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BILLIE JEAN KING INTERVIEW
MAKERS: WOMEN WHO MAKE AMERICA
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Billie Jean King
Tennis Champion and Social Activist
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Interviewed by
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START TC: 00:00:00:00

Billie Jean King
Former World No. 1 Tennis Player & Activist

INTERVIEWER:

All right. We're starting at the very beginning. Tell me a little bit about your childhood, what your upbringing was like and what it was like.

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BILLIE JEAN KING:

I was born in 1943. My dad was a firefighter. My mom was a homemaker at the time. I have a younger brother, Randy Moffitt. Moffitt's my birth name. Almost five years younger. And he became a Major League Baseball player and played for the San Francisco Giants most of his career as a righty, relief pitcher with a good slider. My parents both were very good to each other. Always told us to think about others. They're very good citizens. Kids do what you see, not what you hear. And my parents paid their taxes, never were in

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debt. If we couldn't afford it, we didn't buy it. It's just very simple, good values. They also were the parents. They had the power, we didn't when we were younger, which was good. I find today the children have the power when they're young, not the parents.

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BILLIE JEAN KING:

I prefer the way I was raised. My dad and mother are strict, –

ON SCREEN TEXT:

Billie Jean King With Her Family

Long Beach, California

BILLIE JEAN KING:

–but loving and gave us unconditional love. Didn't care for any good in our sports. We wanted to be the best. And they kept saying, "Are you sure? Don't do it for us." They were very big on education because they didn't get as much of education that they wanted. They both came from divorced backgrounds and could not stand it, so they made a commitment to each other and loved each other right up to the end when my dad passed away. They've been married 65 years and were still holding hands and very loving to each other. Not to say they didn't argue. Of course, they argued. But I would say... I was born in Long Beach. And we grew up in a tract home, which is typical of Southern California. They all look the same. And they bought it in 1945.

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INTERVIEWER:

And what'd they tell you about how far you could go as a girl, as a woman?

00:02:10:00

BILLIE JEAN KING:

I think my dad was a huge influence on me because he really wanted me to have the dreams my brother had. And he always told both of us to go for it, but make sure you do what you love, what you like. My mother was very much on the same page with him. The only thing they did say, which got me ... I was very unhappy, was that if they could only send one of us to college it would be my brother, because he would probably most likely be the breadwinner. And I remember arguing with them saying, "That's not necessarily true. And I've been very responsible. And I'm the older one." And I said, "I think actually I'm the more responsible one, so maybe you should send me. Or what if I get better grades than he does?" Or ... I started having this debate and they started laughing because they heard me. But I know if ... That was the only thing I heard different, was that. Or I couldn't ride my bike and they'd let my brother ride his bike farther away. But that was my dad protecting the girl. You know, the baby— the girl. And I said, "Dad, I'm just as responsible as he is." "I don't care."

00:03:12:00

BILLIE JEAN KING:

In general, my dad probably encouraged me more, as far as my sports, than my mother. I think my mother would've been really much happier if I'd grown up and had three kids. Although to this day she still says, "I can't

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believe what you did with your life. How do you feel ..." She's trying to figure it out. But my mother, I think, could have been a great business woman. If she had been born my generation or even ... Well, probably even the next generation after that. She's really smart. She doesn't realize.

ON SCREEN TEXT:

Billie Jean King & Her Mother

BILLIE JEAN KING:

And she can paint. She took up painting at 50. And when she went to work to help, she worked in a lab as a receptionist. But what she did is, she ended up doing the books. She got the guy out of the red, into the black. And I said, "Mom, do you realize what you did? You're a business person. I know what he hired you to do, to answer the phone and be a receptionist. But you didn't end up being his receptionist. He turned his business around." And she said, "Yeah. He did thank me." And I said, "No kidding. You got him in the black." I think she would've been a great businesswoman.

INTERVIEWER:

I want to get you into sports. Tell me when you first ... Were you interested? Were you athletic from the start?

00:04:25:00

BILLIE JEAN KING:

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My brother and I were totally athletic from the start. My mother said we moved in her womb and when we were born, we never stopped moving, and we haven't still. The third word from both, my brother and me, was ball. "Ball, Mommy. Ball, Daddy." We learned mommy, daddy and then ball. She said, "That was your first ... Really your first word besides mom or daddy or whatever you said. And you guys never stopped saying, "Play ball. Ball, mommy. Daddy, ball. Where's the ball? Ball. Ball.'" And that's ... And of course baseball's got a ball. Tennis has got a ball. It just totally makes sense, looking back, that we never stopped. And we loved to play sports and run and be outside. And I did love to read a lot, but I really had ... God gave us both ... At least I should talk for myself, but God gave me extra energy. He just did. Or she or whoever. God is my higher power. But I really have a lot of energy. I can go day and night. I really ... Thank God I got this extra energy. I wouldn't be able to do what I needed to do throughout my life because what I needed to do took a lot of energy. It did. It's an extraordinary amount of energy.

INTERVIEWER:

And from early on, when you're a kid with the ball, doing great was the thought of sports as a vocation for you anywhere in your mind?

