

Preface

I would like to say a few words which might make it easier for you to appreciate this book.

It is a diary about what I did and the thoughts I had, over the course of a year, Wimbledon to Wimbledon, 1973-74. It is disjointed, the way my life is. Topics that have no relationship to one another follow upon each other. But one of the unique aspects of my life is the juxtaposition of disparate events and people, and so I think it is both accurate and important to maintain this sequential chaos in the diary.

I am not a typical member of the tennis tour and my experiences are by no means conclusive, but they are representative. The only things I haven't mentioned are those that I thought too private. But I think what I left unsaid is merely private; I don't believe the omissions would improve your understanding of me or the world around me.

The book will not help you play tennis. It is not an instructional manual. But I'm sure that it will help you to understand tennis, to appreciate the matches you see and the players who participate in them. The book might even make it possible for you to understand tennis politics . . . along with the eight other people in the world who do.

I have tried not to climb up on a soapbox. But I do lead an un-

usual life, and am, with my colleagues, privileged to see more of the world than most people. In this year, I played on five continents, made 129 airplane trips, slept in 71 different beds and traveled 165,000 miles. By itself, this sort of quantitative bombast doesn't prove much of anything. But I try to make my travel work for me. Even the dullest tennis players can perceive how interdependent the world is. If I belabor the subject occasionally, please bear with me; I hope it is the only excess you will have to tolerate.

Finally, the book has been, in a sense, therapeutic for me. Writing has forced me to take a closer look at my life and myself. Especially, it has helped me to appreciate two aspects of my career better. The first is that I am very lucky to have the life I do and especially fortunate to be doing something that I like. The second is that so many of the people I know, especially the men I play against, are pretty damn good people.

A.R.A., JR.

Contents

1. The Second Hundred Years Begin	1
2. "It is not the championship of the world"	12
3. Gladiators & Troubadours	20
4. Two Finals	31
5. The Fun Is All Gone	47
6. The Level of Expectations	61
7. The Worst Day of the Year	67
8. Wives and Strange Bedfellows	76
9. Choking	84
10. Cool	91
11. Nasty Times	97
12. Part of a Gradual Harvest	114
13. These Small Communications	129
14. Different Strokes for Different Folks	147
15. "You must be a loner in tennis"	161
16. Playing Europe and the Zone	175
17. The Aussies	187
18. The Jaybird Stopped Singing	199

2

"It is not the championship of the world"

Wednesday, June 20, 1973 — London

First thing this morning we had a full membership meeting of the ATP at the Gloucester Hotel and presented them with the board's recommendation. They accepted it with hardly a dissent. We seem united to a man — even the poor British, whom everybody sympathizes with.

Coincidentally, my match at Queen's today was against Roger Taylor. He's really on the spot. The British tennis people found him up in Sheffield, where his father was a steelworker, and when he was seventeen, they brought Roger down to Wimbledon, and he lived there, at the YMCA, for two and a half years, learning the game. Recently he moved back to Wimbledon — in a \$120,000 house in one of the most exclusive sections of the village. Now I hear that his wife is making it clear to Roger that she expects him to play.

Under the circumstances, Cox is better off. He has his vote on the record against the players' withdrawal, and he is so bright and articulate, a Cambridge man, among the very cleverest of all the players, that he will be able to fend for himself. Mark is not a leader — don't put him on the line — but he is a great staff man, and he was the guy we turned to to chair the first meeting that led to the formation of the ATP. We were in Quebec City then, the

April of '71, and the word had come out that the ILTF and World Championship Tennis had just made peace. The way they had done it was simply by divvying up the whole tennis world. Nobody had even consulted the players, of course; they just went ahead and acted as if tennis tournaments didn't need tennis players. That really bugged us, and so we got together, five of us: Drysdale, Newcombe, Charlie Pasarell, myself and Cox in charge, and out of that came the ATP.

In contrast to Mark, Roger is the silent, handsome type. He was quite a ladies' man before he married Frances MacLennan, who was a Scottish player and well-to-do, but he never had to work at the girls. Roger never had to *say* anything. He has to work a lot harder on the court, and maybe that is why he is a different personality out there. Roger is forever questioning line calls, which, of course, makes him aggravating to play against.

