



USTA NORTH CAROLINA

MORE THAN MATCHES

Tennis and relationships

They've been battling it out on the courts for more than ten years and hugging it out at the net after each fight.

Sloane Stephens, 26, and Madison Keys, 24, began their relationship as junior players, but their friendship is one of the most widely known and beloved on the WTA tour.

"I've obviously made a lot of friends that I've not have made if I wasn't playing tennis. Madi[son] is one of my closest friends, even though that's sometimes frowned upon because we play an individual sport," Stephens told a press gathering at the 2019 Volvo Car Open.

Keys admits the sport has given her more than she could have imagined. "Tennis has brought so much to my life – not even just the profession itself. It's the experiences. The relationships and the friendships. They have been so much more important than being able to say, 'I'm a professional tennis player.'"

It's not just players at the top who have enjoyed matches off the court. Appalachian State University Tennis on Campus Club President Hallie Fite was engaged after her last match with her mixed doubles partner and now fiancé, Kyle Kennedy.

"I was so in shock but excited. We've spent a lot of time together because of tennis. In fact, I've met quite a few of my friends through the years because of all our matches." Fite says.

Sandy and David Yamane of Winston-Salem also connected through tennis, beginning a friendship through mixed doubles. David is also a master racquet technician, so he served as Sandy's sometimes stringer. This year marks their eighth year together, and yes, they still play mixed doubles.

"I cannot think of anything I would rather do, or anyone I would rather do it with, than taking the court to play mixed doubles with my wife," says David. "Tennis brought us together and Tennis keeps us together."

Byrdie and Daniel Kent were already married but decided to take up tennis to spend more time together. Byrdie had picked up a racquet in high school and participated in a couple summer tennis camps. When she heard about the USTA North Carolina Try Tennis program, she decided to wrangle her husband into participating.

Kent says the couple have two small children and wanted to treat themselves. "Anything we can get to do out and about together in Asheville is so special.

We decided we needed a date night and Try Tennis ended up being an amazing experience. Whether you are new to town or just want to make new connections, tennis is a great way to meet people and find friendly competition."

It was more than just friendly for Chris Schermerhorn. It was family. Her mother, now 85, requested she play in a league team more than 30 years ago, and the now experienced 4.5 player has not missed a season.

"Those ladies were older than I was. I was still in my 20's and no one wanted to play singles, so I did. A friend of mine and I took turns. We had such a good time we decided to build our own team, and I am still friends with so many of those women today," recalls Schermerhorn.

"We all have such busy lives that I don't know how people who don't have tennis find time to get together with friends. It's social. It's exercise. It's competition."

The competition with friends is one of the things Stephens says she enjoys most. "You can definitely be friends with your opponents. Your friendship has nothing to do with how you play. If you don't show up to play that day, that's on you, not because of your friendship."

Less than a week after Stephens gave her statements, Keys went on to beat her for the first time in their WTA careers in the semi-finals of the Volvo Car Open (7-6, 4-6, 6-2).

April 20-21 the two resume their roles as friends and compatriots playing for the United States of the Fed Cup team in San Antonio, TX. Stephens, currently ranked no. 8 in the world, and Keys, ranked 14, will lead the team in a battle against the Swiss for a spot in the top-tier World Group in 2020.