00:05:50:00

BILLIE JEAN KING:

When I was nine years old, on Mother's Day, we went to Wrigley Field in LA, which looks exactly like Wrigley Field in Chicago. They're total replicas. It's not there anymore in LA. We used to have a Pacific Coast Lake and I went ...

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And so I was sitting there, at nine years of age, it dawned on me that girls don't play baseball, only boys. And it was not a happy day for me at all. I was very sad that day. And my mom said, "What's wrong?" I said, "Why weren't there any girls playing?" She said, "Well, boys play baseball. Not girls." I go, "Well, I play baseball. I like it. I like basketball better, but I like it. Why can't I play?" I started to ... That was my first introduction to, "Hello, wake up." I don't have the opportunities that say my brother would have.

00:06:47:00

BILLIE JEAN KING:

But I continued to play all sports. And then in fifth grade, Susan Williams, who was sitting next to me, her father had just been transferred to Long Beach. And she was real ... She was the smartest person in the class, but she also loved sports and we always ended up ... It was a co-ed school and we ended up playing all sports and sometimes we'd end up being captains, even though we're two girls. And one day in class, she just said ... She looks at me. She says, "Do you want to play tennis?" And I go, "What's tennis?" I said, "Tennis. What's that?" I said, "What do you do in tennis?" And she says, "You get to run, jump and hit a ball." I go, "Those are my three favorite things in sports. I'll try it."

ON SCREEN TEXT:

Billie Jean King With Susan Williams (1955)

BILLIE JEAN KING:

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She belonged to a country club. They were people of wealth. And we went out to a country club. And we were considered from the wrong side of the tracks. Even though we're fine, we're lower middle class, we had clothes, shelter, food, the things that really matter in life, we were fine.

00:07:45:00

BILLIE JEAN KING:

And we went to the club, but I could see very quickly at this club that I wasn't going to be able to play tennis. We don't belong. But my mother had to sew me white shorts and do this because you had to wear all white. And so I hit with Susan and I really had fun. I'm sure I whiffed it a lot, but I liked the running and running after the ball and trying to hit it. And then we both played on a softball team at Houghton Park. And we're at Houghton Park and Val Haller and the coach looked at us. I said, "Susan took me to play tennis." She says, "Oh well, every Tuesday they have free instruction here." I'm hurrying. I'm a public park kid. They have free instruction. Now we're talking. And so I went home and said, "I want to try ... I really want to try to play tennis." My dad says, "Are you sure?" I said, "Dad, I really want to." He says, "Well, figure out how you're going to pay for your first racket then." I said, "Dad, are you serious?" He goes, "Yeah."

00:08:44:00

BILLIE JEAN KING:

So, I went around to the neighborhood and they helped create these pseudo jobs for me so I could make money. And I made \$8 and 29 cents. I put it up in a Mason jar on the cupboard. And when I had \$8 and 29 cents, I could not

wait any longer. I go, "Daddy and Mommy, can we just ... Please, I got to get my racket." We went to Brown Sporting Goods. He says, "What would you like?" And I said, "What is \$8 and 29 cents buy?" He goes, he says, "That's very helpful." So he took me over to the different rackets and I found one with my favorite color. It was lavender. And I said, "I found my racket." And I slept with it. And I read every tennis book, all three of them that I could find in the library. It's not like amazon.com, that's for sure. And I just started to learn the history because I love history. That was fantastic. So I go out to the public park for my first instruction. And at the end of the day, I said to my mom ... I was 11.

00:09:40:00

BILLIE JEAN KING:

"Mom, I found out what I'm going to do with my life. This is it." And she goes, "That's fine, dear. You have homework." And all this as she's driving home. And I go, "Mom, I got to tell Dad. I got to tell Randy. Come on, hurry." And I'm jumping up on the seat, which they didn't usually allow us to do. I was just jumping up and bouncing on the seat. And I remember it was the DeSoto fluid drive. They used to have to step on the accelerator and then let up. And you hear the gears change. It was a crack up. I can just remember the sounds. I remember the day, the clear blue sky. And how excited I ... The eucalyptus trees at Houghton Park. I remember everything so clearly, how excited I was. And I go, "Mom, I'm telling you, this is it." You know, my mom's 89 now. And sometimes she'll look at me and say, she'll say, "I remember that day." And she said, "You were so happy. And look, you did do it." She's so sweet. And I go,

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"Yeah, mom. I told you, I knew." And she said, "I know, you really did." I went home, told Dad and Ray, and that was it.

00:10:37:00

BILLIE JEAN KING:

I started going to every park every day. Clyde was at Houghton on Tuesdays, Somerset on Wednesdays, Ramona on Thursdays, Rec Park on Fridays and Silverado on Mondays. I started showing up at every park every day. And finally, after about the fourth time, he goes, "You been at my other parks, haven't you?" And I go, "Yeah." And he said, "How old are you, 14?" I go, "No. I'm 11." He goes, "You're 11? Oh, good. Good. Come on." He got a live one on me. I was totally ... I told him I want to be number one in the world. He goes ... And it's ironic because he had waited all his life to have a child really want to be good. So, there was two of us, Jerry Cromwell and I, who absolutely ... And then Susan also would go out. But Susan started to do ... She's more of the Jackie of all trades, but she definitely was the number one player in the city at the beginning. And that's how that got started. Then at 12, I had an epiphany after I started playing actual tournaments, at 12, after a year.

