces. So I would relate to people by telling them stories about my life. We would laugh for about four-and-a-half hours every

day. My day would start at 3:30 a.m. in the morning and my show a couple of hours later. It would finish at 10 a.m.," says Taylor.

"What I really adored about the job was the responsibility. There's something special about being the first person awake and accessing all the information before giving it to people who need it to get their day started. It was a great feeling, a great job to have."

Since Taylor's father was a radio artist, he did not have to go searching for inspiration. "My dad is 73 years old and he's still working with a radio station in Boston, Massachusetts. I grew up watching my father go to work and absolutely loving his job. That was my example growing up. I didn't want to be miserable in my job. I wanted to do something that I enjoyed. Seeing how much fun he had with radio shows, I decided that's what I wanted to pursue as well. So when I first started out as a teenager I volunteered at some radio stations. I scrubbed toilets and cleaned the side of the building for a couple of years before getting my first opportunity."

Radio eventually led to television, and then the career-defining moment for Taylor came just before the Fed Cup fixture between the US and Israel in 2002. "I got a call from a colleague who said that Fed

Cup tennis was in town and the United States Tennis Association (USTA) needed an announcer for it. I was really busy and tempted to say no, but went ahead and did the job. I saw Lindsay Davenport for the first time; Monica Seles was playing for the US at that time; the legendary Billie Jean King was coach of the team; and it was a neat event for our small community to host. I followed the players, did the presentations and wrote the scripts."

According to Taylor, things started falling into place from then on. On the final day of the tie he got an offer to go to New York to audition for the lead announcer's job at the US Open. At first he thought it was a joke, but the 2002 edition of the tournament at Flushing Meadows proved to be the turning point of his career.

"We had Venus and Serena Williams slug it out for the singles crown at a packed Arthur Ashe stadium. Then the next night we had Pete Sampras take on Andre Agassi in the men's singles final, and it turned out to be the last match of Sampras's career. I felt that if this is what the US Open was all about, I would do everything possible to continue performing in this role. It has just been a great relationship with the USTA. Year after year I keep going back to the US Open."

Taylor also explains how he would juggle his tennis job with the one at the radio station. "I would take my broadcasting equipment to the US Open, wake up at 5 a.m. in the morning and do my radio show from the Arthur Ashe stadium in New York. After that I would work all day till 2 a.m. in the morning at the US Open, get two hours of sleep before repeating the routine. It does teach a lot of discipline."

Apart from working at the US Open, Taylor has featured regularly at the ATP event in Indian Wells. He has also been part of the 2004 and 2016 Summer Olympics, held in Athens and Rio de Janeiro, respectively. Interestingly, his Doha chapter began at the 2011 Pan-Arab Games. Also, not only has he been travelling

There's a team around me which I can depend on, but as far as the presentation is concerned, it's all on my shoulders. I spend hours writing players' bios and scripts so that they can be introduced properly. I also conduct post-match interviews at the end of a match. I prepare the giveaways - the balls that the players would autograph. I also have to print everything so that I can hand out hard copies to the rest of the team, and then I go out on court for the presentation ceremony which includes conducting interviews at the end of a match."

Hosting the players' dinner gala at the hotel and preparing the script for that particular event are also part of Taylor's tasks. Talking to players at the conclusion of a match does provide an anecdote every

players and thereby the action, which is not possible in other places where gaining access to important areas might not be that easy.

Looking ahead, Taylor feels that it's his voice-over expertise and online marketing skills which will call the shots in the future.

"Voice-over is huge in my life right now since I am not getting any younger. Since 2011 I started focussing more on it and am enjoying it. I really like helping somebody manifest the vision they have for a video to be put on a website, a television commercial, or a movie project they might be working on. I have been building that part of my business lately."

"Now that work is focussed online, I can use the contacts and relationships which I have developed over the years. People can now hire me directly through sites like Envato. So a lot of the work I do isn't in Boston where I live. It's in places like Dubai, Paris, Columbia, Georgia, etc. Things are not completely online. There are still some studios which I have to visit, but nobody really employs me. Everything that I do now is freelance, an option which is becoming more and more popular because of the Internet."

And what does the future hold for youngsters aspiring to follow in Taylor's footsteps? "If anybody is aspiring to be a tennis announcer, I don't really know how to answer the question because it happened by accident in my case. I don't take it for granted and I know how incredibly lucky I was. Like any other profession, if you really want something, you need to put in the time and effort."

"If it's in Doha, you need to help out with the Qatar Tennis Federation. Get yourself close to the sport so that you have a chance to take advantage of any opportunity that might come your way. As far as voice-over is concerned, it's not an easy field. There are so many people who have niches and corners of the industry locked up. So I'm still finding my way. In the production aspect, whether it's film, online or television, I have not found a niche yet. That should be the goal. Find a niche where what you do is unique." ■

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to Qatar for the ExxonMobil Open since 2014, he has also been involved with the Qatar Total Open, the women's tennis tournament held annually in Doha, since that time. The challenges faced by him over here are a lot different.

"For the US Open, we've got a large team of talented professionals to work on production. I write the players' bios and take care of the presentations and voice-over for the content that needs to be put up on the big screens for radio and television commercials. I don't have to do post-match interviews there because we have TV broadcasters doing that job. Occasionally I do a doubles trophy ceremony."

"Now events like Doha are different.

now and then which gets etched in one's mind forever.

"A couple of years ago (in Doha) I asked Novak Djokovic about his New Year's resolution. He said that he wanted to have a voice like mine. And the same year at the Qatar Total Open I asked Victoria Azarenka about the distractions that come up during a match. She completely ignored my question and said: 'You make everyone sound like a rock star.' I just looked at her and replied: 'Thanks for changing the topic.' Those are some of the loudest moments that I can remember."

Taylor points out that one of the advantages of the tennis tournaments in Doha is that one can be much closer to the