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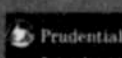
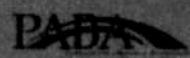
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Q & A

Tennis champion, equity champion

Billie Jean King Shares Life Lessons

By Mary Schutten

In 1972, when I was 16, Billie Jean King was my MAD crush. I want you to know that this was no immature or infantile obsession – it was more than that. It was LUST!

So when I figured out we were going on the same Olivia cruise, I wrangled a chance to interview her. I summoned all the journalistic integrity I could, dizzily blathered some questions at her and tried not to faint.

Let me back up a bit. Billie Jean King is a tennis and cultural icon. *Life* magazine named her one of the "100 Most Influential People of the 20th Century" AND she is one of our very own! Mm hmm, now I've got your attention. What made her so incredible and noteworthy was that she was the mother of all smart, savvy, strong, athletic and muscle-y role models! While being the world's #1 woman tennis player, she founded the Women's Sports Foundation, World Team Tennis, The Women's Tennis Association (union) and put together the first Women's Professional Tennis Tour – The Virginia Slims! And, she still has the record for most Wimbledon Championships (20) to boot!

For those of us in our 40s and up, she championed gender equality and helped push the passage of Title IX, federal legislation that launched the women's sports and education

"You don't have to have a career like mine where you have a platform to impact millions... You are a #1 person if you impact just one life."

BILLIE JEAN KING

revolution. Title IX legislation states that no organization receiving federal funding may discriminate on the basis of gender.

Billie Jean King taught me to take myself and my talents seriously. Because of her example, I went to college on one of the first women's athletic scholarships given at the University of Washington and travelled the world playing professional tennis for two years. From that time forward, I have always taken my passions and dreams seriously. (Okay, maybe not the one where I make out with her and we become life partners.)

Now for the juicy stuff. In 1981, she was outed by her hairdresser who sued her for "palimony." Initially, she denied she was the woman's lover but days later she became the 1st woman sports professional to admit at a national news conference she was gay. (Oh, be still, my beating heart, there is a chance for me! I will take the \$494 I got from my divorce and take care of her and we will live happily ever after.) The suit was dismissed on the grounds that it crossed the line and shaded toward extortion. After telling the truth about her sexuality, against the tennis establishment's wishes, she lost over 2 million dollars in sponsorships.

However, what most people remember her for is a tennis match called "Battle of the Sexes." Thirty-five years ago she played Bobby Riggs, a former Wimbledon men's singles champion and self-avowed "male chauvinist pig." The stakes were high,



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