

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB LUNCHEON WITH BILLIE JEAN KING

SUBJECT: SEXISM IN SPORTS

MODERATOR: THERESA WERNER, PRESIDENT, NATIONAL PRESS CLUB

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**THERESA WERNER:** (Sounds gavel.) Good afternoon, and welcome to the National Press Club. My name is Theresa Werner, and I am the 105<sup>th</sup> President of the National Press Club. We are the world's leading professional organization for journalists committed to our profession's future through our programming and events such as these while fostering a free press worldwide. For more information about the National Press Club, please visit our website at [www.press.org](http://www.press.org). To donate to programs offered to the public through our National Press Club Journalism Institute, please visit [press.org/institute](http://press.org/institute).

On behalf of our members worldwide, I'd like to welcome our speaker and those of you attending today's events. Our head table includes guests of our speaker, as well as working journalists who are club members. And if you hear applause in our audience, we'd note that members of the general public are attending so it's not necessarily evidence of a lack of journalism objectivity. (Laughter)

I'd also like to welcome our C-SPAN and our Public Radio audiences. Our luncheons are also featured on our member-produced weekly Podcasts from the National Press Club available on iTunes. You can also follow the action on Twitter using the hashtag NPCLunch. After our guest's speech concludes, we'll have a Q&A and I will ask as many questions as time permits. Now I'd like to introduce our head table guests, and I'd ask each of you to stand up briefly as your name is announced.

From your right, Peter Foster, U.S. editor, *The Daily Telegraph of London*; Jean LeMasurier, Gorman Health Group; Marcia Apperson, senior associate in the

Ombudsman Office at PBS; Sylvia Smith, features editor for State News, *AARP Bulletin*; Jane Watrel, general assignment reporter, NBC4; Jon Vegosen, Chairman of the Board and President of the U.S. Tennis Association; Alison Fitzgerald, freelance journalist, chairwoman of the Speakers Committee. I'm going to skip our speaker for just a moment.

Donna Leinwand Leger, reporter for *USA Today*, 2009 National Press Club president, and the Speakers Committee member who organized today's luncheon. David Haggerty, first vice president, USTA; Kevin Wensing, U.S. Navy retired, National Press Club member who serves as a member of the USTA advocacy committee and military outreach; and Larry Bivins from Gannett. Thank you all. (Applause)

On September 20<sup>th</sup>, 1973, the world watched as Billie Jean King stepped onto the tennis court in Houston to face Bobby Riggs, then one of the world's greatest tennis stars. In the lead up to the event, Riggs had boasted of his tennis prowess and belittled female players. He called female professional tennis players inferior. Indeed, it was, but not in the way Riggs thought. Just a year earlier, Congress had passed Title IX mandating equality at schools and universities that receive federal funding. But the benefits had not yet reached women's athletics.

In 1972, just 29,000 women played varsity sports at the university level compared with 170,000 men. In high school, the disparities were even worse. Fewer than 300,000 high school girls played varsity sports compared with 3.7 million high school boys. King had just helped found the Women's Professional Tennis Tour at a time when men's tennis was awash in prize money and sponsorships. That year, Billie Jean King won the U.S. Open but earned \$15,000 less than the male champ. King said she would not play the next year if the tournament failed to even up the pot. In 1973, the U.S. Open became the first major tournament to offer equal prize money. (Applause)

So when King stepped into the Astrodome that day, she had a message to deliver, and she delivered it in straight sets, beating Riggs 6-4, 6-3, 6-3. The *Sunday Times* of London called it "the drop shot and volley heard around the world." "The match didn't just change women's tennis, it changed tennis," King told NPR in 2008 interview. Attendance at tennis matches soared. "It's funny how when a woman does something, they always think we only affect half of the population," King said.

King went on to found a women's tennis magazine, the Women's Sports Foundation in between winning 39 Grand Slam titles in singles, doubles and mixed doubles. She won her first Wimbledon doubles title at the age of 17. The next year, King upset the number one seed, Margaret Court, in the first round of Wimbledon. From 1966 to 1975, King dominated the sport. For six years, she ranked number one in the world. She beat world class players such as Martina Navratilova and Chris Evert. In 1990, *Life* magazine named her one of the 100 most important Americans of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

President Obama awarded her the Medal of Freedom, the nation's highest civilian honor. And if your daughter has ever won a trophy in her competitive sports league, it's time for a tip of the racquet to King. Since that fateful day in 1973, girls' participation in

high school sports has increased 940 percent. (Applause) Now, 3.1 million high school girls play on high school varsity teams, and 170,000 play at the college level. But as King will tell you today, there is still ground to cover to make all sports opportunities open to all. Please join me in welcoming Billie Jean King. (Applause)

**MS. KING:** Thank you. That's very kind of you, those are kind words. I didn't remember a lot of it. So glad C-SPAN's here today. I'm so glad we had a healthy lunch, thanks to Susan Delbert. Did you have fun? Did you guys decide what the menu was going to be today, or what? Also, I want to thank Andrew Price and all our servers, being so kind to us and taking good care of us. Means a lot.

It's a pleasure to be here today. Do you realize, I've never spoken here and I'm 68. It's never too late. So, I'm really happy to be here, and thanks Theresa and thanks to the National Press Club and all the officers, the Board of Governors, and the members of the NPC Speakers Committee for having me. I am thrilled to be here, because I've certainly watched enough people speak here. So, thank you.

