



At the Rothmans International Tennis Tournament in Toronto. Top: Jimmy Connors; bottom: Dick Stockton.

Drama at Rothmans International Tennis Tournament

by George Fanta

Tennis is Canada's fastest growing participation sport thanks to the rapid construction of many indoor facilities and the elevation of two key tournaments into world prominence.

The most important is the Canadian Open which is held each year in August in Toronto. The second, and close behind the Open, is the recently completed Rothmans International Tournament which is jointly sponsored by World Championship Tennis. This year, over 7,000 spectators packed the CNE Coliseum in Toronto, a record crowd, to see top-seeded players compete for \$100,000 in prizes.

It takes cash to attract world famous players from the professional circuit and Rothmans have seen to it that prize money is available in sufficient amounts to do just that. This year, \$30,000 was awarded to the successful male singles finalists. The second place winner received \$15,000. First prize for the best doubles team was \$8,000.

The crowd, and a large CTV national TV audience at home, were disappointed when top-seeded Jimmy Connors from California had to concede victory to rival Dick Stockton in the first set of the finals due to an injury to his knee.

Connors appeared to have hurt his knee on an approach shot in the 10th game of the first set. Connors was leading 5-4 when Stockton broke him in the 10th game to tie it at 5-5. By the end of the game, Connors was limping and favoured the knee whenever he ran. Despite the injury, Connors continued to play and broke Stockton in the 11th game of the set to take a 6-5. Then before the start of the 12th game, Connors took a five and a half minute injury time out as allowed by the WCT rules. Actually, he took ten minutes which his opponent did not protest, because Stockton was anxious to see the match completed in regulation play. It was not to be, Connors had been advised by the examining physician to leave the game to avoid aggravating the injury further.

The top-rated player in the world, whose agile legs have made him a millionaire in a few short years on the tournament circuit, refused his doctor's advice and elected to continue playing. After returning to the court, he facetiously suggested to Stockton that he would try to continue as long as he, Stockton, would hit the balls back short to his forehand. Stockton quipped that he would agree as long as Connors would default on the match point.

There is too much at stake to give anything away in the professional tennis circuit. Connors pluckily took up position at the service line. The crowd held its breath as he took a 40-30 lead in the game despite an obvious attempt to favour the knee. However, he stopped short of the net after the successful shot and told the umpire that he was unable to continue. After consultation, it was announced to the crowd and TV audience that the match had been awarded to Ken Stockton.

Stockton admitted after the game that he was disappointed in the result. While on the court, he was in a quandry. He said that it was hard to force a man with an injury to move around a lot. Sympathy for the injured Connors would have built up quickly. Stockton said that he didn't

know what he would have done, if the match had continued.

Stockton had advanced to the final by beating Tom Okker of the Netherlands 6-4, 6-2 in a semi final match the day before. Connors beat Eddie Dibbs of Florida in a two and one half hour match which finished 4-6, 7-6, 6-1. Okker teamed up with Wojtek Fibak of Poland, well known to Canadian tennis fans, to claim the \$8,000 first prize for men's doubles competition. They were the top-seeded pair, beating second seeded Ross Case and Tony Roche from Australia 6-4, 6-1. It was their fourth victory in five tries on the WCT tour this season.

Connors was advised by his doctor to rest his knee for two weeks before resuming his tour. This is one more of a series of incidents which has kept Jimmy Connors in the limelight ever since he made his meteoric entry into international professional tennis in 1974. That was the year that he nailed down titles all over the tennis world. He fought his way to the finals at Wimbledon to face Ken Rosewall. The veteran had never won at Wimbledon and the crowd clearly wanted him to win this one. But "the kid" disposed of him without ceremony 6-1, 6-1, 6-4. He followed this up with a similar one-sided victory over Rosewall almost immediately after, 6-1, 6-0, 6-1 at Forest Hills. In other play, Connors took ten U.S. Lawn Tennis Association tourneys and several opens to earn \$281,309.

The following year, Connors challenged Rod Laver and Don Newcombe and walked off with jackpots that dwarfed the size of his earnings the year before. Beating Newcombe alone, netted him half a million. This settled the question whether Connors was equal to the top pros and he has been big news ever since. It is a tribute to those behind the Canadian tournaments, like Rothmans, the WCT and the Canadian Lawn Tennis Association, that people of Connor's calibre come to Canada to play.

This is only one step in a series of moves by Rothmans to help lift Canadian professional tennis further up the ladder of world standing. Rothmans has been mainly responsible, through their financial support and publicity-generating activities, for the further expansion and development of the Canadian Professional Circuit. □