

Mrs. King Defeats Riggs, 6-4, 6-3, 6-3, Amid a Circus Atmosphere

By NEIL AMDUR

Special to The New York Times

HOUSTON, Sept. 20—Mrs. Billie Jean King struck a proud blow for herself and women around the world with a crushing 6-4, 6-3, 6-3 rout of Bobby Riggs tonight in their \$100,000 winner-take-all tennis match at the Astrodome.

In an atmosphere more suited for a circus than a sports event, the 29-year-old Mrs. King ended the bizarre saga of the 55-year-old hustler, who had bolted to national prominence with his blunt putdowns of women's tennis and the role of today's female.

Mrs. King, a five-time Wimbledon champion and the most familiar face in the women's athletic movement, needed only 2 hours 4 minutes to reaffirm her status as one of the gifted and tenacious competitors in sport, female or male.

A crowd of 30,492, some paying as much as \$100 a seat, watched the best-three-of-five set struggle, the largest single attendance ever for a tennis match. Millions more viewed the event on national television. The match also

was seen in 36 foreign countries via satellite.

Mrs. King squashed Riggs with tools synonymous with men's tennis, the serve and volley. She beat Bobby to the ball, dominated the net and ran him around the baseline to the point of near exhaustion in the third set, when he suffered hand cramps and trailed, 2-4.

Most important, perhaps for women everywhere, she convinced skeptics that a female athlete can survive pressure-filled situations and that men are as susceptible to nerves as women.

It was Riggs, for example, who only yesterday had claimed "I have no nerves," who double-faulted at 4-5, 30-40 to decide the first set.

And it was another Riggs double-fault, at deuce in the ninth game of the final set, that gave Mrs. King her third match point. An uproar of cheers followed when Riggs drove a high backhand volley into the net.

Later, away from the tumult and the shouting,

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The New York Times

Published: September 21, 1973
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Mrs. King

Trounces

Mr. Riggs

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Mrs. King admitted that she, too, had suffered cramps in her leg in the sixth game of the final set.

"It was a combination of nerves and just all that running," she said. "When I felt the first twinge, I said, 'Oh God, not now—not this close.' I was really worried."

Riggs did not leave the match empty-handed. Like Mrs. King, he was guaranteed a minimum of \$75,000 for ancillary rights to the promotion. His other endorsements and contracts should swell his take to over \$300,000.

Mrs. King, the biggest money-winner in the history of women's athletics and the foremost spokesman for equality in sport, is certain to reap even greater financial returns from tonight's victory. But as she said yesterday, "pride matters a lot more than money."

Riggs, who had hoped to use another triumph as a springboard to greater riches, praised Mrs. King.

"She was too good," said the 1939 Wimbledon singles champion. "She played too well. She was playing well within herself, and I couldn't get the most out of my game. It was over too quickly."

In the first set alone, in what represented an incredible testimony to her quality of play, Mrs. King won 26 of her 34 points with outright winners, balls which Riggs never touched with his racquet.

After having lost her serve to open the second set, she immediately broke back at 30 with the shot she relishes, the running backhand cross-court.

As he pressed to put more pace on his serve and first volley, Riggs's game gradually deteriorated. He found himself being passed on return of serve, chasing lobs that HE was supposed to be stroking, and stretching in vain for Billie Jean's assortment of passing shots and deadly volleys.

At the finish, Mrs. King's statistics spoke for themselves: 70 of the 109 points she won, or over 64 per cent, were outright winners. Such perfection might compare favorably with a quarterback who completes 20 of 24 passes for six touchdowns.

Even before the first ball was struck, it became even more evident that this was to be no ordinary tennis event.

Instead of the traditional walk onto to the court, the players entered the stadium with the flourish of something out of a Cecil B. DeMille movie.

Mrs. King came first on a Cleopatra-style gold litter that was held aloft by four muscular track-and-field athletes from nearby Rice University and an Astrodome employe. One of the togoclad carriers was Dave Roberts, one of the world's finest pole vaulters.

Riggs was transported into the stadium in a gold-wheeled rickshaw pulled by six professional models in tight red and gold outfits who had been dubbed "Bobby's Bosom Buddies" during his stay here. It was apparent why.

A band, seated behind what would have been home plate for baseball, blared brassy march music while brightly colored costumed characters from Astroworld frolicked for the large crowd.