To Jon Vegosen, who was already introduced by Theresa, our Chairman and President of the USTA, and everyone at the USTA. We got a lot of people from the USTA today. We're covered, man. I love it. Also, our mid-Atlantic section. Where are they? Are they here today at all? That's too bad, where are they? I thought they were going to be here.

Anyway, just so you know, the USTA is our national governing body of tennis, and there's 17 geographical sections, just so you understand. And we happen to be in the mid-Atlantic section, which is one of those 17 sections. And the states are Virginia, West Virginia, Maryland, and obviously the District of Columbia, just so we are very clear on anybody that's not familiar with our sport. I think it's important you know that.

I also would like to thank Kurt Kamperman, who's the CEO of Community Tennis. And just about everything I'll be talking about today comes under his leadership. So why don't you stand up, Kurt? (Applause) Thank you. He's a heck of an athlete, too, believe me. And to all the Board of Directors that are here from the USTA, I really appreciate you being here.

Also, the two people that probably helped me the most to get prepared today are Barry Ford, who's Director of Advocacy, I don't know where Barry is, but I want to thank you. There he is, please stand. (Applause) And also, to Derrick Johnson, who's Director of Corporate Communications. Where are you? Thank you. (Applause) And thank you, Witt.

Many of you know me as a tennis player, I guess. Some of you know I'm a social activist, but I come to you today as one of my proudest achievements. I'm one of over 27 million recreational tennis players. In fact, according to the Sporting Goods Manufacturers Association, tennis has been the fastest growing traditional sport since the

year 2000. We currently have over 800,000 adult league participants, have fun's part of that, from 18 to 88. Whew, I just made it. And that is just adults.

As you know, tennis has obviously been a huge part of my life, it's changed my whole life. I was blessed to have a great career. I wish I'd won more. But more importantly, tennis has given me my platform, my platform, to continue my lifelong quest for equal right and opportunities for boys and girls, men and women. Since I was 12 years old, I had an epiphany, and I've promised I would dedicate my life to that goal until the day I die. And thanks to tennis, I was able to have a platform. And thank you, Bobby Riggs. That also gave me a huge platform.

For several years, many of you in this room have been encouraging people to pick up a racquet. But why? Because tennis is a sport of a lifetime and it can be enjoyed by people of all ages and all abilities. The USTA invests 100 percent, 100 percent, of the proceeds from the U.S. Open towards their mission. So when you come to the U.S. Open, if you buy a ticket, you're helping community tennis. And the mission statement is to promote and develop the growth of tennis.

In 2011, just last year, the USTA invested over \$49 million, that's almost \$50 million, for public courts, scholarships, programs and grants. That's a lot. Most national governing bodies don't do that. They're usually always asking for money. So the USTA's almost 50 million. Of course, the U.S. Open keeps growing so who knows what 2012 will bring.

Recently, somebody asked me to name a huge turning point in my life. Well, there's a lot. If you think about your own lives, and think about the turning points in your life, we never know how a person's going to touch our life or how you're going to touch theirs. You never know, so stay alert.

Well, let's go back to-- rewind, fifth grade, electricity school in Long Beach, California, where I was born and raised. Susan Williams sitting next to me, thank God her father had just been transferred from New York for his job. She looks at me and says, "Do you want to play tennis?" And I look at her and I go, "What's tennis?" Now remember, I've played every other-- like tons of all team sports before that. She says, "Well--" I said, "What do you do?" And she said, "You get to run and you get to jump and you get to hit a ball." I said, "Those are my three most favorite things in sports. I'm there, I'll try it. Let's go."

So we go over to her country club and we play. And I come home and I had fun. And I thought, "Well, I guess I'll get to play if Susan takes me to the club." Well, we were also on a softball team. At the softball practice, our coach, Val Halloran [?] says-- Susan says, "You know, Billie Jean went out and played tennis." And I went, "Well, if you can call it that." And Val Halloran says, "You know, they give free coaching, free instruction, here every Tuesday at Houghton Park." I heard the word free. What? Whoa. Now there might be an opportunity for me to play more.

So I go out and I'm on the court with Clyde Blocker. I'll never forget this day as long as I live. Because at the end of that day, I knew, I'd found out, what I was going to do with my life. I wanted to be the number one tennis player in the world, done. My poor mother, she picks me up, you know, she's, "Hi honey, did you have fun?" I go, "Mom, I found what I was going to do with my life. Let's go home, I want to tell dad and I want to tell my brother. Come on, come on." Well, my mother is going to be 90 in about two weeks, and she still remembers that day. (Applause) And we still always have a good old laugh over it. Says, "You're still going. What's going on here?"

So she's funny because she didn't really care. And my younger brother, Randy Moffitt, was a relief pitcher. Most of his career was with the San Francisco Giants. Good righty, good slider if you're into baseball at all in the room. That's my baby brother. My poor parents, they didn't care if we were any good, but here's what happened.

Most people think tennis is only played in clubs. I meet people all the time who think, "Oh, it's a country club sport." I go, "Exsqueeze me, exsqueeze me, I don't think so." Over 70 percent of tennis is played in public parks. And I'm one of those kids. Like I said, I'm a public park kid. Let me just name a few, just a few, of the past champions-- when I mean champions, I mean number one in the world, that come from the public parks. Just to kind of like-- this'll refresh your memory.

I think you've heard of Arthur Ashe, who was number one in the world. Chris Evert was many times number one in the world. Stan Smith was number one in the world, Jimmy Connors, Serena Williams, Venus Williams, just to give you a few of the champions who've come from public parks. Because everyone's initial reaction, they think we came from a club. It's not true. Public parks.