00:11:35:00

BILLIE JEAN KING:

I had an epiphany at the Los Angeles Tennis Club. The sun was setting and I was sitting by myself on the grandstand court, which probably held 150 people at the time. And I just remembered something was wrong, that everybody who played tennis was white, the clothes were white, the shoes were white, the socks were white, the balls were white. And I remember

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asking myself, "Where is everybody else?" No people of color. Except I knew about Althea Gibson, and she was of color, because I read, so I knew about her. But I didn't see her yet. And I thought ...

ON SCREEN TEXT:

Althea Gibson, Arthur Ashe & Billie Jean King

U.S. Pro Indoor Tennis Tournament, February 1969

BILLIE JEAN KING:

Then I basically formed my goals in life through that. And that was to fight for equal rights and opportunities for boys and girls, men and women. That was going to be my life's work. And that's when I was 12. So I was pretty clear on what was going on. I had not really awakened to the gender thing yet in a big way. At nine I did because of the baseball game, but I put that in the recesses of my mind, didn't really ... It wasn't at the forefront. Now, I was so full of tennis. And tennis became my platform, really, to do my life's work. Tennis was not just tennis. It was really a platform to allow me to have a forum.

INTERVIEWER:

Can you say this sentence for me and finish it as you will, "When I'm playing tennis, I feel ..."

00:13:15:00

BILLIE JEAN KING:

When I'm playing tennis, I have fun. I feel alive. I feel integrated. I feel one with the universe. I feel exhilarated. I feel I can do anything. I feel like ... I believe in myself. I feel liberated. I feel freedom. I feel ... And when I say integrated, I mean I'm integrated my mind and body and soul as one. Because I have to use my mind, I have to use my heart, I have to use my guts. Those are the basic feelings. When I'm finished with playing, I always come off the court knowing that ... That's when I truly feel one with the universe, that I've integrated myself again, within myself. And that I really love tennis. I don't like it. I love it. It's fun. I love to feel the ball against the strings. It has nothing to do with competition.

00:14:22:00

BILLIE JEAN KING:

Everybody perceives former professional athletes that, "Oh, don't you miss the competition?" No. I had my moments. It's up to the younger ones. It's their turn. But to go hit the ball, even if I hobbled to the ball, even if I can only take a step to the ball. Because I'm now in my later sixties. I've had double knee replacements so I could play tennis again. What kept me going through the pain of my rehab is the thought of hitting that first tennis ball again. It's like light at the end of a tunnel. This long tunnel of rehab, because I'd been through a lot of rehab already. So I had an understanding of it, but this was the most difficult. And I just kept thinking about the light and hitting the first ball again, just hitting the first ball. And when I say hitting it, I mean tapping it, I mean standing at the service lines, being very close to the end and just feeling the ball in the strings for the first time. And another thing I wanted,

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now this is where my competitive soul does rise to the top, is I had to make the first ball go over the net.

00:15:24:00

BILLIE JEAN KING:

I did not want to see it going in the net. It had to go over the net. I didn't ... I was going to hit it very softly, so I knew it wouldn't go long. I didn't want it to go wide either, but I wanted it to go over the net. It was a sense of starting over correctly because that's the perfectionist in me too. One thing sports teach you, which unless someone's been there, it's very difficult to explain and articulate in words. It takes you to a different ... Another place to find out who you are. There'll be moments in a match where you think you cannot take one more step and somehow you find it within yourself. Some place that you don't even know about that allows you to go on. And allows you to go on in a way that's successful, with energy and endurance and all the things that you've worked for.

00:16:2:00

BILLIE JEAN KING:

Pro athletes know we're performers, we're entertainers. Unfortunately, the world doesn't look at us enough that way. They really do separate us. We're still very separated. If I go to a conference for women, I'm over here, I know how they perceive me. I'm over in sports, I'm over here. Sports. I'm not sports. I'm an activist. I'm all these things. You guys, that happened to be my platform. They still haven't connected to that fact. But if you're a writer, if

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you're a journalist, if it ... Then people, they think you're connected to it.
We're usually number one.

INTERVIEWER:

Tell me what it's like to play and to win at Wimbledon.

ON SCREEN TEXT:

Wimbledon, Women's Singles Event
London, 1975

00:17:01:00

BILLIE JEAN KING:

It's great winning at Wimbledon, but I prefer team sports over singles.

ON SCREEN TEXT:

Billie Jean King
US Open Tennis Championships, 1972

BILLIE JEAN KING:

Mixed doubles is my favorite sport, men and women on a team. And then women's doubles is second most favorite. And then singles. And today I do world team tennis, which is two men and two women on each team, it's coed on a level playing field. So if a child comes to watch a team tennis match, he or she is seeing men and women cooperating, equal contribution by both genders, on a level playing field. And that's what I want the world to look like.

