The “Bad Boys” of Tennis: Shifting Gender and Social Class Relations in the Era of Nastase, Connors and McEnroe

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Abstract

Tennis from the mid-1970s onwards until the mid-1990s witnessed a global downturn in on-court manners. This was exemplified by players such as Ilie Năstase, Jimmy Connors and John McEnroe, who built reputations on their “bad-boy” images, by exhibiting lower levels of sportsmanship, honesty, courtesy to officials and behavioural restraint, and concomitant higher levels of ostensible petulance, aggressive posturing and disrespect toward opponents, umpires and spectators than had been customary in the past. The aims of this paper are to examine the extent that this phenomenon was the result of wider shifts in class and gender relations during this period, alongside the rise of consumerist, neo-liberal, free-market philosophies in American and British societies. In short, the overall objective is to offer a partial explanation of this phenomenon by locating it in the broader social context of marked changes in society and tennis more specifically.

Key words
Neo-liberal, free market, etiquette, behaviour, commercialism

Introduction

Tennis from the mid 1970s to the mid 1990s, according to the British tennis personality Ted Tinling, witnessed a "world down-trend in court manners", exemplified by players such as Ilie Năstase, Jimmy Connors and John McEnroe, who built reputations on their "bad-boy" images, by exhibiting lower levels of sportsmanship, honesty, behavioural restraint and courtesy to officials, and displaying concomitant higher levels of ostensible petulance and aggressive posturing than previously had been customary.[1] While there were numerous examples of well-mannered players like Bjorn Borg, Stefan Edberg, Stan Smith and Arthur Ashe who sustained traditional codes of conduct during this period, it would be wrong to discount the popular trio as exceptional cases. Among the rank and file it was evident that general changes occurred to codes of conduct, manners and sportsmanship in men's tennis, which were defined and rooted historically in British upper-middle-class ideals of the "gentleman amateur". A detailed analysis of this historical period led the sociologist E. Digby Baltzell to describe players like Connors and McEnroe as "ungovernable ... adolescent dropouts", who "brought the game to the lowest level of mannerly civility in its history"; and he condemned the "rampant rudeness" of players like Năstase, and the lack of "court manners" generally among the top players.[2] That this downward turn lasted for about two decades, before the next generation seemed to prompt a return to some of the sport's core values, presents an interesting phenomenon.

This paper aims to offer an explanation of this phenomenon, by addressing the following questions: To what extent were shifts in behavioural norms the result of changing class relations and the democratization of tennis, which invited new working-class players and cultural influences, and, crucially, provided an avenue for such players to actively resist "traditional"

behavioural norms and cultural mores in tennis? The notable shifts in the on and off-court behaviour and attitudes of professional male players are of concern given the challenges posed to the tennis establishment during this period by political and economic developments both within the sport and in wider American and British societies more generally. In the years following 1968 when tennis went "open" to allow professionals to compete alongside amateurs in the world's major championships, a "boom" in the sport's popularity, particularly in the United States, coincided with a period of administrative insecurity as the major established associations tussled with each other and with emergent groups like corporate sponsors and professional agencies for legitimacy, control and profits in the sport.[3] This paper considers how the resultant escalation in prize money and other lucrative opportunities that players enjoyed as an outcome of the sport's rampant commercialization in the 1970s and 80s, coupled with the broader rise of consumerist, neo-liberal, free-market philosophies in tune with the conservative, right-of-center stances of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, influenced the behaviour of male players. In this sense, Năstase, Connors and McEnroe could be considered representatives of a kind of class struggle or broader social movement, as they threatened to undermine the sport's hallowed amateur traditions in their employment of off-court corporate logic and on-court ruthless win-at-all-costs behaviour. To offer a more complete analysis of this phenomenon, this paper also considers the extent that developments in women's tennis and in the wider feminist movement impacted the behaviour of some male players, in the sense that advances for women propelled them, either consciously or subconsciously, to assert their masculinity in more pronounced ways. It asks: Was the apparent post-modern "crisis of masculinity" unfolding in wider society also manifesting itself through the on-court behaviour of male tennis players, in the form of a backlash against weakening gender distinctions?