I'm happy to say that the USTA is investing in public parks and schools by helping to build and refurbish courts, in providing programs in countless communities throughout the country. These tennis facilities have become safe and fun community hubs. In the past six years, the organization has built or refurbished 25,000 courts in the U.S. and we hope by the end of this year, we hope that we've completed 30,000. So things just keep rolling along great. (Applause)

Also, the USTA's very focused. In fact, the entire community is focused on this 10 and under tennis initiative that's just gotten started the last, what, three, four years? And this initiative is going to help fight childhood obesity, which we all know is epidemic in this country. And we're going to get kids active. We know at the Women's Sports Foundation that if a girl does not exercise by the time she's ten, ten years old, she only has a ten percent chance to exercise the rest of her life. So this ten and under initiative is vital to help that. Because not only do we want to get them started, we want to keep them going forever.

The great thing about the ten and under initiative is everything's smaller. The courts are smaller, the racquets are smaller. But, the balls are actually bigger. This is good, this is good. I'll tell you why. Okay, here's what happens with a regular tennis ball

when a child plays. I'll use the gavel. I have a racquet, but I'll use the gavel. No, this is more fun. I feel really authoritative here. But anyway, okay. So when the children play with the regular ball they're hitting all their shots up here. They get all these goofy grips and as they grow older and they grow taller, everything's about quite right.

But what happens with these balls, because they're slower and they bounce a little lower, they're around their center of gravity and that's the strike zone. If you play baseball, you know where that is. That is where you want-- it's the sweet spot, where your point of contact when you hit the ball, and that really helps. It makes such a difference. You would not believe the success that these children have in hitting the ball back and forth in a long rally. That never happens usually. You know, they're whiffing at the air, they go back to the fence, they grab the ball. "Oh okay, that's fun."

Okay, so now it's fun. And this is why they're going to stick to it. And you know what? What's good for the kids is good for us mature people. AARP, are you listening? All right, this is good, because I qualify. This helps us, too. We don't have as much space to cover, the ball's a little slower, I like it, it's good. So guess what? This keeps everybody playing forever. It's great. The first time I tried it before I had my knee-- my last two knee operations with my knee replacement, I went out and tried it on the small-- I go, "This is for me, baby. I got a chance to really-- this is fun. And I can play with the kids that way, too." Makes it really fun. And that way, you get a lot of generations together. It's really fun, I love it.

The great thing about tennis, too, it's an individual sport and it's a team sport. You got choices. Another great thing is both genders, so boys and girls, can play it, a lot. And I'm talking about from the grass roots to the professional. Not a lot of sports can say that. We don't have the NFL for the women. We don't have major league baseball for women. And if you want me to keep going, I can keep going, okay? So I want you to think about how great tennis is as a sport. It takes care of all of us, and I love that fact.

And today, I want to introduce Mark Ein, who's the owner-- stand up, Mark, please. (Applause) Of the Washington Kastles which is one of our World Team Tennis Teams. That's what I do with my life. Mark has really gotten behind this ten and under initiative, so has the City Open that comes up after on the U.S. Open series. I know you guys do a King of the Kastles or something play day with this ten and under initiative. I mean, everyone is getting behind it, and I think it's so important. All of our teams, all of the professional tournaments, all have gotten behind this ten and under initiative. If you go to a tournament, if you go to a Kastles match, you're going to see kids running around playing on these smaller courts with the smaller racquets and the balls, okay? It's so much fun to watch the kids. So far we've done about what, 5,000 kids courts and we're making tennis accessible in tighter areas, like urban areas.

You can have it anyplace, basketball court, in the street. It doesn't matter. Put it up, get them playing, it doesn't matter. Don't get too fancy-pantsy on it. But none of these opportunities, none of these opportunities, would happen without the tens of thousands of volunteers that love our sport so much. And I want to really thank the volunteers. Lucy

Garvin, who's here, third, I think, woman president. Do I have that right? Third woman president of the USTA? You know what I'm talking about. You're great with the sections. You know, Dale knows. I mean, it's so important to really honor our volunteers because without them it doesn't happen. Every section has it, every community tennis association, everybody. The USTA school program, we're also an after school program, we've reached one million elementary school kids just last year alone. Also, we also have the National Junior Tennis and Learning Network, which was co founded by Arthur Ashe, Charlie Pasarell, and Sheridan Snyder, and we have over 660 chapters in the United States, nationwide.

By the way, sidebar, Arthur Ashe and Charlie Pasarell were roommates at UCLA and they played on the men's tennis team there, just FYI. They're my era, so I know. And the NJTL provides tennis, educational opportunities. And they also help train the children in life skills. And that's over 250,000 underserved youth per year. It's fantastic what they're doing.

Story. Trenton, New Jersey, a chapter there. I think David hired in as first vice president. His dad was real involved in the park where they played. Michelle Gbelama, not Michelle Obama, Michelle Gbelama began playing with the NJTL of Trenton during her sophomore year of high school, which is pretty late. Michelle became an instructor and leader for the NJTL of Trenton. She received a four year scholarship from the NJTL and attended Drew University. She was named all-conference champion and was the most decorated female tennis player at Drew. Michelle's family immigrated from Africa and she was the first family member to attend college. What a turning point for Michelle, to have that opportunity. You never know.

Since 1994, USTA Serves, which is the charitable arm of the USTA, has provided over \$10 million in funding for tennis and education programs in over 172 communities in 43 states. Deborah Larkin, the Executive Director, is here today. She's fantastic. I've known her forever. She's a tennis nut. She plays USTA leagues and I've known her for many years, a dear friend who's done a great job as the executive director. She's a go-getter. She is perfect for that job.