And so the socialization process of world team tennis is extremely important to me. So a child comes, you know what? If you see it, you can be it. It's what your parents did. It's what your role models did. And what you saw and not what they said.

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BILLIE JEAN KING:

So they see these players working together. And sometimes the men are in the leadership role when they're playing and they're performing and they're leading and all this, or coaching or whatever. But when the women are playing, now the men are in a supportive role and the women can strut. The men and women are always supporting each other or being in a leadership role, depending upon what's demanded of them at that moment. And that's what the children are picking up on. They don't realize that's what they're seeing, but that's what they're seeing. And that's how we created this format. So if you see a world team tennis match, you see my philosophy on life. And it goes back to my epiphany at 12, when I was going to dedicate my life to equal rights and opportunities for boys and girls. Now, what has everybody else done to me? They've put me into the women's part. That's not who I am. I'm for both genders. And I grew up with a brother, and my dad was very influential. And my mother's very... I just look at people as people. I don't really look at the genders so much.

INTERVIEWER:

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Tell me what the opportunities were like for women versus men playing tennis in the sixties and seventies. And how you felt about that.

00:19:06:00

BILLIE JEAN KING:

At the amateur level it was very equal. We all were getting our 14 or \$28 a day. Sometimes the men got a little bit more, or the top women got a little bit more. The top players, men and women, got more under the table sometimes. But it was ridic ... We say we got more, a couple hundred bucks or whatever. And what we wanted was professional tennis. Now there were contract men pros playing off on the side, and they're the ones I like to watch, because I knew that they were the best. Then I watched the best women, who were amateur as well. But the men and women amateurs were always together tournament by tournament. And so that was the way I liked it. I didn't like the fact that we're amateurs. I didn't like ... I preferred to be in bigger stadiums and have more audience. Make it bigger, more pro, more exciting, more ... Just everything.

00:20:01:00

BILLIE JEAN KING:

I like music. I like showtime. I'm perfect for professional tennis. I'm not ... Amateur tennis does not ring true to me. And I didn't like the lack of inclusion. It wasn't very inclusive. It was quite very country club, white. I didn't like that either. And I knew if we could get professional tennis that would open the doors to a lot more opportunity for people. So I fought for

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that, always getting in trouble. But when professional tennis started is when everything changed.

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BILLIE JEAN KING:

You had the men starting to talk about an association or a union. And I went to them, and I said, "You're going to include the women, right?" We've been playing together. And I said, "We're both high profile," which we were. And they said, "Absolutely not." I said, "How could you not?" I said, "We'd be so much more powerful as one voice. We're a global sport. We could do so much on the court, but also think how we could influence off the court as one. And we would be exceptional. We would be the exception as men and women professionals. The same association. We'd be the first."

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BILLIE JEAN KING:

And they told me, "Absolutely not. We don't want you. Get lost." Basically. I had two of the guys tell me that probably nobody would ever pay even a dime to watch us play. And these guys were my friends, by the way. I love them, so I was crushed. I was really crushed. It was a very tough time for me. It was a very lonely time, a lot of emotional struggles because of the way we were being treated. So, as time was going on, we had less and less opportunities. When I say us, I mean the women. And pretty soon we had very few places to even play, forget the money. If we were with the men at a tournament, usually the ratio of prize money was 12 or 11 to one. I knew ... And my former husband, at that time my husband, was saying, "You know the men will

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squeeze you out completely," because they would also run the tournaments.
And he was correct.

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BILLIE JEAN KING:

So, I remember Larry saying ... Larry King is his name. He said, "Why don't you go to Gladys Hellman, who is a publisher of a world tennis magazine? Maybe because she's a publisher, and they have the advertising section, she'll know a lot of corporate people." And I said, "That sounds really good. You're absolutely correct." So Rosie Casals, who's a former professional player, from San Francisco. She and I went to Gladys and said, "We need your help." And she said, "What do you mean?" And we're saying, "Would you do a tournament for us? We don't have any place to play anymore. We're really running out of opportunities at all." She said, "Okay. Let me put my head together. See what we can do." So she did a little tournament in Houston, Texas with eight of us at the Houston Racket Club. And she got money from Virginia Slims and she comes up to me. I got money for ... I go, It's ... "Sarah, I don't smoke. I never would smoke. I'm an athlete. How can you do that, Gladys?" She goes, "Well, do you want the tournament or not?" And I go, "Holy Camoly. Now I'm ..." Is it ever easy? Never. So I said, "Okay, it's not about me. It's about opportunity." And she said, "Joe Coleman, the chairman and CEO of Philip Morris, believes in what we're trying to do."

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BILLIE JEAN KING:

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And I knew him. I'd met him. I go, "Okay. He loves tennis." I said, "Okay, fine. Here we go." It was \$7,500, and we're all excited. Every night at her home, the eight of us would get together and try to talk about the future of the sport. And I kept pushing and pushing. And Rosie was great, she pushed. We all kept thinking about what we'd want. We started thinking about just tennis. But then we started thinking about society and women and what this might mean. And basically our philosophy at the end of this, if we can make this work, we want to have a tour. And that means we got to play for money every week. Well, we have no infrastructure. We have nothing. And I'm going, "How are we going to do this? Who's going to believe in us?" It was just really scary.