The analysis of primary data, derived chiefly from archives and player autobiographies, is complemented with a critical re-evaluation of key secondary source materials. Much of this was written by biographers and journalists and provides important detail on the phenomenon of shifting behavioural norms in tennis, but is in need of analysis within an explanatory framework connected to broader societal developments. The main societal contexts examined were Britain and America, principally because key aspects of the traditional code of conduct were modelled on British amateur ideals, but it was arguably American-inspired capitalist influences in the "open era" – most notably changes to media reporting and broadcasting, and the commercialization of tournaments through corporate sponsorships and the sale of television rights – that facilitated the gradual erosion of these traditional ideals and their replacement by a more performance-oriented, commercially-driven, professionalized sporting culture. Britain and America also hosted the world's key tournaments during this period, Wimbledon and the US Open, which alongside the Davis Cup served as foci for most of the sports' key social developments.

Previous historical research on shifting behavioural etiquette in tennis before WWII considered how developments in wider class and gender relations were connected to noticeable changes to how men and women actually played, in terms of the strokes they learnt, how and against whom they used them, and with what severity; in essence, how the connections between social class, gender and behavioural etiquette in tennis were reflected through the exhibition or balance of aggression, self-restraint, foresight in decision-making, and chivalry. It was evident that how someone played tennis said a great deal about their social class and gender, and social aspirations more generally.[4] This paper examines a specific phase in men's tennis history during the post-war period when the ways in which the various social classes and sexes interacted

within a system of stratification were more open, flexible, unstable, and contested. In this analysis, larger social, cultural and economic developments are factored into general discussions of behavioural etiquette and the specific analysis of "bad boy" masculinity.

The First "Bad Boys", Shifting Behavioural Etiquette, and the Democratization of Tennis

Tennis has been a sport characterized and self-regulated by an unwritten code of sportsmanship and restrained gentlemanly behaviour since its inception in the mid/late nineteenth century. The British ideology of amateurism served as the moral and social foundation upon which the established code of behavioural etiquette in tennis was constructed. Crudely put, upper-class patronage and voluntarism combined with middle-class diligence and thrift in an environment of class consciousness and social aspiration. A "gentleman amateur" played tennis for fun with apparent carefree disinterestedness, yet cognisant of how their behaviour subtly transmitted clues about one's class and status.[5] The combined outcomes of middle-class philanthropy, social welfare, and the two world wars helped to facilitate a shift in the opportunities and resources available for previously excluded classes to participate in post-war sport. In Britain and America, new and more egalitarian tennis clubs were being formed, free public-park courts were being constructed in greater numbers, tennis equipment fell in relative cost, and players emerged from more modest social backgrounds.[6] It was from the public parks rather than private clubs where many of America's interwar champions like George Lott, John Doeg, Bill Johnston, Ellsworth Vines, Don Budge and Helen Jacobs honed their skills. Also in Britain, the three-time Wimbledon singles champion Fred Perry bucked upper-middle-class

dominance given his father's working-class background, and many of the leading British coaches, among them Dan Maskell who after the war became the first professional afforded membership at the All England Lawn Tennis Club (AELTC), grew up in modest surroundings.[7] The number of clubs affiliated to the Lawn Tennis Association (LTA) more than tripled in the interwar period, increasing from just over 1000 in the early 1920s, to more than 3200 in 1939. Many of these clubs either catered exclusively to the lower-middle classes, who previously were likely to have been excluded, or simply altered their membership restrictions to attract new members from this class.[8]

Alongside these developments, there was a shift in how the amateur ethos was interpreted and incorporated into competitive sporting cultures, particularly in America, which sought greater autonomy in its sporting cultures as it enjoyed growing political and economic confidence following WWI. Coupled with Britain's decline as a world power, but more specifically through the early challenges to British methods in pre-war Olympic Games, the amateur ethos was challenged as the model for sporting success generally.[9] The emergence of playing styles, coaching practices and codes of conduct that were more accepting of playing primarily to win, allowed a progressive sporting mentality to pervade tennis gradually. The traditional British-rooted amateur ethos appeared ineffective and outdated against the burgeoning professional, commercial and global impulses in post-war tennis, particularly in America which entered this era as unquestionably the most dominant tennis nation.