Playing Roger is not at all like going up against Nastase, however. Everybody knows that most of the time Nasty puts that crap on for effect. But nobody ever questions Roger's motives or his honesty. He really believes that the out-balls are in and that his luck is all bad. I guess if you aren't as handsome as Roger Taylor, you figure you get all the bad breaks with women. If you are as handsome as Roger Taylor, you take the women for granted and bitch about line calls.

Today, though, Roger didn't have much to complain about. It was raining, so we played inside on the boards at Queen's, and he beat me 6-3 in the third. I just didn't play that well; I never could get in charge of the match. Besides, Roger can be tenacious. He's fast and he has a weak backhand and he seldom even tries to go onto the attack, but he's a top counterpuncher. He'll lob you, dink you, run you around, and he's a very steady volleyer.

I tried to get away from things a little tonight by going over to gamble at the Playboy Club, and who should I meet at the blackjack table but Joe Frazier. He's in London to fight the British champion, Joe Bugner. Frazier had no idea who I was. Other black athletes often don't know me, although the tennis boom has made me much more visible outside the tennis world. Anyway, Frazier did recognize me when I introduced myself, so I sat down and we played

together for some time. I won 50 pounds and was delighted; old Smokin' Joe took home something like 7000 pounds.

This is terribly embarrassing to admit, but money makes me happy. I'm not as secure about money as people like Pasarell and Graebner who always had the damn stuff. But I don't mean I just sit on it. I'm a pretty good giver to the causes I'm really interested in, and I love to play with money to gamble — even though I'll never risk losing more than \$100 or so, tops. But maybe if you never had money you're more inclined to use it just to remind yourself that you've got some. I really love to gamble, I'm crazy about it — and when I win, even the small sums, I feel fantastic. It's not unlike the way I feel with my tennis. If I win a tournament, everything is perfect. I don't worry about a thing, and everybody is my friend. Generally, my whole outlook on life is determined by how well (or badly) I'm playing tennis — which, I'm damn sure, is not a good way to be.

Thursday, June 21 — London

Most of the British newspapers are down to calling us names now. Only Rex Bellamy of the *Times* and David Gray of the *Guardian* seem to be covering the dispute judiciously and without emotionalism. One players' handicap is that two or three of the tennis writers are members of Wimbledon and most of the others pine desperately to be the next into the club. This serves to keep any criticism of Wimbledon to a minimum. Peter Wilson, a Pickwickian character, who is already in the club, has advised his readers these past few days that the players are "brash . . . ill-mannered . . . overpaid . . . spoiled."

Jack Kramer has taken the brunt of the personal abuse, and after all these years he has been canned as the BBC commentator. His ex-colleague in the booth is a fellow named Dan Maskell, with whom I had a run-in yesterday at the bar at Queen's Club. I'm afraid I finally ended the discussion by storming out of the room.

Today I had a televised encounter with Peter Wilson, the tennis writer. He began most of his comments by saying, "The recognized administrators of the game say . . ."

"Well that's the whole point," I finally said. "We don't think they should be the recognized administrators. Look, you need four things to run a tennis tournament: the court, the players, a sponsor and management. What do you need with recognized administrators? What function does the ILTF perform? They don't do anything except sell indulgences so that the players, the sponsors and the managers can run a tournament."

Later, Drysdale and I hurried over to the Gloucester Hotel, where most of the players were staying, because we had to collect withdrawal signatures. Wimbledon has decreed that since we all entered as individuals, we must withdraw as individuals. Dust to dust. For us, though, some individuals are more individual than others. What has happened is that Taylor and Nastase look like they're going to deny the ATP and play anyway. Roger is a special case, the neighborhood kid, but Nastase could set a bad example. He claims his national organization is forcing him to play, and this argument might appeal to a few other players with strong national organizations. So, Cliff and I scurried around to get four key guys signed up — Jaime Fillol of Chile, the leading South American; Manuel Orantes of Spain; and Adriano Panatta and Paulo Bertolucci of Italy, who carry the most weight on the Continent. They signed, and that ended any thoughts of defection.

Finally, tonight, Cliff called a new meeting of the ATP board and even offered a new compromise proposal that would sacrifice Nikki for assurances that the players would get a voice in the game. I want nothing of it, but I like what Cliff is doing. He's the president, and he wants to be sure. I always knew he was the brightest man we had, and now I'm sure. The office has made the man even wiser.