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BILLIE JEAN KING:

So at the end of the week, we signed a \$1 contract with Gladys Hellman in Houston, Texas. And that is the birth of women's professional tennis. And our goal was we wanted any girl born in the world, if she is good enough, there's a place for her to play and make a living. That's what we wanted. So when I speak to the WTA tour players, which is the women's tour, is what we started in 1970. I tell them they're living our dream, because they are. And in 2012, they'll be playing for almost a hundred million dollars in prize money. And in 1971, when we had our first tour, we played for 350,000 total money. So we have come a long way.

00:25:31:00

BILLIE JEAN KING:

The people at Virginia Slims and Philip Morris, to this day, are friends. To this day, have helped shape the future. They have the most integrity of any people I ever work with. It's just totally ironic. I don't know. So anyway. It's just scary. But they dropped out of tennis too because the players started to get younger and younger, and they said, "We can't do this anymore. It's not appropriate." Or if we wanted to have a tournament in high school, they said, "Absolutely not." Even if they could do it legally, they said, "No, it's ethically incorrect. No." Everyone's got these misconceptions about them. It's very interesting. But Joe Coleman was such a force and believed in us so much. That helped us and they were willing to get behind it and really activate it, would send staff people to every tournament.

00:26:22:00

BILLIE JEAN KING:

But my former husband and I, what we started to do is go out and try to figure out how are we going to get tournaments. In 1968, my former husband and I ... When he was at law school at Bolt, we ran a one tournament exhibition in Oakland Coliseum. We had four men and four women. And we had \$5,000 in savings and we put every dime we had into it. And I said, "Larry, if this loses money, we are in big trouble." He says, "I know." But he didn't care about money. I did. I'm much more alert on the money part. And we made money. That was my first entree into being a business woman. And I've been a small businesswoman since 1968. Now most people never think of me like that, but that's really what I've been, an entrepreneur since 1968.

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INTERVIEWER:

What was the USTA's reaction?

ON SCREEN TEXT:

The Original Nine (1970)

Advocating For Equal Pay

INTERVIEWER:

What was the reaction of the tennis establishment to this idea?

00:27:17:00

BILLIE JEAN KING:

When we're at Houston Racket Club, and I had asked the USLTA at that time, now it's USTA. I said, "We need you to start a tour. We're losing out. We don't have any place to play." And they said, "Absolutely not. Absolutely not." Five minutes before this \$1 contract, we held it up. We have one photo. That's all we've got in the archives to show that we actually did this. And I made a call to the president at the time and said, "In five minutes, I'm going to sign on \$1 contract. But I don't want you to read about this without me talking to you. And remember, we've talked about this on numerous occasions." He said, "I don't want you to do that. We might suspend you." I said, "You've given us no choice. I don't know what to do." So when I went around the corner where all these bricks were, this brick wall, I remember clearly, and we took up this \$1 contract. The very next day or within three weeks or a month, the USLTA started a women's tour to ... They reacted to what we did. They were angry

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with us. After I'd asked for two years. It's like, "You guys, I'm asking for two years. Please don't get upset with us."

00:28:25:00

BILLIE JEAN KING:

So anyway, now I'm really upset because now we've got the top talent divided. And we got no chance to make ... We're young. We're a fledgling tour. And we're women. That in itself was just ... The LPGA had already started, but just for us to make it was going to be really difficult because we had no infrastructure. We had nothing. And so anyway, two years passed and what I did with the original line is I took each person. I said, "Rosie Casals, who can you influence? Anne Jones, who can you influence?" And so each of us had two people that we had to go in lobby. Lobby, lobby, lobby. To try to get a union together, like the boys were starting. And finally in 1973 at the Gloucester Hotel, we called for a meeting, and I said, "This is the last time I'm going to work on it." I was running out of ... I just was running out of ... I just ... It's either got to happen or it's not.

00:29:25:00

BILLIE JEAN KING:

And a lot of people were working behind the scenes to try to make it happen, like Virginia Slims and all that. And the USLTA started to realize how much money Philip Morris had. I think that made a huge difference. Usually comes down to money. And we got 45 women in the room. I told Betty Stöve, who was from Holland, a Dutch player, to lock the door. She was very big and ominous. I said, "Lock the doors, do not let one person out. We're either going

to have an association by the time we finish or we're not." And Larry, who had obviously gone to law school, was now a lawyer. We got all the bylaws ready before this meeting. So if we were fortunate enough for them to say, "We're going to do it," We could sign them up and elect officers. That was good. We're ready to go, if they said yes. We sat and we discussed and we argued and we discussed and we ... Finally, I said, "Okay, you guys, I can't ..." I'm up there. I go, "I can't do it anymore. I've given everything I can to this. We're either going to have an association or not. What do you want to do? Let's vote."

