

## I Beat Bobby Riggs

One Spring morning years ago tennis champion Emery Neale called. He wanted to know if I would take his place in a doubles match with Bobby Riggs. Would I? Riggs was the reason I became a tennis player.

I practically memorized his first book "Tennis Is My Racket". More than a fan; I was a disciple-like in the Bible. People saw him more as a character at this time than one of the all-time greats.

A guy who bet you \$200.00 he could beat you with a 2 by 4 strapped to one leg. Forgotten is 1946 when he was the best player in America . Or 1939, when he won all three events at Wimbledon including the doubles with Elwood Cooke of Portland Oregon.

It started about 1972 when he played Billie Jean King -a match some thought he bet against himself. A match one writer called "the game's greatest moment ". He has a point: Waitresses, Symphony Conductors, Plumbers, Taxi Drivers. People who wouldn't know Pancho Gonzales from Pancho Villa tuned in.

And suddenly you couldn't find a vacant court in town . "Tennis Anyone " became the by-word of the day. All this was buzzing about in my brain when I picked up my rackets, a copy of his book and sped off to the ritzy Racket Club where" White Dress Only "signs were still on the outdoor courts. Riggs wearing a Sugar Daddy baseball cap greeted me with a wide smile impressed that I still had a copy of his book. His partner was head pro Dick Lenker. My partner would be one of the Irvington Club's best, Leonard Clark.

It was obvious to everyone after the first set that Bobby Riggs had lost it. Everything was in slow motion; his movement, his serve, ground strokes. Lenny and I eventually won and as we were shaking hands Bobby asked if I would take him to his hotel downtown . I don't remember a thing we talked about except that he liked my overhead, but added that "it would be the first stroke to go" And we laughed.

When we arrived at the Sheraton Hotel, he thanked me for the ride then began to unbutton his shirt exposing a nasty red scar that ran from the tip of his chest to the middle of his waist. "Thanks for the match Bob, First time I've played since open heart surgery a few weeks ago".



*Riggs & Lenker*

Bob Dietsche

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