



Volume 21

Number 027

Battle of the Sexes (Tennis) - II

Lead: Drawn by rich prize money and the taunts of Bobby Riggs, Billie Jean King, the best woman's tennis player at the time, agreed to a match, the so-called Battle of the Sexes.

Intro: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts

Content: There was a record crowd, for tennis at least, in the Houston Astrodome on September 20, 1973. The television audience was said to exceed 48,000,000. His recent

victory over tennis star, Margaret Court, and his arrogant confidence that he would emerge the victor over King, led Riggs and others who believed in him to place bets on the outcome. In part, King believed she could provoke a shift in attitudes toward women athletes if she were able to win. The event took on aspects of a publicity spectacle. King was carried to the court on a golden litter by four muscle-bound men. Riggs followed in a rickshaw pulled by Bobby's Bosom Buddies, six amply endowed women in a grotesque display of misogyny.

Early in the match, King had figured Riggs' strategy. He had defeated Margaret Court through the liberal use of lobs and drop shots which kept her off balance. He was also much older and obviously much less quick than he was in his competing years. King remained close to the net where she

could keep returning the older man's best efforts. She won all three sets 6-4, 6-3, 6-3.

One of King's interests was to equalize the compensation between men and women in tennis. Her victory over Riggs, so decisive and so very public, helped this goal become a reality. Women's prize money grew exponentially from the 1970s into the 1990s. Interest in women's sports began to increase as well, growing ten times by the end of the 1990s, and has continued to set records at the high school and college levels. This singular match was not the only factor in this transformation, but it was a very public one.

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

Resources

Finn, Robin. "Growth in Women's Sports Stirs Harassment Issue." *New York Times* (1923-Current file): Mar 07 1999.

Foster, Johanna E. "Women Of A Certain Age: "Second Wave" Feminists Reflect Back On 50 Years Of Struggle In The United States." *Women's Studies International Forum* (2015).

"How Bobby Runs and Talks, Talks, Talks." *Time* 10 Sept. 1973.

Kaminski, Theresa. "Game, Set, Match: Billie Jean King and the Revolution in Women's Sports - By Susan Ware." *Historian* 74.2 (2012): 378-79.

Spencer, Nancy E. "Reading Between The Lines: A Discursive Analysis Of The Billie Jean King Vs. Bobby Riggs "Battle Of The Sexes." *Sociology of Sport Journal* 17.4 (2000): 386-402. SPORTDiscus with Full Text. Web. Apr. 2015.

Title IX and Sex Discrimination: Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 Prohibits Discrimination Based on Sex in Education Programs or Activities Which Receive Federal Financial Assistance. Washington, D.C: U.S. Dept. of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 1988.