Incidents of behavioural transgressions in tennis occurred before WWII, but were limited to a small handful of individuals. Bill Tilden, for example, was known to distract opponents by arguing with linesmen and umpires and "throwing" points, but players commonly adhered to a strict code of etiquette. After the war, incidents of such transgressions were not only more

frequent, but also involved a greater proportion of players; from being exceptional, they became normalized. The incidents involving the American Bob Falkenburg at Wimbledon in 1948 were arguably the first reported post-war cases of behavioural transgressions. While fighting his way through the Championships to win his first and only singles title, in both his semi-final and final matches he repeatedly adopted "delay tactics": returning an out serve to delay the second serve; constantly stopping to tie shoelaces; having friendly discussions with officials between points; unnecessarily requesting new balls; and, play-acting with cramp in his hand or leg. For A.K. Trower, a former British referee, his antics undermined the sport's proud tradition of sportsmanship: "A certain standard of conduct is taken for granted ... The centre court is justly jealous of its dignity".[10] Other incidents followed over the years, but moved away from the more innocuous "mind games" toward actual physical intimidation. Earl Cochell was ejected from the 1951 US Nationals for bad language and was subsequently suspended by the United States Lawn Tennis Association (USLTA), as did another American Chuck McKinley for losing his temper in the 1960 Davis Cup Inter-zone final.[11] The Australians Bob Mark, Bob Hewitt and Ken Fletcher were criticized for breaches of etiquette in their own national championships, which led the editor of *Lawn Tennis & Badminton* to speculate that Hewitt and Fletcher's omission from Davis Cup duty and Mark's cut from the team after just one singles match (which he won, incidentally) were direct consequences.[12] Young players were often the worst offenders. Letters of complaint were received from spectators and an "angry hotelier" in the French Riviera after a poor display of manners from several of Britain's young squad players in 1967; "certainly the old tradition of good British sportsmanship was not enhanced", remarked one correspondent.[13]

In an effort to extend their disciplinary powers against bad behaviour, the LTA began in 1947 to publish rules of etiquette; they listed several bad habits to avoid, including a "baleful

glare at an umpire, the hands raised high to heaven when that wonderful winner is adjudged out, the disgusted throwing down of the racket ... even the sorrowful shaking of the head at one's own failings".[14] They produced a list of "do's and don'ts" for tournament players, which included showing courtesy to umpires, good court behaviour, and overall it was stressed that "self-discipline" was a key ingredient for a player desirous of earning "the respect and goodwill of all those officiating and watching".[15] Advice was offered to juniors on how to be a "useful club member", which included exhibiting good behaviour, avoiding scuffing the courts, keeping the clubhouse tidy, volunteering to help at weekends and making teas.[16]

These comments must be set in the broader context of amateur tennis, as its foremost tournament and association officials, who alongside the leading sportswriters represented the tennis "establishment", were keen to promote its superiority and traditional behavioural ideals during a tumultuous period when professional tours were pulling both players and spectators from the amateur game. Moreover, despite amateur officials claiming their players' higher standards of behaviour, a good deal of correspondence suggested the complete opposite, possibly as a consequence of the more relaxed exhibition format of competition for touring-professionals and the better recognition of their responsibility to spectators. One correspondent in *Tennis Pictorial International* remarked: "Officials who have had dealings with the pro circuit have noted the difference from amateur norms. The pro is a craftsman, proud of his job. The undefined amateur is merely a mister-in-between".[17]

