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Tennis: Woman is King

by Piper Wentz

If you were listening, a wild roar went up from every living room at the College last Thursday night, as Billie Jean King, audaciously, stabbed all male chauvinists in the back by defeating Bobby Riggs 6-4, 6-3, 6-3 in their \$100,000 "Battle of the Sexes." Had you been listening carefully, you would have heard the 600 or so people who paraded joyously around the campus, screaming and extolling the merits of the match. Signs proclaiming King's victory were visible in several places on the campus the next day, but surprisingly enough, none were to be seen at the College laundry.

When Billie Jean was borne into the Astrodome on a Cleopatra-styled litter, carried by four muscled men, the match had only just begun. It was not until Riggs dumped a weak forehand shot into the net for the final set that the match was finally over.

Billie Jean, leading 5-3 with Riggs serving, earlier blew two match points with weak shots into the net. At the end of the match, King flung her racket high into the air and, in a traditional fashion, hurled the net.

Riggs Slow

The fifty-five year old Riggs was a tired, rubber-legged man at the finish. Indeed, throughout the match, his legs were unsteady, his shots were not secure, and his movement was slow. His first serve rarely got on the court, and his second attempt was often so soft that King moved in on it and put it away for countless winners. It is unusual for a player of Riggs' caliber and usual accuracy to have such an incredible number of double faults. But all of Riggs' shots lacked authority. He seemed so helpless under King's unceasing attack. Yes, this little man, who had once said that all women should be kept barefoot and pregnant, was certainly a tragic victim of King's slamming, aggressive tactics.

Many began to feel sorry for the weary Riggs at the end. There is no reason for sympathy. It has been a great six months for this old guy. His years and Billie Jean's skills were simply too much to overcome. No one should give him a break, especially not after the things he said. He certainly did not give Margaret Court any kind of a break in their Mother's Day meeting.

Spectacle

Billie Jean King did win, but the question in for history will concern neither the winner nor how the



photo by Doris Weiner

Women celebrating King's victory at Duckett House.

game was played, but what the spectacle actually proved.

It has been said that the match was good for tennis, for there were over fifty million viewers -- many of whom were non-tennis playing people seeing the sport for the first time. It meant nothing in terms of tennis superiority, but was merely a tremendous publicity stunt for the game.

And yet the stunt-like atmosphere of the match resembled a roller game or a prizefight more than it did a tennis match.

The television was most adept in bringing this forth, with numerous \$90,000-a-minute commercials and Howard Cosell, who appeared to have exchanged his Monday night suit for a tuxedo and Dandy Don for Rosemary Casals. Casals was perhaps the only bright spot of the entire telecast, making up for Howard's unusual loss of words by taking almost every opportunity to criticize the sexist Riggs.

Prize Money

The monetary aspects of the match were incredible. The winner received \$100,000, while domestic champagne was sold for a dollar a glass at court-side. It is estimated that Bobby Riggs had easily made \$800,000 before he stepped onto the court. Although he turned his defeat into a million dollar hustle,

he appears to be bankrupt where future hustles are concerned.

Oh yes, was the match the "Battle of the Sexes?" or was it one man's ability to exploit the times? It does not matter. The only thing that matters is what King did on the court, which was to refuse being psyched out by Riggs' juvenile antics. The tension did not get to her; by nature, choke is not part of her vocabulary. Outclassing Riggs to the hilt, she played her own game, acting decisively, forcing him to react.

Superlative King

Billie Jean King did redeem Margaret Court and women's tennis, but she had already singlehandedly brought women's tennis a long way towards equality with men's tennis. She struggled beyond her own personal pocket and enjoyment, benefitting not only current players on the women's circuit, but also those players of the future. Meanwhile, Bobby Riggs went no further than his own enrichment.

No, it was not Billie Jean King, the feminist, on Thursday night, but Billie Jean King, the superlative, accomplished athlete who just happens to be a woman. One can hardly recall a more completely satisfactory result in any sport.

Rally lauds victory

by Sally Duggin

"Tennis today, the world tomorrow," "power to the women," "long live the king," "right on, Billie Jean." These were the cries that echoed throughout the Smith campus last Thursday evening as over 500 students joined in a victory march celebrating women's tennis champion Billie Jean King's defeat of Bobby Riggs, a professional tennis shark and avowed male chauvinist.

The rally started shortly after 11 p.m. when people began assembling in the quad shouting the news of King's 6-4, 6-3, 6-3 win in three straight sets. About a hundred students were present when the group headed for the president's house cheering King and the women's movement. A few minutes later a group arrived with a giant banner proclaiming the slogan "Tennis today, the world tomorrow," and the crowd began marching through the campus from the quad to Green Street to the front gates singing "We Shall Overcome" and "We Have Overcome" in between cheers.

As the women made their way through the campus more and more joined in, some in wet hair and bathrobes, despite the cold. By the time it had turned onto Green Street the line was nearly a block long. The enthusiastic crowd applauded wildly when the banner that led the procession was placed across the College Hall gates.