00:30:27:00

BILLIE JEAN KING:

So we voted. They voted yes. Great. I said, "Great. We can sign up right here. We've got ... And we've got the bylaws. And we'll do all the elections of the officers right now, before we leave this room." We got that all done before we left the room. Because if we hadn't got the bylaws organized, or we hadn't been organized, we would've ... Maybe there'd been ... After everybody leaves, then it starts talking to everybody. We would be toast again. It was great. We come out of there, we're an association. We have our officers. We're ready to rock. Now that's what everybody hears about today is the WTA tour. But we started at the Original Nine in 70. Then we had two tours. And then we finally came together two days before Wimbledon at the Gloucester Hotel in 1973. So I could finally exhale for the first time, that we finally have the top talent together. And then we're off and running.

INTERVIEWER:

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I want to change gears.

ON SCREEN TEXT:

Testifying Before The Senate Education Committee

November 1973

INTERVIEWER:

I want to talk about Title IX. Tell me [inaudible 00:37:07].

BILLIE JEAN KING:

Title IX was huge. Cared about that a lot.

INTERVIEWER:

First hearing about that and why it was important and what you did.

00:31:24:00

BILLIE JEAN KING:

Title IX, from a woman athlete's point of view, we knew we'd get athletic scholarships for the first time, if it was passed. But I knew it was about education. And I really cared ... For instance, if someone wanted to be a doctor back before 1972, when Title IX was passed ... Let's say I go to Harvard, and I say, "I want to come to Harvard." And they say, "Well, you might be good enough, but we only have a 5% quota or 10%." I think it was either five or 10. It was just ... People have no idea. Back in the seventies or sixties people go, "There's no women doctors or lawyers around." I'm

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thinking, "Well, no kidding. If the quota is five or 10% in a class, how are you ever going to have a meaningful number or a critical mass as doctors or lawyers?" Just using those two professions. But the world didn't know that was going on, in general. Nobody understood that.

00:32:24:00

BILLIE JEAN KING:

That's why Title IX was so important, it was just all across the board to have. For instance, when I went to Cal State LA and worked two jobs, I could've gone to SC or Stanford. My dad said, "I'll get a loan for you." And I said, "Absolutely not." I went to ... He knew somebody at Cal State LA, the coach, tennis coach. And he says, "You can play with the men. And there's a women's team. Dr. Johnson's the head of that." And we practiced together every day from 2:00 to 5:00. I said, "Great. I'll go there." And I worked two jobs. I was a playground director, passed out equipment. And 30 miles away across town, Stan Smith, who ended up being number one in the world, had a full scholarship to SC. And Arthur Ashe, who we all know about Arthur, had a full scholarship to UCLA. And I'm over here, 30 miles over here, working two jobs and going to state university. Do you think anybody cared? I guarantee if it were reversed, if I was the one going to UCLA and Arthur or Stan were going to Cal State LA and working two jobs and the girls were getting that opportunity, you would've heard the whole world go crazy.

00:33:25:00

BILLIE JEAN KING:

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It's so interesting how no one cared because we're women. It's a gender thing. And it's so pervasive. It's just so pervasive to this day. I hear it every single day and no one notices it. I think Title IX is one of the three most important pieces of legislation of the 20th century. I think the women getting the vote, I think the civil rights in the sixties and Title IX, June 23rd, 1972. Title IX was absolutely the reason there's so many doctors and lawyers and kids and women in classrooms. In fact, now it's over 50 ... Now, we're what? 57 or 58% women on the average in university. Now we're going to have to worry about the guys getting their little ... Let's go. There should be 51/49 or whatever reflects the population. It's always a challenge, one way or the other. When you oppress people, either by gender, by race, by sexual orientation, doesn't matter what it is.

00:34:25:00

BILLIE JEAN KING:

When you do that, and the doors become ajar, they will fly open, and they will come. And they have. And that's why women ... They don't even realize they were oppressed, a lot of them. Especially the generations today. They don't get it. But my generation who were pre-Title IX, and the kids who got just barely in the seventies were going to college, they get it. They understand why we've got so many women in college and university. Because we were oppressed is the reason. And I don't care what color, whatever it is, that's why Title IX was so crucial to having both men and women in the fabric of every community in every way. And education's very powerful.

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INTERVIEWER:

You gave me the date, the exact date of Title IX's passage. Does that mean you remember that happening? Where you came ...

00:35:19:00

BILLIE JEAN KING:

Well, sure, it's during Wimbledon. Are you kidding? I was waiting. And my shero is Edith Green, who really came up with the idea in the beginning, in the sixties. Congresswoman from Oregon, a Democrat. And then Senator Birch Bayh, who was the Senator who got it passed. In fact, Edith Green was very angry with it when it went to vote. It didn't include what she wanted ... How she wanted it. So she didn't even vote, she was just so angry with everybody. But Senator Birch Bayh did the right thing, he compromised. The most important thing was to get it started, to get something to happen in a positive way. And sometimes you can't get exactly what you want. And I've met with him and I've thanked him because he ... I said, "Why did you want this to go through? Why did it mean so much to you to get up there and really put it on the line?" He says, "Billie, my grandmother, my mother and my wife are the three biggest influences in my life. And they're the best. And why wouldn't I want the best for them and for my sons."

