

A NEW VOICE

Andy Taylor, the new compere at the Qatar Classic, explains how he got the role and takes a fresh look at the sport with Ian McKenzie

Sparta, near Springfield in Missouri, is about as far removed as you can get from Doha, Qatar, but Andy Taylor, the new compere at the Qatar Classic, has bridged that gap.

Andy really liked Sparta and loved hosting his morning radio show on KTTS. He needed to get up at 3.30am for the 26-mile drive into town, but the early rise was worth it, because his show was at the heart of the community and that's what he liked!

Andy lived in the woods, owned a pickup truck, an SUV, a Winnebago caravan and a bass boat. "It was a remarkably self-sufficient, independent existence," he explains. "My home had its own water well and we heated with firewood."

So how did someone who lived in the woods in the American Midwest end up compering a World Series squash event in Qatar?

Andy had worked on his radio show since 1997 when, in 2001, the US Tennis Association (USTA) hosted a Federation Cup event (for women's world teams) in Springfield, where the US played Israel. He was asked if he would be the announcer.

He picks up the story: "On the last day a guy was sitting behind me with a ball cap. He tapped me on the shoulder and asked 'what do you think about doing the US Open in NY?' I laughed and said 'whatever pal' and turned away and left it at that."

Two weeks later he got a call from the USTA, asking if he would like to try out for the job as announcer at the US Open in the Arthur Ashe Stadium. He also received a bit of advice: "The next time the president of the USTA (it was Arlen Kantarian) asks you a question, please don't blow him off!"

As Andy says: "Lightning struck." He headed to New York, where they were looking for

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Compere Andy Taylor (left) fell in love with squash after the Qatar Classic quarter-final between Mohamed ElShorbagy (pictured here) and Ali Farag

energy, life and someone to do the ceremonies, presentations between the matches, ramp up the kids during the day and create more buzz and atmosphere. Andy gave them buzz. "I did my best and they have asked me back. I have been doing it ever since," he says.

Other invitations followed and he moved to Boston, where he set up his voice artist business.

Andy has since compered at a number of major sports events, including the Olympic Games tennis competition.

An invitation to Qatar to comper at their tennis events followed and now he does the men's Qatar ExxonMobil Open and the women's Qatar Total Open each year.

"I've been working with these guys since 2014. We have had some fun. There is always a big production and a ceremony before the trophy presentation," he explains.

When squash came under the auspices of the new Qatar Tennis, Squash and Badminton Federation, it was not unnatural for him to be invited to comper the Qatar Classic as well.

Andy played sport when he was growing up, but squash was not on his radar, nor that of most Americans for that matter.

After the invite to Qatar he realised he needed to get up to speed with this new sport quickly and arranged a trip to the U.S. Open in Philadelphia.

"I had never seen it played or even knew how it was scored," he explains. "I sat there through eight matches and felt when I left it was good. It was cool."

He feels squash has great potential, but believes it has to get more exposure. Andy thinks the glass court for the Tournament of Champions in New York's Grand Central Terminal is a fantastic idea, but would like to see something similar done to promote squash at the US Tennis Open, where they get up to 150,000 spectators.

“It is huge, it is visually appealing,” he enthuses. “When you see a glass court for the first time, it inspires curiosity and when you see a match like the Farag-ElShorbagy quarter-final – and I said this on Twitter – this is the match that made me fall in love with squash.”

Andy likes the fast pace and the drama. "I adore the sport now," he says. "To watch Farag come back, save three match-points and force the match into a fifth game, that is everything. To see a match like that, how can you not fall in love with this sport?"

SQUASH

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