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## MELISSA BROWN

By Nancy Gill McShea

News travels fast in New York tennis circles when a young star emerges from the pack and defeats another young talent soon to be acknowledged as one of the greatest women tennis players of all time. We're talking about Melissa Brown of Scarsdale, who in the early 1980s beat Steffi Graf three times in their early teens.

Melissa was a natural athlete, an honor student who starred on her soccer and basketball teams. But she was surrounded by tennis players -- her dad, Neil, was the captain of his tennis team at New York University; her mom, Nina, was ranked in Eastern Open singles; and her younger brother, Derek, followed suit and ranked first in Eastern juniors and tenth in the country -- so tennis ruled in the Brown household.

By 1982 Melissa was ranked No. 1 in the USTA girls' 14 division and newspaper reporters sensed that she was



Teenagers Steffi Graf and Melissa Brown.

ready for primetime. Charles Friedman reported in The New York Times: "Melissa... tall with long, slender legs was the best young tennis player in the country in her age group... 1982 was a banner year... with a record 90 match victories against 15 losses and a collection of titles ranging from the summer national clay courts to the international Sport Goofy Disney Cup... which she won in Monte Carlo."

Melissa defeated Steffi Graf at the Monte Carlo event, a mini Olympics that showcased eight of the world's best young players from North America, Europe and South America. In that first meeting, Melissa was 14, Steffi was 13.

The most dazzling Brown-Graf encounter was a featured attraction at the 1983 US Open. Local fans lined up 10-deep on the sideline of Court 7 at the USTA National Tennis Center to watch the pair duke it out in the women's qualifier.

This contest would count. They were two teenagers heading toward pro careers. Melissa was 15, Steffi was 14.

Renee Richards coached Melissa that day and gave an account of the match:

"Steffi was seeded second, with entourage of father, mother and assorted other assistants and a reputation already as a top prospect. I went over after practice that day and watched her hitting on a nearby court. Steffi was quick and athletic but... she took her forehand very late, almost off her back foot, and with a big backswing. Melissa had much more classic strokes, was very solid on both sides and more importantly, she hit the ball hard. I told Melissa, 'Listen, you know that Steffi makes big shots with her forehand but it won't stand up to your ground strokes. Play her forehand, she will be late with it.'

"Melissa was smart besides being strong, and she did exactly that, dispatching Steffi, 6-1, 6-2. After Steffi cried outside in disbelief -- to this day that loss is considered one of the worst 10 defeats in Steffi's pro career -- she went home to Germany... and came back with the greatest forehand in women's tennis. If Melissa's career had not been interrupted when she went to college, we may have seen more battles between those two young stars."

By the spring of 1984, Melissa was surging and expectations escalated. At the French Open, she had just turned 16 and gained worldwide attention, surprising the No. 6 seed Zina Garrison, 6-3, 3-6, 6-3, to become the youngest singles quarterfinalist in the history of that Grand Slam event.

One month later at Wimbledon, Melissa won the Ladies Plate consolation prize. She outlasted six players who had surrendered in the main draw, including Lea Antonopolis, 6-3, 5-7, 6-2, in the semifinals and Robin White, 6-2, 7-5, in the final. She again gained "a first" distinction, this time as the youngest player ever to prevail in the Ladies Plate event.

"My favorite match was when I beat Zina at the French getting to the quarterfinals," Melissa said recently. "I was just starting out and she was No. 4 in the world... Just the emotion of reaching a goal, trying to do your job... and winning the Wimbledon plate was unbelievable."

"Getting a trophy from Wimbledon; nobody takes that lightly." Her name is engraved on the trophy in the Wimbledon museum.

Later that summer, Melissa prevailed over Steffi Graf again in an exhibition at the Rye Town Hilton. They had become friendly and Melissa invited Steffi to her home for lunch. They prepared for the match by practicing together on the courts of the Scarsdale Junior High School.

Melissa's first coach, Kit Byron, said she outslugged Steffi in that match, basically hit her off the court. "Melissa was a very strong girl," Kit said. "She hit through the ball, very flat, and could drive the ball off both sides. And she was a quick learner, one of the most coachable pupils I've worked with. She dominated everyone in her age group. She was also one of the loveliest young

women I have ever met in my life and one of the hardest workers I ever had on the court."