After tennis went "open" in 1968, the amateur-professional distinction was all but entirely removed, yet much of the power to dictate player behaviour in accordance with traditional amateur ideals was retained by the privileged and long-serving tournament, club, and association officials. Continuing its tradition of electing high-ranking officers from the British

armed-forces to its helm, the AELTC chose Air Chief Marshal Sir Brian Burnett as its chairman from 1974-84. Presiding over a period of immense change, Burnett like many of his esteemed colleagues from this mould found challenges to their authority problematic and quite alien, as players like Năstase, Connors and McEnroe "increasingly flaunted their new found independence". He also expressed great reluctance to accept the escalating prize-money that players increasingly expected.[18] Tennis officials and leading sportswriters were fearful, if not convinced, that the professionalization and commercialization of tennis was inextricably related to, if not the direct cause of, the downturn in on-court behaviour by male players. Unsurprisingly, national governing bodies continued to compile lists of "unwritten" rules as the threat of bad behaviour continued. The third USTA official handbook in 1981 contained forty-one rules of tennis and twelve points of etiquette, ranging from how to control your temper and display the right attitude, to how to dress properly and cross courts at changeovers.[19] Colonel Nicholas Powel, the Tennis Rules Committee Chairman from 1976-89 and a devout and well-respected member of the established "old guard" of American tennis, produced in *The Code of Tennis* a set of over forty precisely defined rules of etiquette, while another text aptly named *Tennis Disputes: A Reference Guide for Matches with No Linesman or Umpire* settled over 400 common on-court disputes including ordinarily mundane topics like the appropriate length and frequency of toilet breaks.[20]

In 1969, the second year of "open tennis", the top male player, Rod Laver, completed his second "Grand Slam", winning all four major championships, and accumulated $124,000 in prize money. Exactly ten years later, Bjorn Borg won just two major championships but earned more than $1 million over the season. As prize-money skyrocketed, many of the top players came to be represented by management groups, who decided that their player's etiquette should

be subject to explicit controls, in order to protect themselves against potential negative repercussions from behavioural misdemeanours. The agency ProServ, for example, added a "goodwill" paragraph to new contracts in the mid-80s that simply read: "As a highly visible athlete you have the responsibility to set an example, to be involved in various causes, and to give your time to charity at different times throughout each year".[21] According to Baltzell, players came to feel no longer bound by duties of self-restraint, honesty and integrity connected with the sport's high-class traditions, but increasingly played according to a "win-at-all-costs" mentality that stripped them of their ethical responsibilities in the pursuit of competitive success; the "unwritten class codes of honour, decency, and deference" that silently managed player behaviour were gradually replaced by "bureaucratic rules" written by administrators.[22] Bodo agreed that while the "code of conduct" prevented a player from being a bad sport, ironically it actually denied them the opportunity to be a good one, by making good behaviour an explicit duty rather than a matter of choice.[23] Despite these rules, some high-profile players still flouted codes of conduct, in what was perceived by the establishment as a growing threat to the sport's traditions. Achieving the greatest notoriety in the early open era were arguably Ilie Năstase and Jimmy Connors.

Năstase won seven major championships in singles, doubles and mixed-doubles from 1970-75, and in eighteen years of Davis Cup competition helped Romania reach the final three times between 1969 and 1972. Despite these achievements, he was best known for his fiery personality and on-court antics; described by Bodo as "the first great player of the Open era to flout the amateur ethic".[24] He was known to swear at crowds and engage in gamesmanship tactics, often in order to disconcert an opponent and extricate a match he was in danger of losing.[25] Năstase was immensely popular among spectators, partly because of his charm and

charisma, but also likely an outcome of the broadening appeal that tennis was having as a spectator sport, particularly in America.

Much like Năstase, Connors also considered himself an entertainer first and foremost. "That's what it was all about", Connors reflected of his days playing professionally in his recent autobiography, "entertaining people and being a little bit different".[26] He was voracious as he was accomplished, winning Wimbledon twice and the US Open fives times from 1974-83, and retaining the world number-one ranking from July 1974 onwards for a record 160 consecutive weeks. Connors grew up a working-class boy from Belleville, IL and apparently retained a deeply-ingrained "us-versus-them" chip on his shoulder throughout his career. "Right from the start", Bodo asserted, "he dismissed most of the traditions in tennis as frivolous affectations of a class to which he did not belong, and would rather subvert and conquer than join".[27] He was immediately recognised as a "different" type of player to what the establishment were used to seeing. In his entertainer guise, Connors recognized no mandate to follow the dominant code of conduct or value system, but to captivate audiences: "I make no apologies for the way I played tennis. I wasn't out there to win a popularity contest – I was out there to win – and entertain at the same time".[28] Consistent with his lament over the decline in "gentlemanly conduct" and "civility" among players as an outcome of professionalism, Baltzell considered Connors "a selfish, vulgar, uncharitable and unsportsmanlike champion", who often grabbed his private parts and uttered obscenities even when his own mother was watching.[29]