In just the past few years, at the start of '03, they provided over \$3 million in college scholarships. Another very important area is they have funded hundreds of adaptive tennis programs that allow people with disabilities to enjoy tennis. We're covering everything, man, we got it. Get those checks out, we're checking off everyone, woo, in those little boxes, you know? Oh wait, I haven't finished, sorry. More to come.

The USTA has the military outreach program. They have programs that support more than 100,000 of our military and their families at home and abroad. This includes in helping providing tennis facilities and programming on bases throughout the U.S. and other initiatives like Adopt a Unit, which provides tennis equipment to deployed forces so they can enjoy the sport in the precious downtime that they have.

I know that our first lady, Michelle Obama, and Dr. Jill Biden, would be absolutely thrilled to know this. And if they don't know already, they will know soon. Because I'm very fortunate to be on the President's Council for Fitness, Sports and Nutrition. I don't know if Shelly Pfohl's still here, but she's my boss, Executive Director. She's fantastic. Like the U.S. Army staff sergeant, Andy Marcasano, he is from Shell Beach, California. While stationed in southwestern Afghanistan, the USTA sent a tennis care package that included nets, racquets, balls, instructional information. Andy and his fellow soldiers made a court on flattened mud and gravel. That's what I told you, it'll go anyplace. And they set it up and they're banging the ball around. I hope it relieves some of their stress. I cannot imagine the stress they must go through.

Isn't it great, you take a racquet and just smack the ball? You know what? You don't hurt anybody. I know psychotherapists who say that's very good therapy. But you don't hurt anybody, it's fantastic. And you feel so much better afterwards. We want tennis to make a positive difference in the life of others.

The USTA contingent is here this week to reach out to our national policymakers in hopes of developing some partnerships that can impact more communities and lives. We want to insure that every child has an opportunity to get the best education possible. We want to partner with communities across the country to create safe, healthy communities for everyone.

The USTA is more committed than ever to make tennis more accessible. Our goal is simple: to grow tennis and make it look like America. That's good. Let's go to Q&A. Oh ho, ah ha. (Applause)

**MS. WERNER:** Thank you. And before we get started in the Q&A, I inadvertently left out Sean Mayo, who is at the head table, and is a board member of the USTA. So thank you for coming. (Applause)

It's the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Title IX. Do you think it's still needed? And if so, should it be changed or expanded and how?

**MS. KING:** Well, it's the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary. It was passed June 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1972. One of my sheroes (sic) is Ms. Green, Congressman Green of Oregon. She's no longer with us. But it was her idea. She was called the Mother of Education. And then the other person who's one of my heroes is Senator Birch Bayh who was in the Senate and introduced the bill. These people were fantastic. Patsy Mink from Hawaii, fantastic. She was the first person of color that was in Congress. First female, I think. I don't know, I think it's female. God, I usually have this right. I'm having a-- I'm not going to call it a senior moment. No, it's a brain cramp. I ask kids when they're 21, "What do you call it when you don't remember something?" They go, "What do you mean?" I go, "Do you remember everything?" And they go, "Absolutely not." I say, "What do you guys call it?" And then everybody's stumped, I love it.



But when you're older, it's, oh, oh, senior moment. Not. So anyway, as far as Title IX, it was about education, it wasn't about sports. That's how it originated. Sports was tagged on as a last minute thought. Before 1972, the quotas at the Harvards of the world were 5 percent, if you wanted to be a woman doctor, if you wanted to be a woman lawyer, okay? These were our forward thinking educators. A woman could not get an athletic scholarship until the fall of 1972. And there weren't very many in the fall of 1972, I can tell you. There was hardly any because a lot of schools resisted on changing the law.

As far as Title IX, women are still 168 million behind every year in scholarships and opportunities. So when you read the sports section, you think we're terrible because we're hurting the football programs, we're hurting the men's sports. Believe me, both men and women sports are being dropped in certain universities and colleges. And the one thing I keep telling them, the athletic directors, do not get rid of tennis. Do not get rid of men's tennis or women's tennis because we are a lifetime sport and we have obesity in this country and we should be encouraging lifetime sports in our universities if we're going to have a healthy nation. Because we are putting our nation at actually security risk because in the military, they're having a hard time even passing the test.

They go to pre-boot camp to go to boot camp now. Okay, so we have got to make this nation strong mentally, emotionally and physically, and keep tennis in the universities and colleges. (Applause) Sorry, I get a little wound up.

**MS. WERNER:** Well, since we're on the topic of obesity, aside from destroying all computer games and information technology, what else do you think could be done to change behavior so that people live healthier lifestyles and just get out and move?

**MS. KING:** Well, it's interesting because just two weeks ago, our President's Council just joined forces with-- yeah, we did, we joined forces with the Entertainment Software Association, which is video games. And if you know, there are a few games where you actually have to be active like Dance Revolution. A lot of people don't want to do sports, but they'll do that. Great, just get moving. That's all that matters under our First Lady's Let's Move campaign.

So we've joined forces with them and they're going to do many more active video games. So they're going to be part of the answer. But the average screen time is seven to eight hours a day. It's pathetic. So we know that can be television, computers, phone. Just make sure you have the top of your hair all dyed if you have hair up there because everyone sees the top of your head now. (Laughter)

So anyway, I'm in an elevator and everybody's on their phone. I'm going, "Whoa, yeah baby." So anyway, I'm very nervous about the top of my head. So anyway, it's very important that we get kids outside. We need play time. We know that even for one minute, if you make children move in the classroom, for one minute to music, boom, boom, move your arms, move your legs, sitting on a chair, okay, gets your circulation going.