Yet on August 16, 1984, Jane Gross commented in The New York Times that hazards awaited young kids who played pro tennis: "Miss Brown, currently ranked No. 43 in the world and a quarterfinalist at the French Open, is neither the first nor the youngest tennis prodigy to switch from amateur to professional play at a time when most of her friends are worried about junior proms, learner's permits or the availability of Michael Jackson tickets. In recent years -- outgrowing the age-group competition, uninspired by the prospect of collegiate play -- a parade of teen-agers has joined the women's circuit, among them Tracy Austin, Andrea Jaeger, Kathleen Horvath and Carling Bassett. The phenomenon has had mixed results and has stirred debate about whether teenagers are particularly susceptible to disabling injuries, like Miss Austin's, and to symptoms of emotional burnout, like Miss Jaeger's."

Melissa said she was aware of the hazards of being one of those young pros in the early 1980s. She said it was like a free-for-all before the WTA adopted an age rule (January 1, 1995) which helped longevity.

She trained at Nick Bollettieri's tennis camp while she toured on the pro circuit. Nick was impressed with her upbeat personality and her ability. "Melissa was a real fighter, she would do anything to win," he said. "She was part of a talented group -- Arias and Andre (Agassi). They all worked hard."

"I'm dedicated when I do something," Melissa said, "but I wanted some balance, to be well rounded. Tennis becomes like a business, it requires a lot of preparation. I started to think about life after tennis so I went to college, which kept me grounded. It held me back with the tennis but I thought it was better for the long run."

She enrolled at USC and then transferred to Trinity in Texas, from which she graduated in 1991. She continued to compete on the pro tour part time and won the USTA Circuit in San Antonio in 1987 without losing a set. In 1988 she defeated Pam Casale and Michelle Jaggard in advancing to the third round of the Australian Open before losing to Claudia Kohde-Kilsch.

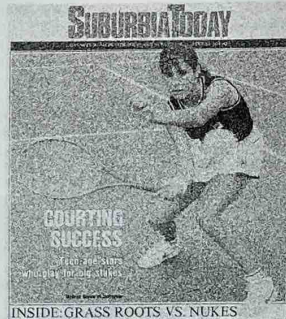
Kathleen Horvath, who also turned pro at 15 and quit the tour to attend college and graduate school, said she thinks of Melissa "as friendly, smiling, bubbly, Melissa and I... sometimes trained together... Unlike most pro tennis player peers, Melissa was open, honest and sharing. She would happily divulge everything she did without me even soliciting information... I knew exactly what fitness drills, exercises she did... and how her practice match went... She would honestly ask for feedback without hesitation or concern that she was giving away anything. It was... endearing and I was touched that she trusted me and valued my opinion. I think this was a testament to her drive and desire to be able to put ego aside... to become a great player."

Butch Seawagen played mixed doubles with Melissa at a tournament in San Diego and said, "I was already in my thirties and Melissa was just a kid; she was a great player and we had fun."

Nicole Arendt remembers playing the same tournaments as Melissa and said, "Wow, what a talent!!!"

Another contemporary, Patti O'Reilly, said that Melissa was a "beautiful competitor on and off the court."

Melissa's friend Nick Greenfield called her a role model. "She was a tall, lean, quick and graceful player..."



Rising pro tennis star Melissa Brown was featured on the cover of the Gannett Newspaper Magazine on August 28, 1983.

an Amazon beauty... who punished the ball," he said. "She hit clean winners from anywhere on the court and achieved tremendous success and fame facing older, top ranked players who were ruthless competitors. Had she not been so nice, there's no doubt she would have been a top-10 player... but then she wouldn't have been Melissa."

Melissa finished college and retired from the tour in the early 1990s. "It was a difficult transition to focus on getting a normal job," she admitted. "Nothing can be as rewarding as playing professionally where you grew up or getting to the quarters of a Grand Slam tournament. You think about the millions who are playing tennis and trying to strive... I cherish the past a lot more now than I did during the moment itself. I'm like wow, that's not so easy to do. When you're in the thick of things you're just trying to reach the top and don't realize the accomplishment until you're older."

But it was time for a change. Over the next ten years she first worked at Tennis Week with Gene Scott -- "He helped me get started," she said -- and she ran successful pro-am charity fundraisers at Tennisport for Skip Hartman's New York Junior Tennis League. She worked at Planet Hollywood in their event department and enjoyed a successful advertising career with Conde Nast's Self magazine and Hearst's House Beautiful.

