

ANDY TAYLOR

# THE VOICE OF THE US OPEN



Taylor to "Qatar Tennis Link"

# I like Doha and the wonderful atmosphere in Qatar ExxonMobil Open and Qatar Total Open

He is best known as "The Voice of the US Open" but you can also hear him announce at the Qatar ExxonMobil and Total Open tournaments. Andy Taylor got his start in the industry as a radio show host and really never imagined becoming an international stadium announcer. Yet after being given the opportunity to voice the US Open in 2001, he never looked back and his life has not been the same since then. Andy tells Qatar Tennis Link about his experiences and his best moments with players in doing this job.

**Tell us about your experience as a stadium announcer for both the ExxonMobil and Qatar Total Open tournaments?**

I started in 2014 and that was the year Rafael Nadal won the championship in the men's singles. It was phenomenal because he had about nine months off and he was just making his comeback in the ATP world tour. Then that same year, Simona Halep had won six championships and six titles the year before. In the end, she won the 2014 Qatar Total Open title over Angelique Kerber and it was an absolute blast.

It was the first time that I had hosted these events in Qatar but not the first I had been to Doha. The first time I came to Doha was for the 2011 Doha Arab games and I was just an announcer there.

That was my first experience in Doha so it was nice to have had some time here before I came to work these events and I absolutely enjoyed it.

**What do you think about these tournaments?**

One of the best things about the Qatar Total Open and the Qatar ExxonMobil Open is that it is intimate. When you go to a Grand Slam such as the Australian Open, Roland Garros, Wimbledon, US Open, there is so much happening. Many of the extra events distract you from just seeing the players. But if you are a true tennis fan, you want to be up close and personal. Regardless of where you sit at the the Khalifa International Tennis and Squash Complex, you really feel like you are on top of the action. Additionally, you also have more access to the players just walking around on the grounds. You see the players going back and forth to the media center for their interviews and you get to see them up close instead of just on television. I have always told people if you are really a fan of tennis - Grand Slams are amazing, they are events in and of themselves. But, to experience tennis itself and to see your favorite players up close, events like the ExxonMobil Open and the Qatar Total Open are ideal, just fantastic tournaments.



## How do you see the tennis and Qatar? What do you think about the level of tennis in Qatar?

Well I haven't really had a lot of opportunities to see very many Qatari tennis players. I got a chance to see Mubarak Shannan in the men's event, and I was very encouraged to see how well he was playing.

It takes time to grow a program. If there is a big name in town like Serena Williams, Novak Djokovic or Andy Murray, the fans want to be there to be a part of the celebrity. I think those big tournaments would help both players and fans absorb the passion for the game itself.

You can't really change people's minds or make them like something. All you can do is campaign for something like what happens for tennis during the ExxonMobil and Qatar total tournaments. For example, I know football is huge here. Everybody loves football and team sports are great. Why are they great? Because you feel like you are part of something. You've got a group of guys on the pitch and that's the team you support. You really get behind your club and your organization.


But when it comes to tennis, and this is what I love about it, it's an individual sport. In tennis, it is one athlete versus another athlete, one on one. You have to have the physical stamina of a marathon runner as well as the mental stamina of an elite golfer. You throw all of that into one big ball and I would argue that the tennis athlete is probably one of the purest athletes on the face of the planet. Because it is a combination of the mental and physical. That's why I'm passionate about the sport, because I really believe it is one of the elite sports that we have because of it's one on one nature.

## Do you have any ideas on how to further promote tennis in Qatar?

One of the best things that can happen is for you to have success with a specific player because this will give younger people someone to look up to. I think a great example in

this region is Fatima Al-Nabhan from Oman. Her mother put a tennis racket in her hand at a young age and really helped her and pushed her. But the more success that you have with local athletes, the more opportunities that we will have to say, "look this is what you can attain as well." But ultimately, it's about getting tennis rackets in the hands of more people and making the sport itself more accessible.

It's not just a problem in the Middle East, it's a problem everyone. In the United States, tennis is kind of seen



**Began his career with a radio show then he became one of the most famous voices in tennis tournaments**

as an expensive sport. Rackets are expensive. You're always having to buy new balls. You have to have access to a court. Do I need to be part of a club? It's not as easily accessible as grabbing a football and going out on a field or the asphalt somewhere and kicking the ball around. I honestly think that the QTSBF and the crew here is doing a very decent job, the best job that you possibly can do to promote the sport here in Qatar. It just will take time for people to adopt it and embrace it as part of their lifestyle and what they want to do. I mean think of how many tournaments are hosted here. It's a lot, which means you are on the right track. It just takes time. And, I know Nasser, the QTSBF president, is so passionate about the sport and that has helped.

