

Interview with Allen Fox  
SESSION 1 (6/11/2020)  
Timed Log

[00:00:00]

Fox is born in Chicago, Illinois [in 1939]. Family moves to Los Angeles, California, when he's two, and they live there for most of his life. Father passes away when he is ten years old. Brother's asthma prompts the family to move to Tucson, Arizona, where they live until the middle of high school. Begins playing tennis [at the age of 14] while in Tucson. By age 16, he becomes the best 18 [and under] player in Arizona, New Mexico, and West Texas. Family moves back to Los Angeles for better tennis competition.

[00:02:32]

Attends Beverly Hills High [School] and lives in the outskirts of poor Beverly Hills. Within a year of first playing, he gets nationally ranked as number 35 in the 15 and under age bracket. Begins winning junior tournaments by age 16. Despite starting the sport relatively late and not excelling in other sports, he quickly develops in tennis. After two months of playing, he makes it to the Tucson City tournament. Makes it to the semifinals as there are just four players in total. Possesses a great mental understanding of the game and is primarily able to teach himself.

[00:06:15]

Though primarily teaching himself the game, he receives two informal lessons from a University of Arizona player to learn different grips. Teaches himself techniques like volleying by watching and emulating the top players. Moving to LA provides more opportunities to work with other players.

[00:10:41]

Trajectory towards becoming a nationally ranked player. He loses in a qualifying tournament in Arizona, which would have paid him to play on the East Coast. Goes to visit family in Roslyn, New York. Since he's ranked number two in Arizona, his cousin encourages him to call [the national junior championships officials in] Kalamazoo [Michigan] to see if he can gain entry into the tournament. He's accepted to the tournament. The cousins travel by bus to Kalamazoo, and they sleep on benches in the gym. At Kalamazoo, he sees and plays on a clay court for the first time. Using the lobbing technique that was used against him in the [Arizona] qualifying tournament, he wins his first match against the best player from Texas. Then he plays the second seed in the country, Earl Buchholz, and wins the second set, before losing. This convinces people he can play. [Returns to New York and] enters the New York Metropolitan Tournament. Seeded first in the tournament, he lobs every ball again and wins. This leads him to ultimately get ranked number 35 in the country after only playing for a year and three months.

[00:15:43]

Returns to Tucson, and everyone believes he's a player and is afraid of him. Wins the Southwestern 15 and Under tournament and begins improving relatively quickly while he's a tenth grader at Tucson High School. Playing in the 18 and under division at age 16, he wins the Arizona Open [in 1955], which includes players from California and across the Southwest. Also plays in the New Mexico Open and wins the singles [championship] and reaches the men's doubles finals. During his tenth grade (sophomore) year at Tucson High, his mother moves the family to New York. He wants to continue playing for Tucson High, so he briefly lives on his own, renting a room from family friends [1955-1956. He lives on his own from ages 15-16]. His boost in confidence allows him to develop so quickly. Eventually, he becomes established as a top player in the area, so his mother moves him and the family to LA to continue developing.

[00:19:00]

Moves to Los Angeles and begins attending Beverly High for his junior year [1956]. Initially, ten players are better than him [in southern California], but only three or four remain within a few months. He doesn't initially understand why he's so good since he isn't a good athlete, but his capacity for work ethic motivates him to go through more practice and repetitions, which allows him to improve quickly. The two big southern California tournaments are the Southern California Championships and the Ojai Tennis Tournament. Wins the Ojai tournament, beating the second and third best players in southern California, who are both ranked top 10 nationally. Becomes the fourth-ranked player in southern California by the end of the year, and the Southern California Tennis Association starts sponsoring him for tournaments.

\*\*Additional note from Fox - Wins the Southern California Junior Championships at age 18.

[00:21:58]

Life gets suddenly better [after being sponsored by the SCTA]. He develops a friendship and even plays doubles with [Eric Hilliard] Ricky Nelson, a teen idol and highly-ranked junior player. Tennis is social at this time. Many celebrities are interested in it, so he plays socially with several movie stars, including Kirk Douglas, Charlton Heston, Dinah Shore, and Ginger Rogers. Good players often receive guest membership to the Los Angeles Tennis Club, which is the mecca of tennis in LA. Tennis involves money and social standing and coming from a Jewish family without money, and he doesn't have either. He's unable to become a member of the LA Tennis Club, but he can have a guest membership because he's a good player. [See Otis Smith interview about becoming the first non-White member of the LA Tennis Club after Arthur Ashe writes a letter on his behalf in 1975.]