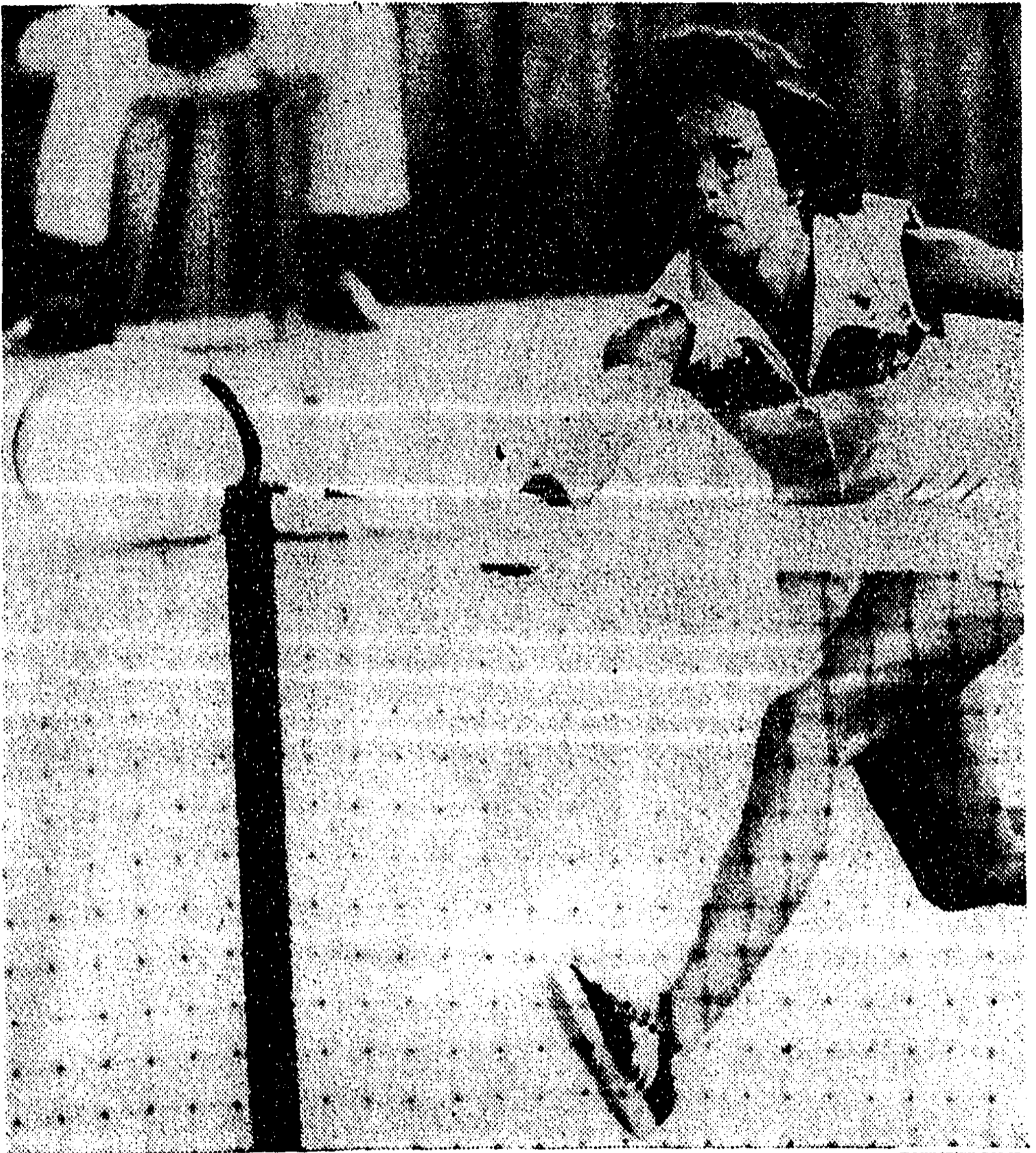
Large banners, seldom displayed at staid country clubs where tennis languished as a sport for the classes for much of this century, were sprinkled throughout the stadium.

The circus atmosphere contrasted sharply not only with conventional tennis events but with the challenge match between Riggs and Mrs. Margaret Court last Mother's Day.

That match, which Riggs won in a 6-2, 6-1 rout, was held at a wilderness site in Ramona, Calif., before 3,000 fans sitting in make-shift seats.

Tonight's courtside crowd sat in \$100 seats sipping champagne from several improvised bars. Some spectators arrived in suits or evening dresses.

Mrs. King even went one-up on Riggs at the courtside introductions. After Bobby had presented Billie Jean with a large candy sucker (he had given Mrs. Court a bouquet of roses before their match), Mrs. King gave her gift—a brown baby pig.



Mrs. Billie Jean King making a return to Bobby Riggs in the Astrodome

The New York Times

Published: September 21, 1973
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Mrs. Billie Jean King holds trophy and check for \$100,000 she won in match with Bobby Riggs last night.



United Press International

Riggs, down 6-4, 6-3, looks dejected as he prepares for the third set in the Astrodome.

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