They then returned to the quad singing, "Glory, Glory, Hallelujah, HER truth is marching on." Back

in the quad Helen Reddy's "I Am Woman" was playing, and everyone sang along. Everyone, that is, except a few coeds from Park and Wesley Annexes who attempted a token cheer for Riggs. They were immediately booed and hissed into silence.

Asked to quiet down for a few minutes the group heard two announcements that sparked another wave of loud applause. "A telegram has just been sent to the Astrodome", one girl shouted. "It reads, We love you, Billie Jean, signed Smith College." "And another one saying 'Right on, Billie Jean, you are strong; you are invincible; you are woman; has also been sent,'" announced someone else.

At that point a circle began to form on the driveway encompassing the green. As in a huge folk dance the unbroken circle traveled around the quad, concluding the main part of the celebration.

The students returned to their own houses discussing the game, Howard Cosell's reporting, plans for the signs which appeared overnight on Hopkins, Chapin and other houses. Others spoke not only of the game, but of the rally itself. As one student later said, "It was fantastic that Billie Jean won and put Riggs and a lot of others with similar views in their places, but it was also exciting, and encouraging, to see so many Smith students spontaneously turn out in support of something they believed in."

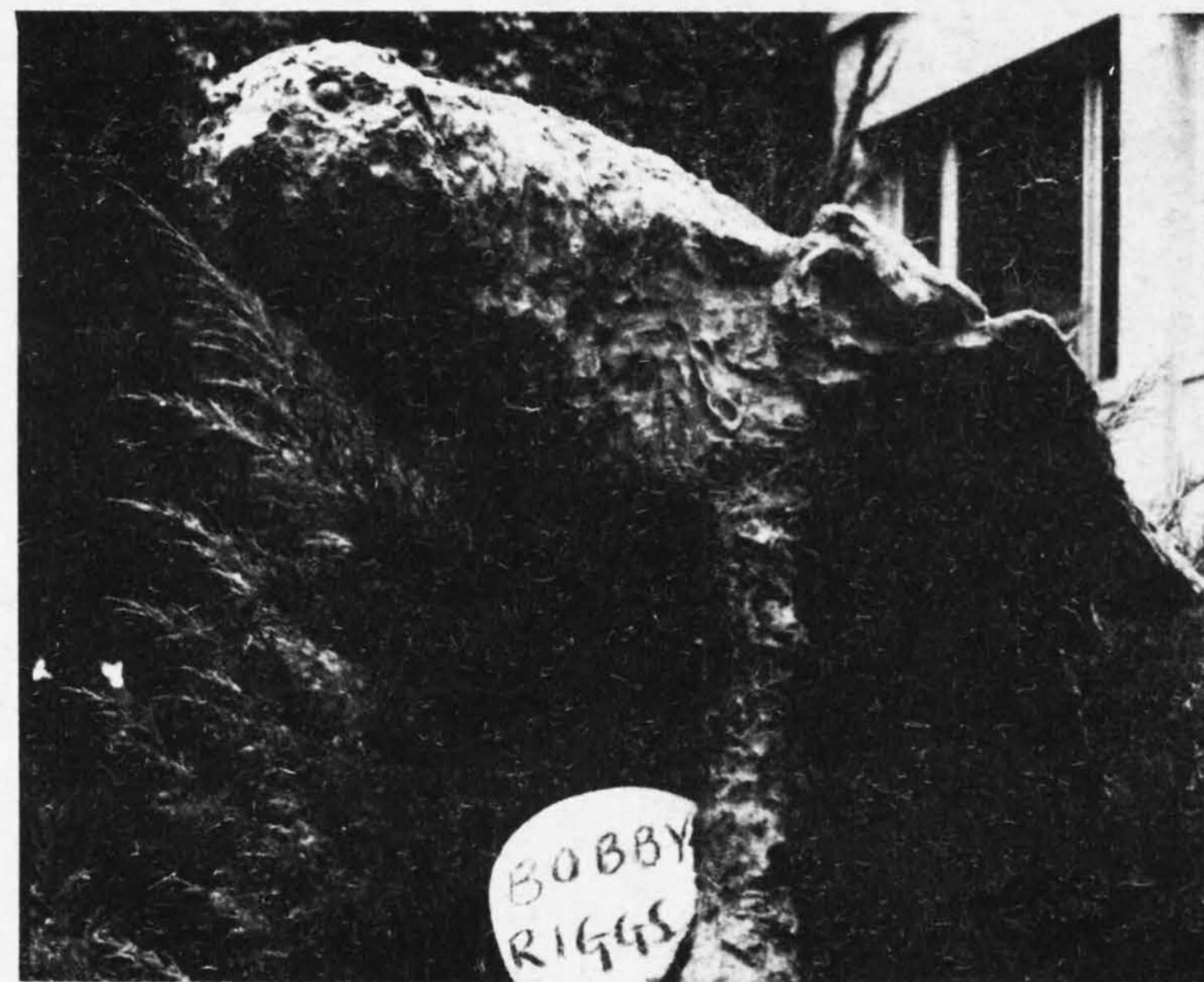


Photo by Glynis Berry