00:36:26:00

BILLIE JEAN KING:

And he ... I just love this man. I cannot tell you how much I love him. Patsy Mink, who wasn't totally into it until Wendy, her daughter, comes home from school and says, "Mom, I got voted president." She said, "That's great, Wendy."

That's great." But she says, "But I can't be president because my teacher wouldn't let me. She said I could only be a vice president." And Patsy Mink goes, "What? What happened?" She said, "My teacher said only girls ... Girls couldn't be president." She said, "Okay. That's it." Patsy Mink, that was it, she got behind ... She's from Hawaii. The first woman of color who got into the Congress. She went crazy. And so she got totally behind this and just fought for it. But her daughter's experience ... You know how a mother is with her daughter or dad is with their children. It doesn't matter. They're real protective. That's what woke her up and got her behind it.

00:37:20:00

BILLIE JEAN KING:

I tried to help Title IX as much as I could because I was still playing, obviously. I was right in the thick of everything, with the women's pro and professional tennis and the women's ... But I talked to Donna de Verona, we'd always get together and talk about that and the Amateur Athletic Act, and we're just grinding away. And then I started going to the women at *Ms. Magazine*, and talking to them. And then talk to Gloria Steinem. And I said, "Gloria, you're not using us enough. We're visible. We sweat. We're real. Use us for the movement. Use us." If you look at an interview before I played Bobby Riggs, the night that I played him, this was two and a half hours before I'm playing. I'm doing an interview with Frank Gehry, he says, "Do you think you're part of the women's movement?" "Yes, Frank, I think we are." It's just amazing how people don't ... Sports are always left on the outside. We're mind, body and soul. And I still think sometimes they're too much from the neck up. Some of

the feminists, if you really ... I love them dearly a little bit too much from the neck up sometimes. We need to have a whole ... We're complete human beings and I want to use us more.

00:38:28:00

BILLIE JEAN KING:

We're so visible. We're actually ... Look how we move. Look how we have to trust our bodies. Look how we're empowered. Look how we have to have brain cells with strategies. The ball comes to me and every time a ball comes to me, I have to make a decision. The ball goes over to the other side, there's a consequence. Every single ball I hit, there's a consequence. I have to deal with it. I have to be nimble. I have to adjust. I have to think. I have to strategize all the things you use in real life are right there. Lessons in life, on the court, or on the field, whatever you do in sports. I'm telling you, it makes you strong. It gives you extra strength to carry on. There's something about what it teaches you and it gives you, it becomes a part of your DNA. I don't know. I just think we're so visible. We just have a chance to make a difference.

INTERVIEWER:

I want to talk to you more about Bobby Riggs.

ON SCREEN TEXT:

Billie Jean King & Bobby Riggs

New York, July 1973

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INTERVIEWER:

Tell me what made you decide to go for it and to rise to the challenge that he laid out.

00:39:26:00

BILLIE JEAN KING:

I was worried about a lot of things. So I knew I had to play him. And I knew the exposure would be extreme. To set the scene, back in those days, we had four channels, no cable TV, no microwaves, no facts, obviously no social media, no anything, really. We're just going to touch tone telephones. I think they were inventing the portable telephone. Girls could not get a credit card on their own in 1973, without a man signing for her. And young women today, if I tell them that, they can't believe it. They go, "What?" I say, "You could not get a credit card on your own without somebody, a guy signing for you. He could be out of work, could be on welfare, but if he signed it, you could probably get it." And they go, "No way." I said, "Way." That's what it is. You had Roe versus Wade. You had Watergate heating up. You had Vietnam starting to cool down. Although, I don't think it's cool down to this day.

00:40:37:00

BILLIE JEAN KING:

So there was a lot going on this match. And I knew it was really important because we'd have so much focus. Now, why was there so much focus? Because there was a male involved. At that time, over 90% of the media was controlled by men. Now it's still ... It's about 90% now. It's controlled by men. And so we have been taught to look at the world through men's eyes, we

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just have. Whether it be movies, whether ... Doesn't matter what it is. We have learned to see it through our fathers, our grandfathers and men's lives. Because Bobby Riggs was involved, now it's about the men. Now they're interested. I'm in the men's arena. Billie Jean, now you're important. You're in our arena. That's why it got so much attention.

INTERVIEWER:

And say a little bit about what it felt like playing that game.

ON SCREEN TEXT:

"Battle Of The Sexes" Tennis Match

September 20th, 1973

00:41:33:00

BILLIE JEAN KING:

About a few weeks ago my brother said to me, "You called me the night before you played Bob Riggs. Do you remember that?" And I go, "No. I don't remember that." He said, "You told me to bet anything I wanted on you. That you were going to win." I said, "I must have been smoking something because I don't remember that." And it's interesting because the day of the match, Rosie Casals, who was a commentator, came to me in the locker room, 20 minutes before the match, and said to me, "How do you feel? What do you think?" And she says that I told her, "I'm winning." Do I remember this? No. I was in another world by then. I get into my tournament ... My game mode. I'm not there. I'm totally in a different place. I had to be. I also went to a

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cocktail party, 20 minutes... I walked out the locker room, went to a cocktail party, thanked everyone.