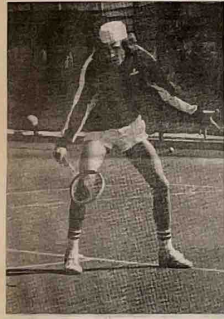
Melissa and her husband Herb Rubin are now busy raising two children: Brianna, 7, and Benjamin, 4. What's next? "I'm going to use tennis to do something big again -- a charity fundraiser For Juvenile Diabetes," Melissa Brown said. "I'm going to really start focusing on that now!"

## BRIAN HAINLINE, M.D.

By Nancy Gill McShea

"Brian Hainline has literally saved the US Open tennis tournament at times by making sure a player was prepared to go on court for the final," confided David Brewer, USTA managing director, professional operations. "Brian was also central to the initial effort to establish the tennis anti-doping code. He did the heavy lifting—research and writing—that put tennis ahead of the curve in establishing a systematic approach to the issue."

Not surprising, Dr. Brian Hainline is on a mission to make certain that the game of tennis is the model sport for protecting players' health and safety. He has the credentials to get it done.



Brian Hainline proved he is in command from this vantage point. (Photo by Doug Cristofani)

Brian Hainline played No. 1 singles and doubles for Notre Dame.

School of Medicine.

"I have always been interested in the study of the mind and I've been playing tennis as long as I remember walking—since about the age of 2," said Brian, who earned Phi Beta Kappa status at the University of Notre Dame in South Bend, Indiana, and played first singles and doubles for the tennis team there.

He brought his tennis game and fascination with the mind to New York in 1983 to begin his neurology residency at N.Y. Hospital, Cornell Medical Center after completing studies at the University of Chicago. On the court, he has engaged in knock-down-drag-out battles for 25 years with his tennis buddy Jim Malhame.

"Brian is a fierce competitor and he kicks my butt most of the time, but the guy's got character, he has never given me a bad line call," said Jim, who's equally impressed that his friend has logged 20 years teaching religious instructions to pre-teens and 25 years volunteering in tennis. "He's an inspiration, a physically fit doctor who practices what he preaches. To win in tennis,

the nerves and body have to hold up and technique has to be solid so a player won't fold under pressure. Brian attends to all three components to prepare himself and tournament players for the contest."

"I have observed the 'extraordinary' in motion working with and observing Brian in his gentle but confident care of an athlete in the most important match of her career..." said Kathleen Stroia, WTA (Women's Tennis Association) vice president, sport science/medicine & player development.

Brian's interaction with players is confidential, of course, and he admits "it's a lonely place to be. It's a challenging balancing act between helping a player prepare to go on court or helping a player make a decision to retire.

"Everybody is always searching for answers," he continued. "Whether I'm practicing neuroscience, teaching religion or developing policies and procedures for the USTA, a unifying theme is to help people become aware of how they can take steps to improve their level of self care, sense of awareness and well being, to develop that and give it back to life."

He met the ideal adviser in that effort in the late Dr. Irving Glick, the US Open tournament physician for over 25 years who established a medical department that became the model of medical care at tournaments throughout the world. "Dr. Glick was my mentor in medicine and in life," Brian said. "He taught me the essence of what it's like to be a compassionate and knowledgeable physician."

In 1986 Dr. Glick invited Brian to follow him as a consultant at the Open. In 1992 Brian became the Open's chief medical officer and started working closely with the WTA, the ATP (Association of Tennis Professionals) and the ITF (International Tennis Federation).

Brian, a prior USTA board member, remains a committed volunteer beyond his professional responsibilities. Back in 1989 USTA President David Markin was expanding a sports medicine advisory committee. Brian wrote to Markin, said he would be honored to serve and became a founding member of the USTA Sport Science Committee. Since 1993 he has served on and now chairs the ITF Sport Science and Medicine Commission, which oversees 202 Olympic countries. Since 1999 he has been a member of the ITF Wheelchair Tennis Medical Commission and has written the rules of eligibility for international wheelchair competition. In 2005 he chaired the USTA Professional Council, which oversaw five interrelated committees.

"Everyone has an agenda, but when it comes to medicine and safety there is no other agenda," said Brian, who gathers expertise from all the constituents in tennis to help create an environment in which players can thrive. "We're all about building bridges...We sit down together and...realize we have the same mission."

A few colleagues indicate the reach of the mission.

Kathleen Stroia—"Leadership has many definitions, but the one closest to articulating Brian's style is how he creates a way for people to contribute to making something extraordinary happen, as when he guides a committee to come to consensus and action on a critical health care initiative."

