



Great Escapes: Celebrity Tennis Coach and Lifelong Lensman James Bollettieri's Favorite Photographers

By Brian Mastroianni April 9, 2021 10:11 am ET



Tennis coach James Bollettieri.
Courtesy James Bollettieri

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James Bollettieri has tennis in his blood. While he's the son of famed coach Nick Bollettieri —founder of the IMG Academy, which developed stars like Anna Kournikova and Andre Agassi —Bollettieri has staked his own claim as an elite coach over a career spanning 45 years.

Bollettieri, 65, doesn't think of tennis as merely a sport, but part of a varied "lifestyle" that encompasses art, photography, his love of surfing, and the outdoors. It's all part of a whole that defines who he is.

Some of Bollettieri's earliest memories of tennis stretch back to being four years old and on the court beside his dad up to his young adult years traveling the country, initially observing his father and later mentoring and shaping tennis greats himself.

Bollettieri says he started coaching at just 15, working during the summers at his father's camp, filling in wherever he was needed.

"It started out with 'son, go down there and take care of that section of mainly adult women,' helping out wherever there was a need, which eventually grew to running camps, which is a big responsibility," Bollettieri says.

That dovetailed with his burgeoning interest in photography, which began when he was in the ninth grade. He would go on to earn his Bachelor of Arts in photography from the University of Miami.

Bollettieri has photographed the likes of John McEnroe and Roger Federer, his work appearing everywhere from ESPN and art galleries to the walls of tennis clubs around the country and the U.S. Open.

"I would say it's the depth of the photo that makes a good one. When you look at it, it moves you emotionally as well as making you feel good. It's not just one type of feeling you get out of it. It's not just something on the surface," Bollettieri says of what draws him to photography.

That concept of depth could also apply to the tennis players he admires. He explains that what makes a great tennis player isn't just "the technical part and fitness and getting the movements right," but also personality—a dedication and curiosity to not just get better at the sport, but embrace a well-rounded lifestyle.

That combination of athletic talent and personality he says is exemplified by people like Jim Courier, whom he coached and traveled with for two years as a rookie-turning-pro player.

Under Bollettieri's father's tutelage, Courier would go on to rank number one in the world, and win four Grand Slams and five ATP Masters titles. Beyond that, he's an accomplished musician and popular sports commentator.

"He made it more exciting, he brought in fans as a top commentator and someone with a full life—that's a guy that did it all and used the potential of hitting the tennis ball in every part of his life and business world," Bollettieri says.

Currently, Bollettieri is partnering with private condominium Arte, located in the beachside community of Surfside, Fla., where he lives. There, he's the face of the exclusive "Bollettieri Experience at Arte Surfside," where he and his team of tennis professionals offer high-performance training sessions and private tennis instruction to residents. Bollettieri helped design the rooftop court at the building, which rests just north of Miami Beach.

Penta caught up with Bollettieri to hear about five of his favorite photographers.

Man Ray. "Really love his work, he is a unique kind of artist, an experimental photographer."

Robert Mapplethorpe. "I love his portraits. The way he did still lifes and took people's portraits, they've definitely influenced me."

Henri Cartier-Bresson. "His candid work, his street work is something I would do when I was on the tennis tour coaching. I would go through the streets of Paris, or Germany, or Brazil, and I would document the lifestyle around me."

Walter Iooss Jr. "Probably the coolest photographer you'd ever meet. He's a sports photographer but I would say he's more than that. A very cool guy, a big influence."

Edward S. Curtis. "He documented the Native Americans like no one has done in this country. His work is quite extraordinary. If you've never looked at his work please do, it's really, really beautiful."