We reconsidered at length, but at the end, after six hours, at 3:30 in the morning, the vote hardly changed. It is all over now. There is still a Wimbledon left for 1973, but it is not the championship of the world . . .

Earlier today, Owen Williams, who runs the South African Open, came over to the Westbury, and for the first time we talked about the possibility of my playing in the Open this fall in Johannesburg. I have been trying to play in South Africa since 1968,

when it appeared that the United States Davis Cup team might meet the South Africans in an Interzone match.

We had choice of ground for such a match but were prepared to relinquish it in order to force South Africa's hand. The issue became moot when the West Germans beat South Africa in a match played in France, but it made me think more about the matter. Especially, I decided that it would not be best for me to first enter South Africa as a member of a national team; I wanted the privilege of going in as an individual. So I applied twice, in writing, for visas, in 1969 and again in 1970. The South Africans considered me too activist, a latent troublemaker. The fact that I had once made a flip offhand remark to the effect that an H-bomb should be dropped on Johannesburg may have caused the government to arrive at this conclusion.

South African teams have been barred from the Olympics since 1964, and such diverse sports as soccer, table tennis, weightlifting, rugby, cricket — even big-game fishing — ban the South Africans from international competition. The efforts of one British student, Peter Hain, have played a vital role in shutting the South Africans out of competition. Hain's various STOP movements — aimed at either stopping the South African teams from playing in another country or at stopping foreign teams from traveling to South Africa — were especially crucial in forcing at least token concessions. Beginning in 1970, the Nationalistic government began to permit a carefully audited handful of world-class black athletes to filter through: a New Zealand rugby team; a few track stars; Evonne Goolagong, the Australian aborigine; Bonnie Logan, an American black tennis player; Lee Elder, the professional golfer.

It was all strictly window dressing, since there was no comparable integration (if any at all) permitted at the lower levels of sport, but at least it was a start. Then, about a year or so ago, Owen quietly let on to my lawyer and good friend, Donald Dell, that if I could keep a low profile and not rattle too many sabers they might even let me in too. Since my views on S.A. were well known, I could not lose by shutting up for a while. Then I could get to see the place with my own eyes.

The key factor in the equation is Dr. Piet Koornhof, the Minister of Mines, Immigration, Sports and Recreation — and primarily

Sports; the rest of his crowded portfolio tends to take care of itself. Koornhof is widely considered to be the most intelligent member of the Cabinet and the comer in the National Party, heir apparent to Prime Minister Johannes Vorster. From everything I've learned about South Africa, I really believe that sports is its Achilles' heel, and if that sounds like an exaggerated claim on behalf of sports, well, just consider this: what other government at any time in history anywhere in the world has felt obliged to place the most promising member of the government in charge of its athletic program? Usually that area is a political backwater.

And it was Koornhof who opened the doors. "The more enlightened Nationalists believe that the white Afrikaners, the party's main constituency, are ready to accept Koornhof's policy," Owen explained. "If so, it becomes petty and foolish to let in a lot of other athletes and continue a vendetta against Arthur Ashe. But understand how tricky this is. Koornhof has embarked on a very ambitious new policy — it's real brinkmanship. It would have been easy for him to have sustained his predecessor's policy. The Nationalists have nothing much to gain except perhaps a few liberal votes that would otherwise go Progressive — and much more to lose. This is a significant part of an experiment to see how far the people of this country are prepared to go down a new road."

Owen is himself, like Cliff Drysdale, a Progressive. Amongst the three major South African parties, it is a distant third — the only one of the three that professes racial equality. For espousing this mad philosophy, the electorate has responded by awarding the Progressives a single seat in Parliament. Owen was a world-class amateur player twenty years ago, just off the top ten, a broad, friendly man who, as a promoter, has made the South African Open into one of the half-dozen top tournaments of the world — and one of the most successful too. He is a man as decent as he is capable, and I believe that he wants the same things for the people of South Africa that I do.