00:42:29:00

BILLIE JEAN KING:

I thanked Ted Tingling for my dress because he'd gotten it right. I love my tennis dress, that match. And I just went to Gladys Hellman, thanked her for everything. I just went around to everybody, I said thank you. And they're all saying, "Come on. You have to win." And then I walked downstairs. They put me on the Egyptian litter. Now, Jerry Perenchio, who was the promoter of the match, and who I'm very thankful to because he's a wonderful man. And he's exceptional. He said, "I know you're a feminist, but you probably won't want to do this, but would you get on this Egyptian litter?" And I go, "Absolutely. It's showtime. Let's go." And he goes, "You will?" I said, "Yes. I like to have fun. Come on." I get on that sucker, you got the track and field guys from Rice University, bringing me out on it. And I'm going to ... That's showtime. That's a different ... Now we're talking showtime, so I'm out there. And I'm still in this other place.

INTERVIEWER:

And what about the match itself?

00:43:24:00

BILLIE JEAN KING:

I went from plan A to plan B, because I just felt it. This feeling came over in my gut and I went, "Okay, just go with plan B. Got it." And that was to run him

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in five rallies, as much as I could, just run him into the ground. It didn't matter if I won the point. That didn't matter. I was going to run him into the ground. I was in great shape. I'd pay the price. And five rallies for sure, I was going to run him into the ground. And I did.

ON SCREEN TEXT:

Billie Jean King Playing Bobby Riggs

"Battle Of the Sexes," September 20th, 1973

BILLIE JEAN KING:

I don't know if I won those rallies or not, but I did what I was supposed to do. But the reason I beat Bobby Riggs is because I respect him. He was a former number one player. I'd read all about him. He and I both grew up in Southern California. I'd heard all the oral history about him. Great stories about him hustling. But I'd also seen tapes of him. And I knew that he had given up a lot because when his career could have been at its height. It was during the second World War. He'd won the triple crown at Wimbledon. I had total respect for this man. And that's why I beat him.

INTERVIEWER:

And how'd that victory feel?

00:44:23:00

BILLIE JEAN KING:

I was just relieved. I knew it was about social change. That was our one moment we had where we had focus. And it was visual. I wasn't reading something. I wasn't talking about it. Let the racket do the talking. And there were so many parties going on, in dorms, in fraternity, sororities, in the burbs, in apartments. I hear stories. Every day I hear a new story, to this day. "I went to college and we went out in the streets and we were throwing toilet paper. We're doing this. And we're going here." And then Ann Moore, she met her husband that night during the King-Riggs match. And she was engaged that night and they decided they wanted ... Everybody was partying so much, they decided ... She and Donovan wanted to go watch the match. They were really interested in the match. They went over and started watching the match. Drop ... Got disengaged from her engagement. They're married happily to this day. And she says, "It's all your fault because when you played Riggs that night ... That's how I met my husband Donovan."

INTERVIEWER:

What is the best piece of advice you ever got?

00:45:38:00

BILLIE JEAN KING:

I've gotten such great ones. Depends what area of life. My parents. Geez. You want me to just name off a few?

INTERVIEWER:

You can name off a few.

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BILLIE JEAN KING:

Accept responsibility. Be kind and good. Never give up. Always do your best. Have fun. Find your passion. I have two cues that I use for coaching a lot, in life skills or on the court or ... And that's champions adjust and pressure is a privilege. Because having pressure is a privilege. It's like when I played Bobby Riggs, that was pressure. It's what you do with it that matters. It's a privilege to have these opportunities. I kept telling myself that night too, it's a privilege.

INTERVIEWER:

Just off the top of your head. iPad or notepad?

00:46:30:00

BILLIE JEAN KING:

iPad, baby.

INTERVIEWER:

Early bird or night owl?

BILLIE JEAN KING:

God. Early bird as a child. Night owl ... And now I'm becoming more of an early bird again, but basically night owl.

INTERVIEWER:

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Spontaneous or methodical?

BILLIE JEAN KING:

Both.

INTERVIEWER:

Diplomatic or direct?

BILLIE JEAN KING:

Both. Sometimes it depends on the situation.

INTERVIEWER:

Type A or easygoing?

BILLIE JEAN KING:

I'm more of a type A.

INTERVIEWER:

Higher math scores or higher verbal scores?

BILLIE JEAN KING:

Verbal.

INTERVIEWER:

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Patient or impatient?

BILLIE JEAN KING:

Patient.

INTERVIEWER:

Prada or Gap?

BILLIE JEAN KING:

Gap.

INTERVIEWER:

Prepare or cram?

BILLIE JEAN KING:

That's a both. Today, I crammed.

INTERVIEWER:

Domestically skilled or domestically challenged?

BILLIE JEAN KING:

Domestically, totally, challenged.

INTERVIEWER:

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10 minutes early or 10 minutes late?

BILLIE JEAN KING:

10 minutes early. I'd rather be early. I will wait though. I'll wait outside. But I'm early.

INTERVIEWER:

Book smart or street smart?

BILLIE JEAN KING:

Wow. I like both. I'm probably a little of both on that one.

END TC: 00:47:42:00