There's a little kid that he said, "I love getting--" He likes recess because he says, "I get the wiggles out." I get the wiggles out so I can--" And I said, "Do you do better when you go back in the classroom?" "Yes, I can focus." I said, "Focus, that's a pretty good word." But they're so cute, man. The kids get it. So we've got to get them out. So it's nutrition, we've got to find ways to get our kids moving. But, you know, as a parent or a caregiver, whoever's taking care of children, we've got to set the example. We have to live it. We can't just tell them what to do because they watch our actions. They don't listen to what we say.

So if we're walking, take a walk with the child or maybe a child will take a walk with you. Sometimes, children change adults. So, you never know. But obesity is going to be a bigger cause of death in health challenges than smoking, okay? It's done now, it's done. So obesity is our main challenge because of the heart disease and diabetes and all the things that are happening. So we need to really help each other be active and make it part of our lifestyle. It's not going to be easy. Parents, teachers, everybody, coaches, we've got to do it. It's preventable, it's preventable. So we can do this as a nation, we can do this. Sorry. I'm getting wound up.

**MS. WERNER:** Does the current generation of athletes understand the challenges that you faced?

**MS. KING:** Well, you know, every generation has a different frame of reference. So in all fairness, I always try to think of the person's age and what their frame of reference must be. When I grew up, it was amateur tennis and we made \$14 a day. One of my first heroes was Althea Gibson, the first person of color to win anything. Because people of color weren't even allowed to play in sanctioned tournaments until 1950. That wasn't that long ago. So I was very fortunate as a 13 year old to see Althea Gibson in person in Los Angeles and got to watch her. And that changed my life, too, because I'd only been in the game for two years.

So it's important to really understand each person's generation and where they come from. I don't think they understand, I don't expect them to understand. But I can tell you, there's nine of us that just got together for a reunion. We're called the Original Nine, and we started women's professional tennis. That's not the way I wanted it. I wanted the men and women to be together and they rejected us. So, I went to plan B and we started ourselves. And we're very fortunate that we signed a \$1 contract with Gladys Hellmann in Houston, Texas, in 1970, and that was the birth of women's professional tennis the way you know it today.

Now, do I expect Maria Sharapova or Venus or Serena to understand that? We can tell them and they do have a sense of history, they're very good. But they didn't live it. Just like I'm not living the pressures that they deal with. They're very different. Look at the money management they need to do. (Laughter) I would like to have that challenge, I must tell you. Because I love money because it creates opportunity. I'm not very high maintenance, so I'd be giving it away, most of it. But it's fun to make money and create

opportunities for people. But, no, there's different pressures, there just is. They're much better players today than we've ever dreamed. I mean, if I could hit one shot like they do today, that would be just a fantastic feeling.

So everyone's different. But I must tell you, with the WTA, the Women's Tennis Association, we have these mentoring classes all the time. So we're very connected through the generations. My generation spent an enormous amount of time with Chris Evert and Martina Navratilova to mentor them, to help them. We asked of them to keep doing it each generation. And we do try to really connect the generations. And they do know about the past history because they're taught the past history.

Katrina Adams is here today, and she's on the Board of Directors of the USTA, but she went to Northwestern, she won the NCAAs in '87 with Diane Stone, who's actually my assistant, which is really funny. But, you know, it's just amazing what each generation gives. And we do stand on the shoulders of the generations before us. We just do. And so I'm very thankful to the Althea Gibsons and the other guys around that time, too, that were very good to me. So we just have to-- you know, we're all in this together. We are in this together so we have to help each other.

**MS. WERNER:** What do you think has been the biggest change in tennis in the past 20 years?

**MS. KING:** Ay-yi-yi, 20, that's not very long ago. Well, I think it's been an evolution of equipment change. I mean, this racquet, I'm going to mess up my signature, sorry, but it's really light. This is like my security blanket. Like Linus, when I got my first racquet, I told my dad I wanted to play tennis and he said, "Great, show me." So I went around to all the neighbors and begged them to give me a job. Then when I had \$8.29 saved up, a Mason jar up in the cupboard, I said, "Mommy, Daddy, I can't wait any longer. Please let me go get a racquet." I went to Brown's Sporting Goods and I got my first racquet.

And the salesperson said to me, "Well, what kind of racquet do you want?" I said, "What does \$8.29 buy?" And so I got it because I loved the color. Purple is my favorite color, lavender, violets, all those are my favorite. And I would sleep with my racquet every night and I would dream about winning and being number one. So when I see this racquet, I go like, "Oh, I love it, I love it." Just like Linus, you know, with your blankie? That's how I am with the tennis racquet, when I see a racquet.

But the biggest thing is materials in the racquet. They're so light. My wooden racquet was 13 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> ounces. Oh my God, nobody plays-- well, maybe Federer, his is pretty hefty. Sampras's was pretty hefty when he played. But most of them are really light. But the aerodynamics, the way of the racquet are-- you can hit so much harder. The sweet spot's a lot bigger. I mean, I can go on and on. And now they've got this string, all the pros today are talking about the string they use. That's all they talk about. "Oh." It's got little sharp things in the string so the spins take more. Like if you've seen Nadal hit that forehand spin, the reason it takes-- everything's exaggerated. If it's a slice, it's

exaggerated. If it's a topspin, it's exaggerated. And they have the control that we would never would have had with our-- our sweet spot was about this big on our racquet and the racquet looks like a little badminton racquet now. You know the wooden frames? It's so cute.