I feel empathy for Owen too. As a South African white, he suffers that glib, easy stereotyping that I, as a black in the U.S., must also always endure. Owen came to New York a few years ago to run the U.S. Open, and did such a magnificent job at Forest Hills that it is an open secret that he could have kept the job if only he

had agreed to make one little concession: give up his citizenship. He was guilty by association. People were uncomfortable that an evil, racist South African should be running America's top tennis tournament — and never mind that he wasn't in fact evil or racist.

I told Owen that I would consider playing in South Africa only if four conditions could be met: first, that I would come and go as I pleased, anywhere in the country. Second, that the stands where the Open was held, at Ellis Park, in Johannesburg, would be "totally integrated," with no special sections for racial groups. Third, that a conscientious effort would be made to try and arrange a meeting for me with Prime Minister Vorster. And fourth, that I would be accepted for what I happen to be — a black man. I would not permit the issue to be avoided by supplying me with any temporary "honorary white" status.

"I couldn't stomach that, Owen," I said. He nodded, wrote down the four stipulations, and replied that he didn't see why there would be any difficulty in granting them. This surprised me. Then he told me not to drop any more H-bombs on Johannesburg — and added, in effect, don't call us, we'll call you. Blacks are used to hearing that refrain. The call never comes. So it is my guess that nothing more will ever come of it.

Monday, June 25 — London / New York

I've been so harried by everything that I upgraded my ticket and treated myself to first class back to the States. And boy, it sure didn't take long to know that I was back in New York. The taxicab meter read \$1.00 before I got out of the Pan Am terminal. Understand, I don't mean the airport, I mean the terminal . . .

Monday, July 2 — New York / Toronto

I couldn't get up here to see Kathy as quickly as I wanted to because I had a press conference scheduled this morning at the Doral Hotel on Park Avenue to talk about the ATP, and there was no way I could put that off. It went very well too. Dave Anderson of the *Times* came, and so did the AP and the UPI. I think they all understand more clearly now why we acted as we did at Wimble-

don. Athletes are notoriously poor at attracting public support to their side in these disputes with management, with the establishment, because the other side already has a PR apparatus cranked up. The baseball players got raked over the coals when they struck last year, and the football players also took it on the chin when they went out in 1970. One of the things we have to do is hire a full-time PR man for the ATP.

As soon as the press conference was finished, I got the next flight out to Toronto. I had been getting more and more anxious to be with Kathy again, and she was getting a little panicky too. I could tell that over the phone. I think we discovered from this absence how much we really do care for each other.

balmy. It's the kind of place where people tell you that you'll sleep well, and you do.

*Sunday, August 12 — Pagosa Springs /
Denver / Washington / Richmond*

Slept well last night. Traveled all day. Besides my own luggage, this whole time, all over the country, I've been dragging around the golf clubs that belong to Frank Craighill. Frank is Donald's law partner, and we're going to meet in a couple of days down in Miami and play golf.

I got a lot of letters and work done on the plane. One of the best things about airplanes is that they don't have any telephones.

Monday, August 13 — Richmond

I'm back home now — and funny how easily I still say that, although I haven't lived here for years. Maybe it is mostly just because I had such a happy childhood here. If you have a happy childhood somewhere, I guess that is always your home.

My mother died when I was six, but perhaps because I was so young I was able to accept her loss relatively easily. And I loved my father very much. I had no real problems learning to accept my new stepmother when she came into our home a few years later. We had such a good family, and I was totally absorbed in books and athletics.

Of course, I can remember segregation, the hard, legal segregation of that time in Richmond. I suppose I was always *aware* of it, but it was not a concern to me. I can clearly recall the white line on the floor of the bus — it was just to the front of the rear door — and I understood that I was required to stay behind it. I don't ever remember discussing it; it was just understood. I used to ride the buses a lot with my stepmother. We'd get on at Chamberlayne Avenue and ride over to Broad Street, and then transfer to the Number 6 line to go over and see my grandmother.

The first time segregation really got to me was the summer I was ten, when I first went up to Lynchburg to practice my tennis under Dr. Walter Johnson, a black physician who took prospects on for the

summer. Anyone who's ever sat in a Greyhound knows that the best seat is the one right across the aisle from the driver, the first seat on the right-hand side. You've got a clear vista looking out the front window. I sat there because I wanted to see the country. It was not just going the same old places on the old Number 6. I wanted a good view, so I sat there because it was the best one. The driver just looked over at me, and very nicely, he said: "Now son, you know you can't sit there." And so I got up and went to the back.