Patrick McEnroe, head of USTA Player Development—"Dr. Brian is a very thoughtful and measured individual. You sense immediately that he wants to do what is best for our kids..."

Brian Earley, director, USTA Pro Circuit—"Brian has re-written the medical time out rule used at every level of professional tennis, including the WTA, ATP and Grand Slam rule books. If I can find any fault whatsoever, it's that the rule uses terms like 'musculoskeletal', 'subcutaneous' and 'kinetic chain.' Maybe...he wants us referees...to travel with a copy of Gray's Anatomy along with our rulebooks!"

Dr. David Cooper, CEO of Pro Health Care Corp.—"Brian is a complete physician...Whether it be an elite athlete or a weekend warrior in need of care, he goes one step beyond applying his knowledge...to heal and rehabilitate his patients. He is a humble, honest man, yet when I asked if he could help my game, he replied, 'I am just a physician, not a miracle worker!'"

Brian's origins trace the history of his destiny. He and his six brothers and sisters grew up in Detroit. "My mother, Nora, was the glue and the faith of our family," he said. "We'd wake up, see seven lunches already prepared and a huge breakfast on the table, Midwestern style."

Brian's late father Forrest, also a tennis lifer who chaired the USTA Grievance Committee, was the family's first coach. Brian later trained at the Hoxie Tennis Camp in Hamtramck, Michigan. "I had a love-hate relationship with the walls there," he said. "You had to qualify to get on the courts. There were two huge cement slabs and you'd have to hit ten forehands in a row between the two lines, then backhands and volleys and serves. Sometimes you'd be at the wall all morning and finally they'd feel sorry for you and let you go on the court. They had a boxful of steel racquets and steel strings so when it was raining we'd hit against the wall with all steel."

At Notre Dame, he majored in philosophy within a pre-professional program which allowed him to concentrate on liberal arts and take subjects in other areas. He loved science but wasn't yet certain he wanted to be a doctor. He took all the pre-med courses in pre-pro and in his junior year did a year of independent study on Carl Jung.

"My main interest was the study of the mind," he said, "so after studying Jung, who interwove psychiatry with

the human condition—not the individual neuroses but the sense of the human connection— I decided to go to medical school and be a psychiatrist...as it is the human connection and lack thereof that is responsible for shaping our genetic predispositions, insofar as that is possible.

"But when I attended medical school, psychiatry was taking a turn into the pharmacologic revolution, branching into neuroscience—the discovery of peptides and neurotransmitters that had an immunologic, physiologic and behavioral counterpart, the discovery of opioid (pain relievers) and serotonin (helps feelings of well being) receptors...Clinical psychiatry and pharmaceutical companies took these receptors and their neurochemical counterparts and made them one-dimensional. Serotonin the happy neurochemical..."

"Before my eyes I saw psychiatry turning to clinical diagnoses...I had this uneasy sense that they were treating the brain like it was a mixing bowl. And neurology was just coming out of a black box. For the first time we had cat scans and neuroscience was on the verge of a major breakthrough into thought, emotion and disease. So I concentrated on that discipline."

Neurology gave Brian the opportunity to delve into the humanity of thought and emotion...expressed in the mundane of daily life. He reasoned that the physician has the unique opportunity to listen to a patient who has had part of his or her humanity taken away. It is the physician who tries to help restore that sense of lost humanity to the patient. And the nervous system is the essence of how that humanity is expressed. All sensation, all motor activity, all thought is communicated through the nervous system.

"That reality, and the excitement of understanding brain function better, convinced me to explore neurology," he said. "But to this day my favorite thing to read is philosophy. Maybe there will be a way of fully returning to Carl Jung..."

Brian is devoted to his family—his wife of 31 years, Pascale, who works in private wealth management; his daughter Clotilde, who is completing medical school and will go into neurology; Arthur, a college physics major; and Juliette, a high school freshman.

Asked where he finds time to spread himself so thin, he said, "I tell my children that a disciplined life with a purpose gives us the most freedom."

But seriously, who is the real Brian Hainline? Dr. Cooper has the answer—"My fondest images are of seeing this brilliant, articulate man transform into a mush when he holds his 3-year-old granddaughter Sophie in his arms. Extraordinary..."



Brian Hainline and Pete Sampras conferred when Sampras pulled out of the 1999 US Open.