Given their high profiles, earning as much for their on-court successes as their outlandish behaviour, Năstase and Connors were at the heart of some important changes in tennis during the mid/late-1970s. The sport progressed through a gradual process of commodification, and a number of innovations were designed by profit-motivated business entrepreneurs primarily to

raise the sport's spectacle, but subsequently helped diversify its audience and playing demographic in terms of social class. Most notably, the introduction of World Team Tennis (WTT) in 1974 opened up tennis to what Connors called "regular sports fans", with its innovative franchise structure that aligned each of sixteen teams with an American city, and the encouragement of boisterous, partial crowds.[30] In addition, exhibition matches, akin to those played among professionals in the pre-1968 "amateur" era, were re-launched. Caesars Palace in Las Vegas began hosting what it called the World Heavyweight Championship of Tennis, which was produced like a title-fight with a 4000-seat stadium "that resembled a tennis court disguised as a boxing ring". In the first "challenge match" in February 1975, the irascible Connors was pitted against the affable Australian Rod Laver, who came out of retirement to play.[31] Before the contest had even begun, Connors behaved with customary indifference to the sport's traditions by yelling "Fuck you!" to all the American celebrities (among them Clint Eastwood, Charlton Heston and Johnny Carson) who appeared to be supporting Laver.[32] The sequel some months later put Connors against Laver's compatriot John Newcombe and attracted an impressive $1 million in domestic (CBS) and international television rights and corporate sponsorship.

Then came developments at the US Open. In what Connors described as "a new level of craziness" witnessed at the 1976 championship, Năstase, after a series of bad calls during his second-round match against the German Hans-Jürgen Pohmann, allegedly "freaked out and spat at spectators, threatened courtside photographers and trotted out every vulgar gesture and obscenity in his formidable repertoire". Spectators responded by throwing coins and drinks onto the court, while one fan apparently had to be restrained from "coldcocking" the Romanian.[33] In his autobiography, Năstase made no mention of his behavioural transgressions that day, but instead condemned his opponent's repeated delay tactics; however, he did admit verbally

attacking Pohmann in the locker room, calling him a "bastard" and a "Nazi".[34] Năstase's actions certainly fit Evans' description of him as "a veritable maestro of the art of instituting bedlam".[35]

It seemed that while the establishment were lamenting such behavioural expressions as anathema to the sport's hallowed traditions, entrepreneurs were keen to commercially exploit them. It was likely the growing spectacle of tennis that Năstase and Connors contributed to propelled the USTA in 1978 to change the site of its US Open from the quaint old-fashioned club in Forest Hills to the modern, purpose-built, concrete stadium in Flushing Meadow. The move was controversial, but the more business-minded executives who came to exert greater influence on American tennis promised much-needed economic stability, in essence by profiting from the new fans that Năstase, Connors and others were attracting. The complex was immediately ridiculed for being ugly, inhospitable, brash and soulless, and for its shameless commercialized vulgarity,[36] but Connors claimed he felt at home there: "The people in this town love to see blood, and I'm willing to spill my guts for them".[37] While traditionalists considered him "rude, arrogant, foul-mouthed, tasteless and selfish",[38] Connors felt that the broader democratizing developments in tennis, and his unrestrained will-to-win and penchant for entertaining theatrics that "appealed" to new fans, helped right some of the wrongs he saw with the sport's established "gated country club" culture:

