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Battle of the Sexes: King vs. Riggs - I

Lead: The 1973 tennis match between Billie Jean King and Bobby Riggs may have contributed significantly to the progress of women in sports and other parts of society.

Intro: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts

Content: The 1960s and 1970s were decades of gains for women. The founding of the National Organization for Women, the steadily increasing influx of women into business and the professions, and the passage

of Title VII in the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Title IX in 1972, demonstrated the incremental progress of women in the workforce, domestic life, and sports. Despite this evolution old sentiments die hard. These attitudes were especially strong in the arena of women's sports. Many felt that women were inferior athletes, unable to compete at the level of their male counterparts.

In the early 1970s a tennis match between two keen competitors brought the "Battle of the Sexes" into clearer focus. After winning many coveted titles, Bobby Riggs had once been ranked the best tennis player in the world prior to his retirement in 1951. He was passionate about the sport and threw himself into the controversy about women's athletics by seeking a woman against which he could compete to prove that men were superior competitors.

Riggs first challenged the leading women's tennis player, Billie Jean King but she declined the offer. He then played and defeated Margaret Court, another top women's competitor, in two sets. This victory gave Riggs the national attention he craved as he was featured on both *Time* and *Sports Illustrated* covers. Riggs then began to taunt King with statements such as, "women's tennis is so far beneath men's tennis." Then promoters came up with a \$100,000 prize for the winner and King reconsidered. Next time: Battle of the Sexes.

At the University of Richmond's School of Professional and Continuing Studies, I'm Dan Roberts.

Resources

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