## ROBERT L. LITWIN

By Nancy Gill McShea

Sports icons Phil Jackson and Andre Agassi have been defined as evolving Zen Masters. Add to the list the name of Bob Litwin, the world and national senior tennis champion who has been ranked first in the world. Bob confided that he started to evolve personally and win major senior titles after he created "The Focused Game" concept, a series of Zen-like self-affirmation techniques he began teaching in 1978 at mental training seminars.

Today, 35 years after he began writing about his focus philosophy, interviewing coaches, national champs and training others in the discipline, Bob works full time as a mental training performance coach with Wall Street hedge funds, traders and athletes. He uses the athlete as a model for high performance to help people get into the ideal space to bring their best to their jobs.

Brian Cheney, ranked No. 1 last year in USTA men's 60 singles/doubles and the son of the legendary Dodo Cheney, believes that Bob's gift is his ability to convey his thinking in his writing. "When I read his writing, I relate to what he's saying about his own experience and that helps me grow in my own life," he said. "That's why he's a successful life coach."

To get to this point in his personal history, Bob has experienced and come to terms with a full range of life's highs and lows. In the process he has learned that "we are not our roles; all roles are transient. We evolve as we get older and what's left is who we really are. Many know the journey but few actually take it."

The tennis angle is obviously a huge part of the story. Bob played the game casually when he attended Great Neck South High School but didn't compete in national tournaments until he was 35. "I was awed by tennis's elite," he admitted some years ago. "I kept thinking you can't start at 35 and be a great national player."

He changed that story when he won his first national title at the 1990 USTA Men's 35 Grass Court Championships in Southampton, N.Y. He was 43. Less than a year later, he silenced skeptics when he beat California's Dave Bohannon 6-2, 6-4 in the final to win the USTA Men's 40 Grass Court singles title at Santa Barbara, proving to himself that his victory in the 35s had not been a fluke. He capitalized on his strengths — mental toughness, great foot-speed and what many consider his wicked southpaw serve — and committed just two unforced errors — and with his focus techniques to concentrate on the short term task at hand and keep his attention in the present to banish anxiety.

He forged ahead and claimed victory in 14 USTA national championships, ranked 21 times in the U.S. top ten and played on and/or served as captain of countless USTA-sponsored national and international team events. He's a legend in the East — undefeated for 11 years while

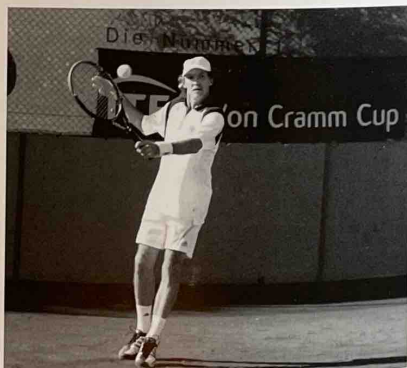
ranking first in his age group 18 times and 29 times among the top three. \*(Bob's national and international tennis achievements in singles, doubles and team play fill 5 pages. E-mail requests will be honored.)

In 2002 he was honored as the USPTA National Senior Player of the Year and on 16 occasions he took home Eastern's USPTA Player of the Year Award.

In 2005 Bob stood on the mountaintop when he won the ITF (International Tennis Federation) Men's 55 World Championships in Perth, Australia, and achieved the world's No. 1 ranking for the year. He has twice been a world finalist (he defaulted once on Yon Kippur) and has notched a trio of top three world rankings.

His peers say he is the classic good guy. Mike Silverman, director of Sports, City Parks Foundation, targeted Bob to receive the 2008 Vitas Gerulaitis community service award for his support of the foundation's junior programs. "However big a heart Bob has as a tennis champion, he has an even bigger heart as a person. He's been an inspiration to many, including me," Mike said.

When Bob hosted "Tennis Talk" — a live audio stream, call-in talk show — which aired on the USA Network during the 2000 French and US Open Championships, he invited his doubles partner Kirk Moritz to work as



Bob Litwin, captain/member, 2008 Von Cramm Cup, Antalya, Turkey

co-host. "Bob is like a brother to me. Asking me to join him was a nice gesture and very good for my spirit," said Kirk, who had endured open heart surgery shortly before the show.

Kirk let it slip that Bob is not completely perfect, however, that he used to engage in a bit of hostility on

the court. "He had a feisty basketball attitude like the other left handed Aquarian (John McEnroe), but he's more relaxed now. His writing helps his play, it helps him to visualize."