> To survive, tennis had to drag itself out of its comfortable little corner. It needed a facelift. The guys of my generation ... moved tennis from those gated country clubs to the streets. We sparked the revolution that opened the doors to the people who loved sports, drank beer, ate hot dogs, and wanted to be part of the spectacle. ... I appealed to a different crowd. The old-school fans hated what I was doing, of course; they were horrified by what they saw as a crude upstart trampling their precious traditions. But the

> new breed of fan, those who before had never considered watching a tennis match, suddenly had someone they could relate to.[39]

Despite the fact that Connors and Năstase helped generate greater profits for tournament officials and helped propel the "tennis boom" of the 1970s, their actions and attitudes continued to be condemned from some corners. However, I posit that the negative responses to "bad boy" behaviour were inspired more broadly by what these players represented to the establishment, rather than by their actions themselves: that is, a threat to middle-class traditions, and established power. Given the post-war democratization, commercialization and globalization of tennis, new players from different classes and cultures clashed with established customs and values, to create a more confusing on-court environment for simply "knowing how to behave". It was apparent, when the ultimate "bad boy" John McEnroe arrived on the scene in the late-1970s, that tennis etiquette had become blurred as existing rules were manipulated or new rules were introduced to suit personal needs. McEnroe's success in this regard highlighted the extent that some athletes were able to "sell" their "bad boy" image as a commodity. The following section considers broader political and economic developments that impacted on the commodification of "bad boy" tennis.

John McEnroe, and the Commodification of Tennis and "Bad Boy" Behaviour

Connors and Năstase were joined in the late 1970s by John McEnroe, another player who seemed to relish the new levels of intensity and partisanship that increasingly characterized tennis crowds, particularly in America. Despite growing up in comfortable surroundings in

Queens, NY, McEnroe shared Connors' acute class consciousness, and actively remonstrated with the tennis establishment about not keeping pace with the sport's professionalization. Criticising seemingly irrelevant restrictions on behaviour, and incompetent umpires and line judges, McEnroe recalled his first trip to Wimbledon in 1977:

> When I saw those dozing linesmen, I thought, *This isn't what Wimbledon should look like*. ... The whole atmosphere was totally set in its ways and self-important beyond belief. I couldn't help resenting how badly the organizers treated the lesser players. ... I was incredulous at all that bowing and curtsying to royalty and lesser royalty. It felt like the class system at its worst.[40]

Nonetheless, McEnroe realized early in his career that, as a top player, tournament directors were unlikely to disqualify him. In the second round of the 1979 US Open, he faced Năstase in what the press dubbed a "boxing match". In the fourth set, after a series of outbursts from Năstase and delays because of crowd heckling and bad line-calls, the umpire issued various penalties. Năstase recalled the ensuing incident:

> It was total chaos. For seventeen minutes, while cans, cups, garbage, and even bottles were being thrown onto court, and the police arrived in case there was a riot, I agued, John argued, the crowd screamed at Frank [Hammond – the referee], and Frank lost control completely. He kept ordering me to play, and I kept yelling that it was too noisy. ... Then Frank defaulted me. Just like that. ... The crowd wanted his blood.[41]

Because of the commotion, and much to the crowd's delight, the tournament director felt forced to replace Hammond and reinstate Năstase so the match could continue. In the furore, McEnroe held his nerve and won the match and thereafter his first major championship, but the incident taught him that "the rules of tennis are eternally flexible and that promoters generally were loath

to spoil a crackling good show by booting a crowd-pleasing marquee name".[42] This was an important realization for McEnroe, who admitted he was "begging to be defaulted", but was saved by his celebrity status:

> It happened at tournament after tournament: I would freak out, the umpire would hit me with a warning, a point penalty, maybe a measly fine or two. ... If I went home, they lost money. The tournament directors knew it, the umpires knew it, and the linesmen knew it. I knew it. The system let me get away with more and more.[43]

Despite years of notable ejection-qualifying outbursts, McEnroe's first and only disqualification on behavioural grounds came at the 1990 Australian Open, when, after a series of questionable line-calls in his fourth-round match against Mikael Pernfors, he told the Grand Slam Chief of Supervisors Ken Farrar, "Go fuck your mother". The *New York Times* ran with the header "So much for Mr. Nice Guy".[44] Coming at the twilight of his career, the incident marked if anything a harrowing reminder of the numerous times previously he had escaped being defaulted, but instead was merely issued a warning, fine or after-the-event suspension.