[00:25:54]

During his senior year of high school [1957], JD Morgan invites him to begin practicing with the tennis team at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). He's able to beat most of the

players except the number one. He's ranked seventh nationally in the juniors, and wins the second-biggest tournament in the country, the National Junior Championship Tournament. Joins the Junior Davis Cup team [in 1957] and travels the east coast grass circuit, including Merion [Cricket Club in Pennsylvania], South Hampton [New Hampshire], Boston [Massachusetts], Brookline [Massachusetts], and Newport [Rhode Island]. The game is an amateur game supported by people with old-money. The players lodge in homes of very wealthy people, and they attend formal social functions. All of the big tournaments are played on grass, like the United States National Championships at the [West Side Tennis Club in] Forest Hills, [New York].

[00:28:54]

Being a Junior Davis Cupper, his way is paid, and people expect him to become a good player. Even Sports Illustrated features him. [Comparatively,] players like Arthur Ashe and Charlie Pasarell are expected to become great and likely win Wimbledon. He is expected to become a good player who can beat the great players but is right below the great players. Named to the Junior Davis Cup Team in 1957 after finishing his senior year of high school and winning the Ojai tournament. As a Junior Davis Cupper, the United States Lawn Tennis Association (USLTA) sponsors him.

[00:31:31]

Torn between choosing UCLA or Stanford University, both of which are recruiting him for tennis. Drawn to Stanford after being flown up for a weekend to visit campus and meeting a girl at a luau. As a good student, he's also offered an academic scholarship. However, he ultimately chooses UCLA after learning a childhood friend is going there. Due to good grades, UCLA offers him honors and entrance, as well as an athletic scholarship. Ranks number one on the freshman team. Ranks amongst the top 15 men in the United States during sophomore year and becomes the varsity team's top player.

[00:37:58]

At this time, all college teams have a freshman and varsity team, and freshmen cannot play in varsity competitions. [Due to the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) rules, freshmen become eligible to play varsity in 1968 for all sports except football and basketball, which gains eligibility in 1972.] Even in basketball, freshman basketball player [Kareem Abdul Jabbar [then Lewis Alcindor] has to play on the freshman team during his first year [1965-1966]. Though the UCLA varsity basketball team is ranked number one [in 1964 and 1965], Jabbar and the freshman team beat the varsity team during his first year.

[00:39:57]

First impressions of UCLA. The size of the university makes it bewildering and scary. Joins a fraternity because there aren't dorms. He majors in physics. His academics deteriorate during

freshman year. While he maintains a B average, his grades are never quite as good as in high school as he becomes more interested in tennis than school. He doesn't receive much advising, so he must figure things out on his own, including learning how to study.

[00:46:41]

Attends graduate school at UCLA. Gets into UCLA Graduate School Psychology Department as the program wants to become more rigorous by including scientists and mathematicians. He's able to take upper-division physics and math courses instead of language. As an upper-division student, he's more mature in his study routines. To pursue a doctorate at UCLA, students must complete core courses each semester, and they are allowed only one B. Statistics courses make up two of the core courses, which come easily after all of the undergrad math.

[00:48:59]

Social environment at UCLA and amongst the team. All of his closest friends are his teammates. He teaches tennis to make extra money on the weekends despite National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) restrictions. During the amateur tournaments, good players may also receive money under the table in cash based on their rank.

[00:53:37]

Begins making some money at tournaments during his last year at UCLA after winning the NCAA doubles championships [1960] during his junior year and the NCAA single championships [1961] during senior year.

[00:54:15]

Ranks as one of the best, if not the best player in the country from the time he's a sophomore. Maintains a rivalry with his childhood friend and UCLA teammate Larry Nagler from Roslyn, New York. He convinces Nagler to choose UCLA. While Nagler is a better all-around athlete, Fox is a better technical player, so the two end up evenly-matched. Nagler plays both basketball and tennis during his freshman year but ultimately drops basketball for tennis. Nagler becomes the number one player during their junior year and wins the NCAA singles [in 1960]. Arthur Ashe and Charlie Pasarell enter UCLA during Fox's first year of graduate school [1961]. [See Larry Nagler's oral history interview for more on his time at UCLA.]

[00:59:04]

Decides to quit tennis for several weeks during the summer between junior and senior year and gets a job moving equipment but realizes that tennis is more fun. The first big tournament of senior year is at Valley Hunt. He beats the top two players, Rafael Osuna, from the University of Southern California, and Nagler. This makes him the best player at UCLA, and ultimately he's the top seed for the NCAA singles championships in 1961 and wins. UCLA also wins the team championship for the second year in a row.

[01:04:57]

Ashe enters UCLA in 1961. Both Ashe and Pasarell are highly sought after. However, Pasarell, not Ashe, is Morgan's number one recruit because he's a more advanced freshman player. During his first year of graduate school, Fox plays Ashe in three tournaments and beats him every time. Fox doubts Ashe will become a great player when he plays him as a freshman because he gets discouraged when Ashe is worked hard enough. However, Ashe also has a talent for hitting the ball in places that even experienced opponents can't anticipate. Ashe also makes many errors, yet he has the best first serve he has ever seen even when considering players like [Ricardo Alonso] Pancho Gonzales. After a year, Ashe overcomes the discouragement and gives him one of his worst losses [1962].