Visualizing not only helps his play, it also refreshes his memory. Bob was a basketball player in high school and said "tennis was a fill sport." He went to college at Michigan, tried out for the freshman tennis team and, coincidentally, met Dr. Brian Hainline's brother, John, across the net. John was heavily recruited and trounced him 6-0, 6-0. Bob put his racket back in the closet and didn't hit another tennis ball for five years.

In the early 1970s he taught history at the Franklin School in Manhattan and the members of the school administration decided to start a tennis team. They checked resumes to find a coach, saw that Bob had played tennis in high school and told him "You're it!" Kids at liberal private schools in those days were politically sophisticated and more interested in debating the Vietnam War than learning a new sport. Only two students showed up for the team. No problem; Bob had instant practice partners!

He got a summer job stringing rackets at a club in Great Neck. The head pro, Joe Fischbach, was passionate about golf and often AWOL when people showed up for tennis lessons so Bob started teaching.

You know the rest. He left the classroom to teach tennis full time, and during that period he welcomed into his life his two daughters, Jody and Amy. He played a few tournaments and thought his game was looking good as he moved toward his thirties. At 33 he tried out for the Maccabi Games and qualified for the nationals. A young kid from Harvard beat him but a spectator told Bob he was close.

"That triggered a positive reaction," Bob said. "It was a double elimination. I won the next two matches and lost the fourth but decided I would try again in four years to make the 35s team. I played some before the next tryouts — met all the great Eastern players — the Steve Siegels, the Doug Barrows — but I got the experience and made the team. I went to Israel, won a bronze in singles and a gold medal in doubles with Steve Gottlieb."

In 1983 he won all his matches in the East but didn't meet the top two players and ranked third. His goal was to be ranked at the top of his age group so he kept going.

"I was always evolving as a player," he said. "Even back then I had a sense that I could be better. I wasn't stuck on a point in time. Every year was a mountain and I thought that was cool. I once told Brian Cheney I thought

it was amazing that I was up there with the best players — with him, the Larry Turvilles, the Armstedt Neelys, the Charlie Hoevelers. Brian said, 'Bob, you've beaten the top players; guys are looking up the hill at you.' Yet after I achieved the No. 1 world ranking in 2005 I still wanted to play a perfect match."

But in the fall of 2007, Carol, Bob's devoted wife of 26 years, was diagnosed with cancer while he was playing the grasscourts at the Rockaway Hunt Club. Dealing with Carol's illness from 2007 to the summer of 2010, when she passed away, was the toughest battle of his life.

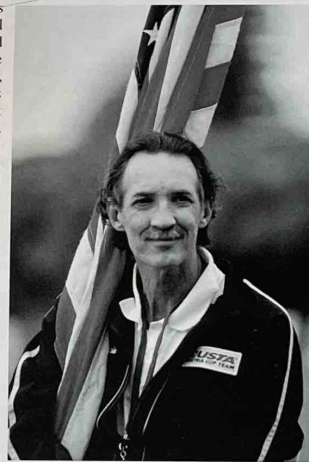
To complicate matters, in early 2008 during a national event in St. Petersburg, Bob flipped over a cement wall. "I was lying there for about five minutes waiting to see if I was paralyzed," he said. "I got up, attempted to finish the match but had to stop."

He was in pain for a year, thought it was a muscle problem and eventually went to see Dr. Hainline to help eliminate the pain. The X-ray showed that he needed a new hip. Bob was shocked, said he went into instant denial but had surgery in July of 2009 and then a total revision of the surgery in November of 2010.

He is now on the comeback trail, getting ready for a tournament in May and writing a new chapter in his story after two years away.

"If I'm ready to play I'm not going to lose," Bob said. "The more complete I am as a human being the better tennis player I am. When you gain perspective about what's really important and then think about the importance of winning a match, the pressure disappears. I feel like the work I've done over the last several years — the spirit work of accepting and non judgment and being more forgiving of myself — these are the things that free you up as a player. So I didn't hit my backhand today. Big deal. All the things I needed to get through the last four years I bring to the court. I'm going to look like I don't even care."

"That is the new story I'm writing for myself right now."



Bob Litwin, 2005 ITF world champ, proudly displays American flag.

## AL PICKER

By Nancy Gill McShea

Imagine getting arrested while running through a tunnel and suddenly Superman swoops in to save you. That would be Al Picker, alias The Newark Star-Ledger columnist Clark Kent – sans cape but with famous glasses intact – who took on his Superman persona to rescue his friend John Korf.

