

# Lori McNeil: Disciplined, Accomplished, Committed

by Avel Gordly

Lori McNeil missed her senior prom to compete in a tennis tournament. She has no regrets. McNeil beat Chris Evert at the recent U.S. Open.

She started her journey to world class excellence at age 10½ in a Houston summer tennis program. McNeil's mother greatly influenced her decision to play. Watching Arthur Ashe play Jimmy Connors in a televised match also added to her enthusiasm. It was the first complete match she had ever watched.

McNeil has had the same coach, John Wilkerson, ever since those early days, and she explained with conviction, "Everyone needs a coach to see what you are doing . . . another pair of eyes while you're concentrating." McNeil is a strong advocate of mentoring. She encourages Black youth to "find someone who is a professional; whoever there is who has their best interest at heart—stick with that person. Don't listen to a lot of people. Listen to that person. When you start winning, a lot of people will come around and tell you to get rid of that person." And she said, "We as a people, when we get to a certain point, we get rid of the person who helped us initially. We need to stick with that person."

McNeil feels that it's important to have a good support system. She relies on hers a great deal, which includes up-and-coming tennis star Zina Garrison. McNeil emphasized, for example, that she and Garrison "stick together" in their travels.

McNeil has traveled to Australia, Europe, Hawaii, and Canada, and she stated a desire to see Africa and Japan.

Asked to explain her approach to discipline, McNeil said while there is always room for improvement, she keeps her priorities in line and is very punctual. While in school, she knew that she could not make bad grades, because it meant she would not be able to play tennis. She has learned to be well organized through preparation for tours.

McNeil went to college on a tennis scholarship and saw the experience as an opportunity to learn more about herself and to make new friends.

Initially, she chose a communications and marketing major but switched to sports medicine after deciding to turn professional.

McNeil, who is 24, enjoys working with young people and plans to put her communications and marketing background to use by opening her own tennis training center in the future. She stressed the need for a place where "minorities, particularly Blacks" can learn and excel. She cited the experience of former tennis great Althea Gibson who once had a center where



Codi Proctor (R), 14 yrs old, gets words of encouragement from Lori McNeil following a short work-out at Chiles Center. The talented 8th grader at H.B. Lee Middle School has been playing tennis 6 years

and this year won mixed doubles and the Women's Division of the Ebony Rose Ski Club's 2nd Annual Tennis Tournament.

Photo by Richard J. Brown



Tennis pro Lori McNeil and her coach John Wilkerson take a break during practice sessions at Chiles Center. McNeil was in town for the World Mixed Doubles Championship.

Photo by Richard J. Brown

Blacks could train, but where the cost may have been prohibitive to many at the time. McNeil wants to learn from some of the things Gibson has shared with her about her (McNeil's) game and business experience. She said, in admiration of Gibson, "Her experiences by far were the best of any Black woman in the game."

McNeil, who projects seriousness and commitment in her conversation, focused on some of the problems facing Black youth. "There is a lot of pressure on youth." Some are "listening to the wrong people," she said. She is disturbed that some Black youth are "emulating white youth", such as being too involved in wearing name brands like "Calvin Klein", and following what she sees as negative images on television. McNeil said that when talking about drugs and teenage pregnancy, "Everyone says I'm different, that can't happen to me—we need to pull together and stay strong." McNeil also said, "I don't think high schools and colleges prepare us for the successes we accomplish."

Coach John Wilkerson suggested there is even more pressure on Blacks involved in sports, because "everyone wants you to excel and sometimes that can be pressure if you're not ready for it," and "It can result in injuries . . . and excuses for losing." Wilkerson continued, "For us, it's even more extreme, because there are so few of us."

Commenting on their impressions of Portland, Wilkerson said in reference to the scenery, "I fell in love with Portland before hitting the ground." McNeil said she was concerned that there was no Black radio station and that "I don't think I could live here, I haven't seen many brothers and sisters."

McNeil and Wilkerson were in Portland to participate in the World Mixed Doubles Championship at the Chiles Center.

## Law for Laymen

Sellwood Community Center, 1436 SE Spokane, Thursday, October 8, 7 to 9 p.m. The classes cover general principles of the law, focusing on a different subject each week. Topics include personal liability, contracts, consumers rights, family law, property rights, wills, estates, and probate. The fee is \$20.

## Law for the Lay Person

Metropolitan Learning Center Community School, 2033 N.W. Glisan, Tuesdays, beginning October 6 for 6 weeks, 7 to 9 p.m. Demystify the legal process with discussions of consumer and landlord/tenant rights, buying and selling automobiles, torts, contracts, and small claims court. The fee is \$15.00.

## PCC Sets Fence-Building Class In Northeast Portland

Portland Community College is offering a one-session class, Fence and Gate Building and Repair, from 6:30 to 9:30 p.m. Tuesday, October 6, at Gregory Heights Community School, 7334 N.E. Siskiyou St. Participants will receive instruction about tools, book resources and materials. Tuition is \$4.00. Further information is available from PCC Cascade Campus Community Education, 244-6111, Ext. 5205.

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