[01:11:01]

Fox and Ashe play doubles together at Wimbledon in 1963. During Ashe's early years, Fox can perceive Ashe is easily discouraged by the frequency of his errors. However, Ashe's discouragement is never physically visible. When discouraged, the increased frequency of errors is common amongst players who rank top 15 or 20, but not amongst those higher because they don't become discouraged.

[01:16:41]

Beats Ashe in the National Hard Court Championships [sometime between 1962-1963]. While he beats Ashe, the match is tough, and Ashe no longer gives him any freebies. Ashe's ability to control his emotions isn't typical of most players because tennis is inherently an emotional game. To keep functioning in tennis, it's necessary to learn how to avoid discouragement in tennis and maintain hope.

[01:21:50]

Ashe and Fox first meet during Ashe's first year at UCLA. Fox doesn't know about Ashe before he comes to UCLA. He knows about Pasarell because of how good he is, especially after losing a late-night match to him at a tournament in Pasadena [in 1961].

[01:25:23]

During grad school [in 1961]. He comes out to practice every day with the team. Some days, he and Ashe practice together, and their relationship begins to develop. Throughout his playing career, Fox always feels like "the Jew" as he plays at fancy country clubs that he cannot get into as a member. Being around wealthy, non-Jewish people who represent the old guard and are supporting the game makes him always feel like an outsider. Likens his experience to that of Woody Allen's character in the movie Annie Hall [1977]. Though no one treats him negatively, there's a feeling that he must be extra careful because he's Jewish. He doesn't want to be a bad example for his people. Though Ashe's experience is tougher because it is readily apparent that

he's Black, they have a mutual understanding. However, amongst players, the focus is never on his skin color, but rather on his game.

[01:31:00]

Doesn't know until years later that Ashe isn't invited to tournaments like the one at the Balboa Bay Club [1961 or 1962]. As a player without natural athletic ability, Fox must be more competitive and focus harder, leading him to be more unaware of things like this. He only thinks of Ashe as a player with a great first serve, a tricky but weak second serve, and a nice guy who gets discouraged during his game, which works to his advantage as an opponent.

[01:34:41]

Though he internally feels like an outsider because he's Jewish, no one treats him as such. However, he gets into a disagreement with Perry Jones, the head of the Southern California Tennis Association. Jones doesn't like it that he doesn't dress up to his standards, such as changing his shorts between semifinals and finals. As he's already sensitive to feeling like an outsider, at the time, he believes Jones' criticisms are because he's Jewish. Whereas he chooses to rebel, Ashe behaves well.

[01:39:07]

Similar to Ashe, Fox is trained to keep his cool; however, Ashe follows it better. Never sees Ashe say or do anything that isn't right.

[01:40:28]

When the game becomes open [c. 1968], he's involved in meetings with Ashe and others about the professional game's direction. Lamar Hunt [co-founder of World Championship Tennis in 1968] begins buying players to get control of tennis. After winning [the first] United States Open [in 1968], Ashe becomes the best American player, and Hunt wants to offer Ashe a contract. At the same time, Ashe's friends Pasarell and Donald Dell wish to form a power group outside Hunt. Ashe turns down Hunt's huge guarantee, which would ensure his life's financial security, to join his friends instead. Fox sees Ashe make the decision and thinks how unusual and unselfish he is.

[01:45:23]

Ashe's decision to turn down the WCT contract from Hunt. Ashe, Nagler, Fox, Pasarell, and Dell meet together [to discuss Ashe's options]. Fox and Nagler believe Ashe should take Hunt's deal, which would be for half of the year. This would allow the group of five to do additional business on the side. Dell and Pasarell want to create an independent force outside of Hunt. Ashe is the key person in the negotiation because he's just won the US Open and is well-known. So, the business hinges on Ashe wanting to be a part of it. Ashe agrees with Dell and Pasarell and decides not to take Hunt's deal. Fox can't understand Ashe's decision at the time as he seems to

choose his friends over assured financial security for the rest of his life. Going into the meeting, he expects Ashe to take the Hunt deal and do another deal outside with Pasarell, Dell, Nagler, and himself. After Ashe rejects the deal, he goes into business with Dell and Pasarell while Nagler and Fox break off. Ashe's decision is riskier, but it works out well for him.

[01:49:51]

The meeting about the Hunt deal takes place [in the Midwest]. [Wesley] "Wes" Pavalon has a public company called Career Academy. Pavalon wants to give the group money to start a company. They meet with Pavalon. The group sees the tennis going open, and they want to be involved in open tennis. Ashe, Pasarell, and Dell remain in tennis and form ProServ. Fox goes into the investment business. Nagler becomes a well-known attorney in Los Angeles. Fox remains out of tennis for the next seven years until World Tennis magazine seeks him out for articles on tennis's mental game.