You've got to remember that people my age — I'm in the last batch — still have a certain tolerance of segregation conditioned into us that the black kids today can't understand. And also keep in mind that it may have been easier to grow up in the segregated south in the forties and fifties than in the north, which was integrated more in name than in fact. At least in the south, things were explicit, and so you knew where you stood. Also, I'm sure that we had a higher quality of life. We weren't jammed into the ghetto tenements. Me, I even lived on what seemed to me to be an estate. My father was a maintenance man and special policeman for a black park named Brook Field, and we lived right there, by the pool and the courts. Sure, I knew the pool was for blacks only. I knew that; at some point it occurred to me that it was always just us "colored" swimming at Brook Field. But no one could have convinced me that any whites' pool could be better than Brook Field. Do you understand? How could any place else possibly be any better — because everybody was always having such a good time.

Do you see how happy I was? I didn't know any difference.

Since my brother, who's a lifer in the marines, and I have moved away, my father has built his own house about thirty miles outside of Richmond at a place called Gum Spring, up in Louisa County. My stepmother still goes into town and works as a domestic. God knows she doesn't have to, and I wish she wouldn't, but she enjoys the work, so she goes.

This afternoon, my father and his good friend Wesley Carter and myself went fishing, and we caught some perch and spot for tomorrow's breakfast. Hunting and fishing are my father's great loves, and I've always enjoyed going along with him. People always ask me how I manage to shift back and forth between black and white

societies, but in many ways they miss the main point. It is just as much a change for me to move between my Manhattan apartment and my parents' house out in the Virginia woods as it is for me to move between the black and white worlds. The Louisa County me is quite a different fellow from the East 72nd Street me, and I adjust automatically, even though I appreciate exactly what I am doing. And it has nothing much at all to do with race.

Of course, I suffer frustrations because I don't live in one community, as most people do. Perhaps that's one reason why I get depressed so easily. Now, my most comfortable world is the tennis tour, where there are so many races and nationalities thrown together that the natural shape and color of things is blurred. It will be a real emotional letdown for me when I must finally leave that society. The largest part of me is part of it.

Tuesday, August 14 — Richmond / Miami

We had the fish we caught yesterday for breakfast, and then I just cleaned away the dining room table and caught up on some work because it was raining outside.

There are few people outside the family for me to see anymore when I come to Richmond. My main point in coming here is to be with my family. Of course, in time I've been separated from many of my old friends. Circumstances have given them and me such different outlooks on life that it would, too, be especially interesting to see them again, and I should make the effort. It is not me that is different, after all, just my unique black experience. I'm sure that the thinking of my old schoolmates would be very similar to mine if they had shared my experience.

I am a black, an American black, but I am a Have and, essentially, I am a capitalist. That is a strange mixture for any one person to be. It is very easy to feel guilty being a Have — especially when so many blacks are Have-Nots. Part of my problem may be that, even though it does not appear this way, I am an incurable romantic deep down inside.

My father drove me to the airport this evening, and on the way we stopped in downtown Richmond. Daddy has a custodial ser-

vice, which supplies the maintenance for two or three banks and some office buildings. It's really interesting to see the expressions on people's faces when they recognize that the skinny black guy emptying the trash cans is Arthur Ashe. I get a kick out of that.

My father is an Arthur too. In fact, both to him and to me, he is Arthur Ashe; I am "Arthur Junior." I take a great pride in being a Jr. I always sign everything, even autographs, with the Jr.

Wednesday, August 15 — Miami

The juxtapositions in my life may be what distinguishes it most. Suddenly, and regularly, I am shifted from one environment to a totally different one, from a rural black home to the Doral Country Club. I keep an apartment here; I represent Doral on tour and oversee the tennis program at the club.

I played twenty-seven holes of golf today with Frank Craighill. We really had a lot of fun today — bets coming and going. I like Frank; he's becoming a good friend.