"I ran through the Lincoln Tunnel...while training for a 100 mile race," said Korf, a USA board member and Mahwah pro tournament organizer. "I got arrested in the middle of the tunnel. The only way I stayed out of jail was by showing the police a story Al wrote about me in that day's paper...I got Al on the phone to say I was a real person. He wrote about the incident in the next day's paper. It's good to have a pal like Al."

Al was everybody's pal during his amazing 60-year run (1946-2005) as a columnist and reporter for The Star-Ledger. Tennis players respected him because he showed up at tournaments in every nook and cranny and was fair, positive and accurate in his reporting. He understood the sport, was passionate about it and always had a smile on his face. Add that all up – it's Superman!

John McEnroe will vouch for that. "Al has covered tennis and has written about me for a very long time," John said. "I appreciated Al's sense of humor and his interest in the game...he is one of a very few tennis writers who actually knew me, understood me, and even recognized that I also had a sense of humor."

Justin Gmelstob, the journalist/broadcaster who ranked 65th in the world, cast his vote, too. "Al taught me from a very early age to respect the quality of a person's work and helped my entrée into this field," he said. "He came to watch me play for 25 years; he didn't sit behind a computer and file a story. In our interviews I learned about loyalty, that the relationship between an athlete and a writer is a partnership of trust invested in together."

Dick Savitt, the 1951 Australian and Wimbledon champ who never misses a tennis news tidbit, was impressed that "Al was thorough, his articles always accurate and he never wrote anything negative about anyone."

Nicole Arendt, ranked 49th in the world in 1997, still has articles Al wrote about her. "I looked forward to our little interviews [juniors to the pros]...lots of them...all over the world," she said.

Neil Amdur, The New York Times sports editor/best tennis writer, echoed the consensus: "Al was a hard-working journalist who loved tennis and covered it well."

The tennis writer Steve Flink said that watching Al work for the first time was an eye opener. "I was 19, a reporter in training and I went to South Orange (N.J.) with Clark Graebner to watch him play a final," Steve said. "Clark won the tournament and Al kept asking him

questions in his straightforward way...Al was polite yet persistent, low key yet forceful, smart yet unassuming. Clark rolled his eyes...but he respected Al, knew that he was a professional doing his job...That left an indelible impression; I wanted to be like Al, to gain the respect of the players yet not make a nuisance of myself."

Bud Collins said "tennis fans in New Jersey were lucky that Al was their man about tennis...His reportage and columns...kept his readers well informed. He knew the game, the players, the coaches...and came up with many a scoop. This went on for years, then decades as he made his name as the dean of American tennis writers. He covered other sports, too, but his heart was in tennis. I have fond memories of sharing press boxes with Al at Mahwah, Forest Hills, Flushing Meadows, Madison Square Garden, Orange and too many date-lines to recount."

Al's career goes so far back he actually filed his stories in the mid-'50s with Western Union, which would send them to the paper in Morse code. In those days the Associated Press (AP), UPI and Reuters did not have reporters on the spot, so Al sent stories to all three wire services in addition to handling his own assignments.

The Superman image gained momentum in 1945 while Al was a student at Newark's Weequahic High School. At 14 he took on two jobs. He worked as a copy boy at The Star-Ledger and then began writing about high school sports. He played piano in a combo and during summers performed for shows at hotels in the Catskill Mountains. In 1949 he won the Scholastic Magazine prize for Best Short Story.

Next stop was Montclair State. He earned bachelor and master's degrees in secondary business education and was the sports information director there before continuing studies in the doctoral program at New York University. "I refined my typing skills at N.Y.U. and hit 126 words per minute," Al noted. "That speed proved invaluable in making deadlines."

When Al retired from The Ledger in 2005, he had spent 99 years combined in two jobs. He devoted 39 years to education, first as a school teacher (24 years) before taking on a supervisory role (15 years) at his Weequahic alma mater. He simultaneously covered sports and tennis (60 years) for the state's largest paper.

"A most rewarding and satisfying period," said Al, who also provided radio coverage in the '50s and '60s for CBS Sports and ABC WorldWide Sports. An advanced intermediate tennis player with a couple of jobs, a marriage and family – wife Anita, daughter Susan and son Michael; that's more complicated than it sounds.