## So now let me know more about you. Tell us about yourself and your career?

I first got involved in tennis when I was in high school and then as I got older and started working, I was so

busy I didn't really have time to pay attention to what was going on in the tennis world. The only thing I knew about Andre Agassi was that he was selling Canon Rebel cameras. I really didn't follow the sport. I was working in radio and I had a morning show in Springfield, Missouri for 15 years. Then, about 5 years into that job, the United States Tennis Association had an event in Springfield and they needed an announcer and someone suggested that I do it. So I went and I helped them with that. On the last day of the event, a gentleman tapped me on the shoulder and said, "hey what would you think about being the announcer at the US Open in New York?" I thought he was joking, so I just kind of blew him off saying, "yeah, whatever, buddy." And about 3 weeks later I got a phone call from the USTA and they said no, we are serious. We would like you to come out and try out for the job as the announcer at the US Open. So I went there in 2002, and did the night sessions at the US Open. And it was the year we had Venus and Serena in the ladies final as well as Pete Sampras and Andre Agassi in the men's final. It was electric, unbelievable. I was hooked and so I've been the voice of the US Open ever since. Last year was my 15th year and this has grown into other roles throughout the years. I've worked at Indian Wells, obviously I work here in Doha. I've done tournaments in Memphis, Davis and Fed Cups all over the United States. It's just sort of morphed into event hosting and doing sporting activities like this. On top of that, now I'm no longer in radio but I have a voice over business wherein I do voice overs for radio and television advertisements as well as a lot of online work and things like that. So that's how I spend most of my time working on my voiceover business. And then a few times out of the year I take time off from that to come to Qatar to host the men's event in January and the ladies event in February, the US Open in New York, stuff like that.

## What's the worst experience you have had in announcing a match?

Rain! Rain delays! It's such a



challenge. Tournament supervisors have to shuffle things around. I mean think about how challenging this has been for the players to have to play two matches in one day just to try and advance to the next round. Not only is it challenging for the players, but it makes it difficult for guys like me that have to prepare biographies for each player for the match. So rain is the most challenging aspect.

### **Do you warm up your voice?**

No. I don't. I'm not an opera singer. In fact I'm a terrible singer. I'm tone deaf. Listen the important thing about what I do is to be able to tell a story. Imagine reading to your children. That's what it's like. When you're describing someone's accomplishments, you want to bring their proudest moments forward. But you want to tell it in a way that the audience follows along with you. You need to be able to just tell a story, use inflection in your voice, not like you're reading to your kid, but give a player's story some life. So that the fans who spent money on tickets to be part of an event feel invested, emotionally invested in this match. That's my responsibility.

### **What do you think of Doha?**

I love Doha.

### **what do you think of the people in Qatar?**

I love them. You know everybody's been very friendly. Everywhere I go. And you know this is one of those places where if you smile at somebody, they are going to smile back at you. In the United States it's not really like that right now. Everybody is so busy or they've got their noses in their phone. I smile at everybody on the street in Boston where I live, and often times people think it's creepy. Friendliness is creepy in the United States nowadays. So it's nice to be in an environment and in a culture where people like saying hello to each other. I appreciate that quite a bit because I've always been an outgoing, friendly person. It's nice to be in an environment where I'm around others who are just like that, which is great.



### **Do you have a favorite player?**

I really don't have a favorite player, because I'm more of a fan of moments and stories.

Right now, the best, most talented players would be on the men's side such as Novak Djokovic, Andy Murray, Roger Federer, Rafael Nadal. On the ladies side, Serena Williams. But here's the thing, when I do this job it's all about moments.

When Michael Berrer from Germany defeated Rafael Nadal in Doha in 2015, that's a moment that I'll never forget. What was interesting about it, is that I rode in a cab with Michael to the stadium a few days before he won that match. He was telling me that he was thinking about retiring this year. I didn't even know who he was when I got into the cab. We just sort of introduced ourselves. It was just really interesting and I wished him good luck. Then, a few days later, to go the court and watch him defeat Rafael Nadal was a pretty neat thing. So Michael Berrer, his character and who he is have become one of my favorite people in tennis. There are other people that I really enjoy talking to who may not be the best players, but I like talking to them because of their spirit and because of who they are. They could be strange and different people or maybe they are just outgoing and friendly. For instance, there's a guy named Ernests Gulbis from Latvia. He's always an

interesting interview, because he wears his heart on his sleeve and he will tell you what he's thinking. You never know what's going to happen. I really adore those moments because this person is giving you their authentic self. Another player who's one of my favorites is Naomi Osaka from Japan. Naomi knows that she's different. She's socially not as easy to talk to or to get along with. So if you approach her and try to speak with her, she might be a little standoffish and you would think she's just not a very nice person. But it's not that. She's shy. I had an interview with her on the court at Indian Wells one time where I was just trying to have a simple conversation with her and I wasn't asking her a question, with a question mark. I was just trying to have a conversation with her and she said, "This is an interview. Aren't you supposed to ask questions?" I said, "Ok, well, no seriously I mean it's a pretty cool deal that you've made it into the second round. Don't you think?" And so she goes, "yes." She could be really frustrating for people like me, but I find it a challenge, a fun challenge. How do I help this person come out of that shell a little bit so that they're not trying to protect themselves behind some sort of wall. I find those types of people very interesting. And it's stories like that I usually share because I love the story behind people not necessarily the celebrity associated with success.



# QATAR tennislink

Periodical magazine issued by the Qatar Tennis Federation

ISSUE 21 - AUGUST 2017



**TAREQ ZAINAL:**

ACHIEVEMENTS IS GOING  
ON AND OUR DEVELOPING  
PLAN INCLUDES ALL

QTSB  
UNVEILS

**"TAMIM AL-MAJD"**

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