The whites I met in tennis tended to be more upper class, a different kind of white people than what most blacks meet. It seems impossible to say (I'm getting old), but I've known Clark Graebner for almost twenty years now, since I was twelve. The kids in my school would tell each other how awful the whites were, and they were surely right — the white people they encountered in passing probably were awful. I knew some awful whites myself, but I knew whites who were decent people too; I knew Clark Graebner was a good kid; I knew he was no racist. I knew white people who were just like us. But how can you convince other kids of that if they've never seen it?

At UCLA I joined a black fraternity, Kappa Alpha Psi, in my junior year. Walt Hazzard, the basketball All-American (who is now known as Mahdi Abdul-Rahman), was my big brother. Truthfully, however, joining a fraternity was somewhat forced on my part at this time. The one common thread that had already begun to run through my life was that tennis players would be my best friends. It was simply the natural order of things, the line of least resistance.

So I joined Kappa Alpha Psi in order to cultivate more black

friends on campus, and the kicker is that I eventually caught hell for that from blacks. If you'll remember, it was not until right after I got out of college in '66 that the black power movement started on the campuses, and it was a couple of years after that when I first met Stokely Carmichael. We were chatting casually at the Reverend Jefferson Rogers' house in Washington when the subject of college came up, and I mentioned that I had been in a fraternity.

"That's Greek," Stokely said. "How could you do a thing like that? Greeks are whites."

Well, I had to admit that I had never thought of it in those terms. But Stokely had worked the whole thing out. As painful as his attack on me may have been at the time, I must admit that it's good to have people like that around to prick your conscience. They keep you thinking, even in a matter like this when I still disagree with him.

Friday, August 17 — Toronto

What a gorgeous day this was — a fantastic moment to be on the face of the earth. I'm not here just to see Kathy though. The Canadian Open starts Monday, and for me there's always something special just in getting back to the tour — even though it's barely been a couple of weeks that I've been away. You walk into the locker room for the first time again, and you feel good and warm and comfortable. At times like these I actually stop and wonder: why can't the whole bloody world be just like our locker room, with all these races and nationalities and cultures getting along?

But, of course, we're all young and healthy and making good money and playing games, and the world is none of these things.

6

The Level of Expectations

Saturday, August 18, 1973 — Toronto

This was Guess-Who's-Coming-To-Dinner-Tonight, north-of-the-border division. Actually, I've met Kathy's parents before, several times, but this was the first time we had ever really planned a long, extended evening. I thought about it all day. I practiced with Okker, but my mind was all over the place worrying about tonight. It just has so many ramifications — racial, social, religious.

But, like so many things in life, it wasn't worth worrying about at all. I mean, it went off without a hitch — a very nice dinner and conversation. One thing that helps me in a situation like this is that I am very good at cocktail-party conversation. I've had to do it so much for so long in tennis that I have not only become very good at it, but now I even rather enjoy it. Kathy is completely different from me in this regard. She likes to get down to the heavy one-on-one confrontations.

Monday, August 20 — Toronto

I beat Antonio Munoz four and one today. Munoz is the number four Spaniard, one of those little Europeans who retrieves everything; good backhand too. Naturally, his game is clay, and I'm not advertised as any kind of clay-court player, so it will be conven-

iently forgotten that I swamped him today on clay. If I — or any big hitter — had lost today to Munoz, everybody would have said: *Well, what'd you expect, Ashe can't win on clay.*

To be truthful, I could not always speak so easily about clay. I used to be downright afraid to expose myself on clay. In '65, I won two singles against Mexico in the Davis Cup at Dallas, on fairly fast courts. The next matches were in Barcelona, on the real slow clay there. Bubble-gum surface. I was playing well that summer — in fact, even after we got to Spain I was still handling Frank Froehling, who was supposed to be our top slow-court specialist — but I didn't want any part of risking myself out there. As soon as I won at Dallas, I said: "All right, Frank, it's your turn." I was just going to pick my spots, play only the fast-surface Davis Cup matches.

Well, Spain bombed us. Ralston and Froehling lost the opening singles, and they clinched it in the doubles, and Froehling lost again, for good measure, in the first match the third day. So we were down 4-0, with a meaningless match coming up between Dennis and Manuel Santana. The Spanish asked to withdraw Santana, so as not to aggravate an injury he had, so Dennis wanted out too.