As tennis grew in prominence, The Ledger elevated it to a featured sport. In 1954 Al expanded news of the

game with "On Tennis" columns and on-site coverage of Wimbledon, French Open, the US Open and Davis Cup matches plus important junior events.

He also covered the New Jersey State and Gene Scott's Eastern Grass Court Championships in South Orange, Anne Cummings (18s), senior grass courts, the Hamlet Cup, the Mahwah event, the Concord Hotel juniors (1973-91, the Easter Bowl, the Port Washington Junior Championships and numerous ETA events.

Al's informal style captured the excitement and ambience surrounding big-time tennis so fans could experience the passion and heat of action on courts thousands of miles away. Readers began to understand the emotional day-to-day life of athletes involved in a world-wide sport played on a year-long basis. In a sport known to keep reporters at bay, his easy personality helped him form relationships with players on the way up, like Pam Casale, and with established stars like Arthur Ashe.

He followed Pam through high school, the juniors and the pros, said she was frank in interviews, allowing readers and fans to...gain insight into...women's tennis. She spoke about the rigors of worldwide travel. "A lot of hard work," she would say. "Not as glamorous as one would think...No time for sightseeing. Anxious moments playing against good friends..."

"Al became part of my family," said Pam, who in 1984 ranked No. 15 in the world. "I once played Chris Evert on Wimbledon's Center Court and asked my mother to find Al and invite him to sit in the Friends' Box. I was getting killed, 6-0, 4-0, came back to win the second 7-5 but lost the third. Al was there cheering. When I beat Bettina Bunge to get to the Mahwah finals, my father couldn't wait to open the paper and read what Al wrote. Al rooted for us all. We were the boxers and he was the trainer sitting in our corner supporting us."

Patti O'Reilly, one of the famous O'Reilly triplets of Ridgewood, N.J., another Mahwah veteran, said she would turn around at almost every ETA tournament she played and "Al would be sitting in the front row, smiling. He had a warm and welcoming manner and you knew that tennis was his passion."

Al saw Arthur Ashe play when he was 15. "I followed him and after he retired we spent hours viewing US Open matches in the press box," Al said. "In 1989, after I had heart bypass surgery and returned to work...at the Forest Hills Invitational, I received a surprise call from Arthur. He wanted to know how I was feeling, advised me not to overdo it, to make sure I covered

myself from excessive sunlight. A warm and thoughtful expression that made you realize how special he was.

"The following year, Kean University...needed a replacement commencement speaker. My wife, Anita, an assistant registrar, asked if I could get Arthur...He graciously accepted and came through with one of the most memorable and stirring addresses in the school's history."

Tennis beat writers shared some memories. "Al became a trusted friend," said Doug Smith, a tennis correspondent/reporter with USA Today and other papers. "In the mid-90s we helped our newspapers save expense-money by sharing a house when we covered Wimbledon...Most tennis journalists covering Grand Slam events...for major newspapers wrote one story (800-1000 words) per day. I felt overworked...my daily workload included a major story, two side bars (300-400 words) and a package of notes (700 words). I complained until I watched Al punch out a major story, side bar, package of notes and a 1,000-word column/commentary daily while covering Wimbledon and the US Open. He never complained."

Steve Flink mentioned that he, too, shared a room with Al at Wimbledon in 1982 to save on expenses... "the pre-computer days when writers still worked on typewriters," Steve said. "Al would work on his daily piece in the press room but finish the writing back in our room. That meant that sleep was simply out of the question. Al would be up as late as possible and would dictate his stories over the phone. He...taught me that there is no substitute for persistence."

Sid Dorfman, 91, a columnist for The Ledger, said it may be a cliché, but "Al Picker became Mr. Tennis, as well known in England and France as he was in the U.S. He covered the sport as one of the most important tennis writers in the country."

Al has been honored with multiple awards --Tennis Week Magazine, Tennis Writer of the Year, 1977 and 1983; the U.S. Tennis Writers Association, Lifetime Achievement Award, 1994 (he was vice president of the association); and the New Jersey Sportswriters Association, Journalistic Achievement Award, 1997, along with the Key to Newark City Hall, for outstanding coverage of tennis events. Al has also been a voting member of the media for over 20 years in selecting the annual recipients to the International Tennis Hall of Fame in Newport, R.I.

Does Al Picker miss his tennis beat? "Sure I miss it," he said. "I loved covering the tournaments, writing profiles and meeting the people but I certainly don't miss the deadlines!"



Al Picker, dean of American tennis writers.