[01:51:33]

The Hunt deal meeting takes place over several days in 1968 or 1969 [after Ashe wins the U.S. Open]. They unanimously turn down Pavalon, who offers half a million dollars to begin the company but wants to own half of it. Ashe turning down the deal and going into business with Dell and Pasarell leads to the creation of ProServ, which becomes a force in tennis on par with the other major management company, IMG.

[01:53:05]

Fox later begins to see Dell as a genius. Lives with Dell for a year traveling the world together and playing doubles in 1965. While traveling together, the two argue regularly. Fox takes a leave of absence from graduate school after Dell invites him to tour through west Africa with the State Department in Togo, Liberia, and play the circuit in South Africa.

[01:57:35]

Compares the relationship amongst tennis friends to that amongst people in the military as going into combat and building a shared understanding builds love. Remembers Ashe as someone who sees the world like him as an outsider looking [into tennis].

[01:59:52]

Before beginning graduate school in 1961, doesn't perceive any social rebellion [or protest]. Things are comfortable, and no one has much of anything. Doesn't ponder much about the issues between Black and White people, however, is raised very liberally. Mother teaches him about prejudice against Jews and how Black people are also up against many of the same problems. So, this attracts him to Ashe because he's Black. Aware that the two of them stick out in some way from the establishment and are allowed in because they are good.

[02:04:32]

All of the good clubs are restricted, such as the LA Tennis Club and the Los Angeles Country Club. As they are old-line, Gentile clubs, they don't allow Jewish or Black members. However, they are always very nice to him. Gets into a squabble with Perry Jones over a towel he wears at his side during the Southern California championships in 1964. Threatens to default Fox in the finals if he tries to wear the towel and says only the president of the LA Tennis Club, Cornwell Jackson. Jackson allows him to wear the towel. LA Tennis Club always allows him to play and gives him a guest membership. Guest memberships are given to players that are good enough. Feelings about the Club are all positive as they gave him much.

[02:11:09]

Fox and Ashe make their first appearance at Wimbledon in 1963, and play doubles together. Both are young, up-and-coming American players set to play two Russian players in the first round, so they're put on center court. The match occurs during the Cold War height and is seen as America versus Russia; however, both the Americans and Russians play so poorly that people begin leaving during the match. Following his first serve, Fox expects Ashe to come up and volley, but he's so nervous that he barely steps in. They ultimately lose the match.

[02:17:03]

Wimbledon matches are televised. After the terrible loss, they put towels over their heads and hide because they are so embarrassed. Off the court, everyone is staying in cheap rooming houses for 1 pound a night. They each receive 50-100 pounds from the British [Tennis] Association. Despite the rooming, they get picked up in a limo with Wimbledon flags on the bumper. This is on his first trip outside the country as he doesn't have money, but the USTA purchases his ticket on his return flight from a Davis Cup match in Iran.

[02:21:33]

It's also Ashe's first time venturing outside of the country. As a young person, Fox never anticipates he'll leave the country. The most memorable moment with Ashe from Wimbledon is the embarrassing exit after their loss. The two also likely spent time together in the Players Room, a British tea room only accessible to the players to eat freely and hang out between matches.

[02:24:29]

The last time he sees Ashe is in Saddlebrook, Florida, in 1992, when Fox speaks at a convention. The two sit on a golf cart. Remembers Ashe being a bit heavier than he was as a player. Ashe is still his typically friendly and joking self. Ashe has already announced his HIV/AIDS [human immunodeficiency virus, acquired immunodeficiency syndrome] diagnosis; however, he doesn't believe Ashe looks ill [Ashe dies on February 6, 1993].



[02:27:45]

Aware of Ashe's previous health issues with his heart. However, they hadn't been in close contact. Hears about Ashe's good works over the years and is unsurprised because he'd seen him give up lifetime financial security [when turning down the WCT deal]. He doesn't see Ashe as a rebel, but he advocates for fair treatment for Black people but doing that in his own way. Many changes occur by the end of Ashe's lifetime, which he helps push through.

[02:31:10]

Last sees Jeanne Ashe at a dinner for the 100th Anniversary of the Davis Cup in Boston, which occurs the same weekend that John F. Kennedy Jr. 's plane disappears [July 16, 1999]. Believed Ashe and his wife were a good fit together.

[02:34:39]

Explains how tennis players, including Ashe, tend to be unusual people. For example, ordinary people won't work out for 3-4 hours a day in the hot sun for 15-20 years.

[02:36:53]

Ashe's legacy for the world is that all of us should be better people and do good works because we're all naturally selfish, but we'd have a better world if all of us were more like him. Ashe's legacy is decency and unselfishness. We might all be better people if we thought about him more. Thanks.