The captain, George MacCall, asked me to play for Dennis, and I begged off. I just didn't want to put my neck on the line. Everybody in the locker room could sense that I was afraid, and I knew it, but I just wasn't going out there on the clay. I couldn't handle it. I'm sure that was when I began to make the mistake of confusing defeat with embarrassment, as so many people do. I thought I would embarrass myself by losing. Actually, as I've finally learned, if you play your best, it doesn't make any difference.

So I gained something from the experience in Barcelona. I was ashamed of myself, I sincerely regret it to this day, and I won't ever duck anything again in my life.

One of the strangest things in tennis is that for all the fuss always made over the difference among court surfaces, virtually nothing is ever said or written about the differences in balls — and let me tell you that the change in balls is a great deal more difficult to cope with than the change in surfaces. Here this week we're playing on clay, but with high-pressure American balls. The clay will help

some players, but if we played a European brand of ball here, that would improve the chances of the Continental players by as much as a third, even a half. There's that much difference between balls.

Europeans as a rule have long, fluid strokes — they hit through the ball — because the player must do the work and apply the muscle to the heavy European balls. Americans and Australians tend to be slashers, with shorter strokes, because our balls jump. It's very simple. The American balls — Wilson and Spalding and all the others — get their resilience from the air pumped into them. But European balls obtain their resilience from the rubber itself.

The fastest balls are the Wilson and Spalding. Then comes the Slazenger, the Wimbledon choice, then the Dunlop, and finally the Italian Pirelli and the Swedish Tretorn. The last two are the really slow balls. Hell, you can stick an ice pick through a Tretorn and it won't make any difference. If you did that to a ball that depends on air pressure for its bounce, you'd virtually deflate it.

The American balls, in baseball terminology, are much livelier. You hit one right and it goes *bing*. You can wrist them around, flick them, and they get easier to handle the longer you play with one. A Wilson loses its fuzz and gets noticeably smaller. Really. On the other hand, the European balls are heavy and get deader the longer you play with one. You hit a Pirelli or a Tretorn, even a Dunlop, it goes *thump*. You try to wrist one of them, it will just die on your racket. European balls are just not flickable. Not at all.

Because the Europeans grow up with the slower balls, they tend to build an entirely different game than what we incline to in America. I think it is possible to postulate that Bjorn Borg may become a great player only because he is so extraordinarily precocious. If he had developed more normally, he would have spent another four or five years in Sweden, learning the game by playing almost exclusively with the Tretorns. Then perhaps it would have been too late for him to adjust to the livelier balls that he would find in the other parts of the world.

The balls you grow up with really influence your whole approach to the game. Take the Europeans. Because of the heavy balls, so many of them opt for a loosely strung racket for even more control. A typical Continental player will string his racket with about fifty pounds of tension; hell, that's like a lacrosse stick to me. I string

my Heads with at least sixty pounds. And your style — from the ball, to the racket, to your whole game. The cannonball serve, the sharp, angle volley are not so much strokes of a fast surface as they are lively ball strokes. You just won't ever find me hitting a drop volley unless I *know* I can't miss. The damndest thing of all about Chris Evert is that she learned to hit those drop shots of hers from the base line with American balls.

Tuesday, August 21 — Toronto

I played tennis with Kathy at her club this afternoon, and then afterward we went downtown to the Canadian National Exposition, which is like a country county fair. And hey, I won two prizes for her too. One time I broke two dishes with one ball. How about that? Now I'm an all-around athlete.

Thursday, August 23 — Toronto

This afternoon I beat Patrice Dominguez in three sets. Afterward, I took Kathy and a couple of her friends out to dinner at a soul-food restaurant named the Underground Railway. Toronto has a very small black population, to be sure, but the Underground Railway is among the first of the soul-food places aimed at the population at large. The Boondocks in New York is another one. I suppose in a few years that soul food will be like Italian food or Chinese food, a *variety*. Before long they'll probably be serving the stuff from plastic containers on airplanes.

Anyway, here was our cast of characters tonight: Arthur R. Ashe, Jr., black American; Kathy Benn, Jewish; her friend Rubin Trissman, also Jewish; and his fiancée, Susan Johnson, Wasp. We had such a good time taking off after one another that we ended up staying another two hours after dinner.

