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Sports

Seniors retain youth in tennis championship

By Charley Korn
Of the Emerald

The hottest tennis player in the world turned 18 this month. As Steffi Graf competes at Wimbledon this week, players two, three, and four times her age took to the University courts over the weekend for the United States Tennis Association-sanctioned Seniors-Only Championship.

Thirty-six players ranging in

age from 35 to 69 matched speed, strength and skill in heat that pushed the mercury into the high 80s.

Buzz Summers, the University men's tennis coach, organized the event for the second year, and while he falls into the 45-year-old bracket, he feels no need to play in the tournament. He knows most of the players and marvels at their vitality. "Just being able to play when you're 65 is very notable. A lot of people at that age are in wheelchairs," he said.

This is certainly not the case with Bob Mix, a Corvallis attorney, ranked third in the Northwest 65-year-old division, which includes players 65 to 69. Mix will turn 70 this year, and is already eligible for the next age group, in which he has a chance to be ranked number one.

Mix has played tennis since he was nine, back in the days

when, he said, people considered it a "sissy game." Mix, six-foot tall and husky, played basketball, baseball and football in college, but retained his tennis playing ability. "Conditioning is awfully important," Mix said. "As the pros say, if you don't get into position you can't hit the ball."

Mix did much more than merely get into position this weekend. He dispatched his three singles opponents and won the 65-division championship. Then, an hour after his 6-2, 6-2 finals victory, he teamed with his partner to triumph once again — winners of the doubles title in the same division.

If someone tried to tell him to slow down at 70, it would be in vain. "The doctors I've had — and I'd fire them if they didn't tell me — all tell me to keep playing tennis," Mix said. "Seriously, the concept of

health has changed dramatically and I'm certain that this is beneficial to my health."

In the course of three matches, Mix lost only one set. Keith McGillivray, a Eugene dentist, beat him 6-1 in the first set of the first round and had Mix worried for a minute. But the lawyer turned the tables — adjusting to the springy court surface and, effectively drop-shotting his 63-year-old challenger, never looked back.

McGillivray took up tennis as an alternative to golf, which took too much of his time. He appreciates the camaraderie of the senior circuit and is "always delighted to enter another age bracket," he said.

"It's an elating moment when a player jumps from being the oldest in his division to the youngest," he said.

"Tennis has changed its image with the likes of John McEnroe," McGillivray said. "Years ago tennis players wore all whites, complimented good shots and called line shots in favor of their opponent." McGillivray said those qualities still dwell among the seniors.

Summers plans to continue the seniors-only championships in the future.

In the 35-singles category, Ed Jolley, Medford, downed Don Bowker, Eugene, 7-5, 6-4. Ray Scudder, Eugene, beat Ron Vavrosky, Sweet Home, 6-4, 6-2 in the 45-singles division. Mix downed Roseburg's Bob Norton 6-2, 6-2 in the 65-singles. Mix teamed with Wendall Maccoby, Corvallis, to defeat Henry Johnson and Dick Hansen of Florence 6-2, 6-2 in 65-doubles action. Jolley and Mike Kingsley downed Kim Griffin and Bowker 6-2, 6-3 in the 35-doubles category.

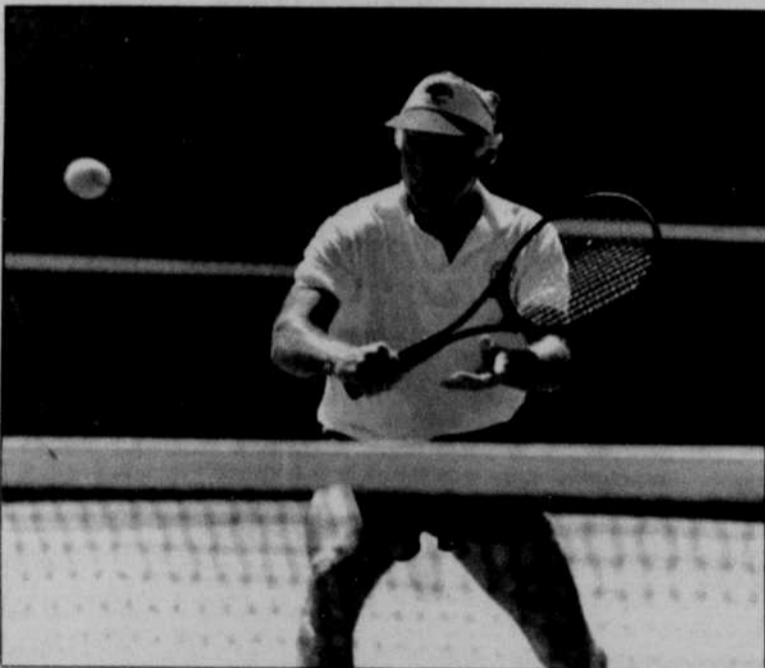


Photo by Derrel Hewitt
Sixty-nine-year-old Robert Mix prepares to return a shot during the second annual Seniors-Only Tennis Championship. Mix won the 65-singles and 65-doubles divisions.

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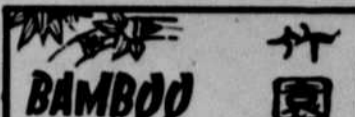
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