And the athletes, let's face it, the training, the nutrition, all the information available and how to train is so much better. Much more dynamic. You know, the kinetic linkage they use when they hit. We were taught to be very static. I mean, it has totally evolved into-- that's why I say if I could just hit one like the kids hit today, it would just be wow. And I tell them that all the time. I go, God-- every generation just gets better, okay? And if you're an older person and you keep talking about the glory days, that's fine. But the kids are better. (Laughter)

**MS. WERNER:** Do you agree with John McEnroe that the pros should go back to wooden racquets as a way to bring variety, strategy and subtlety back to the game?

**MS. KING:** Well, John just described his game. Because he's actually a genius, okay? He had the best hands, I think, of anybody and had the greatest touch. And I love the way his mind works. You know, he still plays every day. He's crazy, man. He's got an academy at Sport Times in New York. I mean, he's out on the court. He's in better shape now than when he played. I mean, he'll tell you. You know how much thinner he is? I don't know if you notice photos? Oh my gosh. The only thing that kept him going when he played was doubles. You know, because he played doubles so much, that's what kept him sharp. The year he stopped playing doubles, I said, "He's in trouble." Sure enough, ewwww. Because that's where he got his practice. I mean, it kept him sharp.

So that would be nice. I don't know about the environmentalists, if they like the wood idea. But it's different. And sometimes, occasionally, they have tournaments with some of the older players with wooden racquets. There are not too many left. It's getting scarce.

**MS. WERNER:** Players or racquets?

**MS. KING:** Scarce both ways. Sorry, that's good. Correct me, I like it.

**MS. WERNER:** Are you satisfied with the level of pay today in women's tennis compared to that on the men's tour? And are there other outstanding equality issues?

**MS. KING:** I bet you guys aren't used to these questions, are you? Because there's so many men in sports, it's really their bastion. It's kind of weird when we start talking about the girls. But we are very fortunate to have equal prize money in the majors and I want to salute the USTA because the U.S. Open was the first by many, many years. The difference happened in 1968, was the first year we got money. You know how you see it today, we get money, checks? Before that, we were amateurs. So 1968 is the beginning of what we call open or modern tennis, okay? So if someone says open tennis, you'll now know what that actually means. It means it started in 1968 where we got paid.

And I won Wimbledon and Rod Laver won Wimbledon and he got a check for 2,000 pounds and I got a check for 750 pounds. I went, "Oh, no. I thought we were going to get equal--" I just thought we'd both get our little check and everybody'd be happy. And I didn't realize, of course not. What am I-- I mean, was I clueless or what? So in the back of my mind I said, "Okay, that's going to be another challenge, another one." I'm thinking, "Gees, does it ever stop?" So, over the years, we just behind the scenes kept after the others. The Australian came around and then they backed off again.

I must tell you, Venus Williams stepped up and she did make a difference. She was willing to go to meetings behind the scenes, she was willing to do a lot of things and put her name-- put herself on the line. And most players have a really hard time doing that. So I take my hat off to Venus. In 2007, all four majors gave us equal money. There's still a lot more money in men's tennis. They have more opportunity. Some of it's cultural, but usually it's because of the old boy network, usually takes care of each other more than the girls.

But let's face it. Men's tennis right now has three players that are extraordinary: Federer, Djokovic and Nadal. And they're extraordinary. The women right now can't decide who's number one. But, that's great competition. You know, it's funny with the media. They always complain no matter which way you go. If there's a rivalry going on they say, "Oh, the rest of the competition's no good." And then if you don't have a rivalry like in the women's tennis right now, they go, "What's wrong with that? There's no rivalries."

So as a player I've seen so many generations of this, I think it's amusing to listen. So, things go in cycles. But right now, you'll never see three players, I don't think ever again in the history with-- they're real exceptional human beings and athletes. But the women, there's lots of competition to decide who's going to be number one. We don't know, which is kind of interesting to me, too. Whereas I kind of know the top three are going to be up there with the guys.

But we always have a long way to go. But the wonderful thing about equal prize money, it's not about the money, it's about the message. We want to empower every human being, boy or girl, to be the best he or she can be. And everybody, everyone, should not be discounted. No person should be discounted for anything. So it's very important that we help each other. It's doing the right thing.

I must tell you that men come up to me in their 40s and 50s today, a lot of times with tears in their eyes, and they say how much that match, when I played King-- I mean, when I played King? When I played Bobby Riggs, how that changed their whole perception. And now they have a daughter and how they're going to raise her. That they insist that their boys and girls, their sons and daughters, have equal opportunity and equal, equal, equal. And they say-- they point to that match and they'll say, "I saw that when I was ten years old. I saw that when I was twelve years old. That changed my life and how I raise my daughter and I've raised my boys."

And actually, President Obama was 12 years old when I played that and he's told me the story, too. So it's amazing how these men are the first generation of men of the women's movement, okay? They are. So if you're in your 40s or 50s, little 60s there, you are the first generation of men of the women's movement.

**MS. WERNER:** You were recently awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom. What is the single most important thing President Obama could do to address the continuing gender inequities?

**MS. KING:** Oh, my goodness. Well, he's been trying with the Fair Pay Act and all the different things that are going on. But we really need people to do it, not just leadership. Each one of us, every single human being, is an influencer. Every single one of you in this room, everyone who hears these words, each and every one of us is an influencer. How are you influencing that women don't get paid 77 cents on the dollar? It's very hard for when you're in power to give up some of that power. It's very hard. If you're the dominant group, you know very little about sub dominant groups. The sub dominant groups know a lot about the dominant group because they got to bob and weave. The sub dominant group's got to bob and weave. They've got to survive and they got to know a lot about the dominant group. That's why it's important the dominant group knows a lot about the sub dominant groups.