Mainly, we directed our fire at poor Susan, since she just happened to be the only Wasp. What bugs me, and what I told her, was how lucky she was that she wasn't in the minority so that she didn't have to waste a lot of her time thinking about minority problems. Because I'm not a Wasp but I live in Waspdom, I have to spend a significant part of my life trying to figure Wasps out. Right

away they have a big edge over me because they're not obliged to spend a lot of their time trying to figure me out. They can just go about the business of living their lives.

I love evenings like this. I really do. I don't think there's anything I enjoy more than getting into conversations with people of diverse backgrounds. Unfortunately, too many blacks my age and younger tend to feign a certain nonchalance around whites that destroys the hope for communication. The country suffers, because, as a rule, young blacks and whites just plain clam up around each other.

Friday, August 24 — Toronto

Can you believe it? I lost to Ivan Molina in the quarters. Guy from Colombia. He certainly has more of a reputation than John Bartlett, but still, it is just inexcusable on my part — especially since he took me rather easily, four and three. He just passed me all through the match. Molina barely made this tournament without having to qualify, and he only did make the draw because he has some reputation on clay. So he comes in, and beats Laver yesterday — which is more than I can say in my whole bloody life — and today he beats me and gets to the semis.

Was I overconfident? Yes, all right, I was. And, obviously, Molina's win over Laver gave him just the right amount of confidence. You often see that happen to a player when he gets a big win. That raises his appreciation of himself so that he is automatically a better player the next time out. Last week or two days ago, if I had played Ivan Molina, he may have been delighted to have won the first set from me and then he would have rolled over and played dead. But today, I let the guy take one set from me, and you can see him thinking: hey, I can take another set from Ashe, because, what the hell, I'm the guy that beat Laver yesterday.

This is not, however, necessarily a universal reaction. Many times (and I think especially where Americans are involved), a lesser player who upsets a star will relax his next time out. With that one upset, he has already exceeded his level of expectations in the tournament, so he is satisfied. If he loses, he can say, so what if Ashe beat me — I beat Laver to get to the quarters and I wasn't

even expected to do that. If you do catch a player who has done better than he expected and already passed his level of expectation, you have a great advantage.

Sunday, August 26 — New York

I went out to the Greenwich Field Club today to practice with Ralston, Gorman and Smith, the first time I'd been back on the grass since Queen's two months ago. A ball skids coming off the grass and wings in low, and that takes some getting used to. But it is not simply the speed itself that upsets you. There's a good analogy here between me and clay. I grew up and learned the game on very slow concrete, so a dead surface itself has never offered me any problem of adjustment. But what is so difficult for me about clay is that you slide a little bit on it. Just a little — but that is enough to throw you off. No matter how long I play on clay, I always feel like I'm out there on roller skates.

The similarity with grass is that it is the one surface that is uneven. The quickness, having to stay low — any good athlete could learn, in time, to make these adjustments. But the real trick to switching to grass is mental because the ball takes so many bad bounces. You can never get grooved on grass, as you can on all other surfaces.

It is not the speed of grass that does a guy in, but the unpredictability. A couple of guys can hit for four hours on clay, but you will come off a two-hour grass match more fatigued because you are so much more mentally spent. This is especially true at Forest Hills where the courts are significantly more uneven than at Wimbledon. You can never stop concentrating at Forest Hills, or you're dead.

7

The Worst Day of the Year

Monday, August 27, 1973 — New York

El Shafei and Drysdale and I went out to Greenwich again to practice and came back to town for an ATP board meeting. All the players are talking World Team Tennis, and it's getting very sticky, particularly among the Europeans, because the WTT season is scheduled to begin in the spring, in conflict with their big championships.

I'm not being cynical here, merely obvious: WTT does not first serve the fans or the players. I believe that its foremost devotion is to the arenas — which is okay, that's American business; only I would like them to admit this. WTT is being scheduled at a time — the spring and summer — when the arenas are empty. It wasn't created to fill a need or a demand, merely dates. The priorities are all upside-down. None of this would really concern me except that WTT's waves may swamp much more of tennis. Philippe Chartier of France spoke to me last night, and he honestly believes that WTT will spell the end of the European tournaments.

Tuesday, August 28 — New York

We had a bear of a meeting of the ATP today. There were sixty-seven members on hand, and they agreed with the board not to