And we've got to give it-- you know, you have to give it up if you're a dominant group. Be inclusive. That's what it's all about. Advocate for each of us. It doesn't matter our gender or our sexual orientation. It doesn't matter. Disability, it doesn't matter. Help each other. It's amazing how everyone wants to be better than somebody else all the time and keeping somebody else down makes them feel like they're the big kahuna. No, true champions in life raise people above, above. Great leaders raise people above themselves. (Applause)

**MS. WERNER:** What advice would you give mothers raising young girls today in regards to sports and society in general?

**MS. KING:** Wow. Yeah, it's so funny. I think in terms of boys and girls all the time and I get these just women's-- like what would a mother-- well, I think what I find with a lot of women is-- let's say if I go to a reception like today earlier, and I say, "What do you like to do?" And they go, "Oh, I'm a terrible athlete. Oh, I'm so bad. But I play tennis, I do this or I like to dance." If I ask a guy that question, he doesn't say, "Oh, I'm a terrible athlete." What are you doing, girls? Don't put yourself down. I think mothers have to notice that, and mothers have to notice-- mothers and fathers or caregivers, whoever's in charge of children, I'm telling you, it's everything you say, everything you do is so important because they pick up on everything. They're smart.

It's amazing all the little things that go on every single day that is racist or biased or something in some way. Teach girls to stop-- teach girls to be empowered. Teach girls and your sons also-- how you teach your sons is real important, too. I grew up with a

brother. I didn't even know what it feels like to have a sister. So my brother and I are so close and he's so adorable in that he's so-- you know, he goes, "Oh Sis, you had it so much harder than I did. I can't believe the difference in-- I only have to show up on time for the bus when they take the ball guys out to the park." He says, "I can't believe your life compared to mine because you're a girl." And we've had these discussions.

But I think it's important that mothers and fathers and caregivers, whoever's taking care of the child, guardians, whoever, to really tell girls to believe in themselves. Don't make excuses. Do not act like, "Oh, I'm terrible," like this-- come on. Don't say you're a terrible athlete, that's for sure, not around me. If you can breathe, you're an athlete. (Applause)

**MS. WERNER:** Many young women admire you and all that you've done in and outside of sports. Who did you admire when you were growing up as a young girl?

**MS. KING:** Women or men?

**MS. WERNER:** Either?

**MS. KING:** Okay. Althea Gibson, obviously I've told you about her. Obviously, my mother and my father are a huge influence. They were a good team, they were good to each other, they loved each other. My dad's passed away, he passed away six years ago. They helped each other. They weren't afraid to cross the so-called female/male domains. My dad would say, "Betty, put your feet up, I'll cook tonight." Oh my God. Or whatever, they would help each other. My mother would usually defer to my father, they were that generation. But, they were good to each other, they were kind to each other. Not to say they didn't get into it, no one's perfect. But I think my brother and I saw that. They loved to dance, too. Aren't you a clogger?

**MS. WERNER:** Why yes, yes I am.

**MS. KING:** Yeah, you are a clogger and a dancer, so my parents loved to swing dance and I know you're a good swing dancer. I think it's really important to have a sense of teamwork. What was the question again, I'm forgetting?

**MS. WERNER:** Who did you look up to growing up?

**MS. KING:** Oh, as far as males, Reverend Bob Richards. He was the minister of-- I went to the First Church of the Brethren as a child. He was a gold medalist pole vaulter in two Olympics and he was the minister of our church. And every Sunday, he got sports into every sermon. Do you think I wasn't there, hanging on every word? And then I'd go behind the church and watch him work out. I watched his discipline. He'd run hurdles. In those days, they had no bend in the pole vault. They had no bend, it was-- so he was truly having to lift his body weight up. There was no flex to it at all.

I always remember looking at it. But I'd go watch him to see the discipline and the intensity. And I remember he asked me, "What do you want to be?" And I said, "Number one tennis player in the world." And, of course, this little chubby kid with glasses, he's probably thinking, "She's got no chance." But anyway, I loved this man. He was such a great motivator. He was one of the first guys on the Wheaties box. Reverend Bob Richards. Do you remember? I don't know, some of you might remember him. He's a great motivational speaker.

You thought you could win anything after the sermon he would give on Sunday. I was ready to go get 'em. I loved that guy, he was awesome.

**MS. WERNER:** Do you feel professional tennis suffers a lack of media coverage? It seems only the major events are carried on network television and covered by newspapers. What can be done to reverse this?

**MS. KING:** Well, actually ESPN covers a lot of the U.S. Open series, which leads up to the U.S. Open. I think we have more hours of television, probably, than any other sport, I think we're right up there. The trouble is, it's not in prime time every time. I think a lot of people-- it's hard. If you want to root for a player, it's a player. We need more American champions. And we've got Mardy Fish and John Isner. John Isner is our poster boy for collegiate tennis. David Benjamin's here, who's the head of the ITA. John Isner graduated from the University of Georgia, he's in the top ten in the world. Now, we never thought that would probably happen. He's our poster boy now. I told him he's in trouble.

But I've been trying to get more young people to go to college. They all want to turn pro and they're not good enough, quite frankly. And, when you go to college, the socialization process helps you. When you go back out on tour, the way John Isner has, it helps you socially. It helps you to cope with the life on the tour. You're much more mature. You handle things a lot better. It's not just what happens on the court, it's what's happening off the court. And I think John Isner is our poster boy right now.

Arthur Ashe graduated. We used to have graduates, but it's a lot tougher now because we have to turn pro earlier and give up a lot and do home schooling more. It's changed. But I really think most of the kids should be going to college or university, not turning pro. They can do it.

**MS. WERNER:** How would you rate the state of affairs for American tennis?

**MS. KING:** I would say we're not at our height at the moment. But we do have junior development. We're making a concerted effort. I've heard we've got more young, better girls than boys right now. I don't know if that's true, but I don't know, I don't think you ever really know until they grow up. I did find this one kid. This guy came up to me and he said, "I'd love you to watch my daughter." And I'm thinking-- you know how often I'm asked to watch their son or daughter? Daily. This is a daily request. And I'm at the Y in Prescott, Arizona, where my mom lives and I'm pumping iron and I'm like-- it's



my one hour to myself. And he's so nice, the guy comes over, Randy Johnson's his name. He says, "I'm just so sorry to interrupt. I'd just love you to watch my daughter." I'm going, "Okay." And I go, "Okay, I'm going to cut through this really fast. "Does she have a ranking?" Because that helps us know their abilities. "Yes, she's number one in the ten and under in the southwest region." And I go, "Oh," now the southwest is one of our weaker sections as far as the top kids. But, she knows how to win if she's number one.

Okay. I said, "Okay, when I come back, I promise you I'll call and I will take a look." So I said, "Please give me your information." He gives me the information, I put it in my sock. He looks down like, "Sure, she's going to call me. No chance." I did. I went out and watched her. And she is so highly motivated. I'm very big on motivation. If the kid's motivated, I'm with them. Taylor Johnson's her name. She's a lefty. And now the USTA has invited her-- she's now in L. A. Her parents actually moved to L. A. so she can train at our training center in L. A. And she's 11, okay? And she's adorable. She just loves it.

And then I have this other guy I'm trying to help get a scholarship. Anyway, I love helping kids. They're fun and they're a riot. They're so funny. But she loves it. And she gave me a photo of herself and she says, "I'll see you at the U.S. Open in 2019." (Laughter)

**MS. WERNER:** We're almost out of time, but before asking the last question, a couple of housekeeping matters to take care of. First of all, I'd like to remind you all of upcoming speakers. May 15<sup>th</sup>, Gary Gensler, chairman of the Commodity Futures Trading Commission; May 30<sup>th</sup>, Anna Maria Chavez, Chief Executive Officer of the Girls Scouts to talk about the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Girl Scouting; and on June 4<sup>th</sup>, the Gerald R. Ford Journalism Awards with guest speaker Chris Matthews.

Second, I'd like to present our guest with the traditional NPC mug.

**MS. KING:** All right! My coffee, my decaf. That's nice, thanks. I like that.

**MS. WERNER:** And I'd like to ask everybody for a wonderful round of applause for our speaker today. (Applause)

**MS. KING:** Thank you.

**MS. WERNER:** And for all of you tennis fans out there, I have something very exciting that I would like to let you know and to thank you that the USTA has donated two tickets to the 2012 U.S. Open. These tickets include seating in the President's Courtside box, hospitality in the President's suite, courtside seating in the Louis Armstrong Stadium, access to all other courts, and behind the scenes tour of the Arthur Ashe Stadium. We will be auctioning these tickets off and proceeds will go to our National Press Club Journalism Institute. The National Press Club Institute is committed to helping working journalists improve their skills through ongoing training programs

and encouraging future journalists through its scholarships. So I ask that you keep an eye on our website at [press.org](http://press.org) on information on how to bid on this.

And I do have one last question, and I would like to ask her, besides her victory over Bobby Riggs, what was your most satisfying victory?

**MS. KING:** First of all, that was not my most satisfying win. (Laughter) It was most satisfying from a pressure point of view. I had a lot of pressure. It was about social change, it wasn't about tennis, okay? Although it helped tennis. We exploded. Tennis at the grass root level and at the professional, it exploded after that moment.

I would say anything to do with teams. If I won a Fed Cup, which is international team play for women when I represented my country. And any time I won a World Team Tennis title, those are the ones I cherish, absolutely at the top. I like teams. I'm a team kind of girl. And I grew up in team sports, I love team. So for me, it's the teams. World Team Tennis, I played for the New York team, for the Chicago team. Those are the ones I hold dear because I still have deeper relationships with those people. And also for Fed Cup. And also, coaching Fed Cup was a real honor. (Applause)

**MS. WERNER:** I want to thank all of you for coming out today. And we have some tennis balls that we're going to close out with that Miss King here is going to lob into the audience.

**MS. KING:** Do you notice the different size? This is our ten and under initiative that we're trying to get organized. So you see all the different sizes. Colors, too. You notice the colors? Kids like colors. I don't know.

[lobbing balls into the audience]

**MS. WERNER:** Duck.

**MS. KING:** Everybody can have one.

**MS. WERNER:** There are plenty.

**MS. KING:** Lot of these people already have this stuff. They're like, "I don't need this." How about you guys and TV guys back there?

**MS. WERNER:** A return. Nice.

**MS. KING:** There's not a lot of space here. Back in the back, get ready. Cal Ripkin, I see him sometimes, he's great.

**MS. WERNER:** Whoa!

**MS. KING:** I don't play anymore. No, I still play.

**MS. WERNER:** All the way down at the end. Thank you all for joining us today.

**MS. KING:** Thank you!

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