Together with the seeming unwillingness of tournament officials to forcibly punish offenders for fear of economic consequences, the increasingly ruthless and assertive pursuit of success that characterised this period of new riches allowed players to both circumvent and challenge the sport's behavioural norms. I contend the rising incidence of behavioural transgressions in tennis was in part an outcome of growing antagonism from certain players to disrupt and reject traditional established amateur values, and replace them with perceptibly more equitable (and profitable) corporate logics tied to entertainment values and wider societal free-market economic principles. Undoubtedly, just as tennis players of the 1970s and 80s were argued to have been influenced by youth "punk" subculture, where the "body became the site of

an aesthetic of defiance and revolt", it is likely they would also have been subjected to the broader social pressures and cultural influences of the burgeoning consumer economy, particularly as many sought to extract wealth and status from tennis as opportunities increasingly availed themselves.[45]

Wider societal developments must be factored into this analysis, as this period in America and Britain witnessed marked changes in normalized codes of behavioural conduct. Some social commentators remarked on the possible consequences of enhanced affluence and permissiveness during this period, whereby a decline in the influence of the Church came to erode the moral fabric of society, and legislative changes brought more liberal social norms and sexual freedoms, particularly among the young.[46] With reference to Britain, Bédarida noted a "collapse of standards", particularly with regard to "ideas of duty, honesty, respectability, hard work [and] ... self-respect", alongside "voluntary self-discipline which made adherence to the law, whether the law of the land or the social code, a matter of individual personal responsibility".[47]

In particular, it seems that new tennis players of the open era, i.e. those who had not competed at the elite level before 1968, played according to stronger extrinsic motives – to seek fame or wealth – and a keener focus on themselves as individuals to the possible neglect of the broader tennis community.[48] Jimmy Connors' actions in the 1970s best illustrated this phenomenon, as his uncompromising on-court ultra-competitiveness and egotism that many found repugnant stretched off court. His self-confessed perpetual drive for prize-money likely figured in his avoidance of Davis Cup play early in his career, and in 1974 it was alleged he allowed his agent Bill Riordan to sue the Association of Tennis Professionals (ATP) for limiting his earnings potential. This was after being banned from the French Open because of his contract

with WTT, which as a competition had upset French officials by organising matches during the Roland Garros fortnight. The case was eventually settled out-of-court, but enhanced Connors' reputation as confrontational, anti-establishment and "money-grabbing".[49]

In the sense that they were opportunistic, self-interested and financially-motivated, Connors' actions seemed to reflect the ideologies of personal responsibility, individualism and consumerism that came to be crystallized shortly after within the political philosophies of Reagan and Thatcher. That they predate the arrival of these leaders to power highlights how the social and cultural characteristics often considered reflective of the period in which these leaders reigned – roughly speaking, the 1980s – had arguably been developing and manifesting themselves in cultural arenas like professional sports before then, but also that such developments, and even the actions of high-profile athletes like Connors, possibly influenced policy makers' ideas. I contend that, certainly in the case of players like McEnroe who learnt to commodify their "bad boy" behaviours for sponsors, tournament officials, and the players themselves to profit from, the policies of Reaganomics and Thatcherism gave credence to these attitudes, and likely stimulated further behavioural change during this era.

Broadly speaking, the 1970s and early 80s experienced an ailing world economy, characterized by high inflation, rising unemployment, trade union unrest and stagnant economic growth as a consequence of a global oil crisis. In wider American society, rates for robberies, aggravated assaults and homicides continued to rise throughout the 1980s, and Britain faced serious problems associated with urban race-rioting and football hooliganism, both of which peaked in the early 80s.[50] Reagan's and Thatcher's collective attempts to revive their respective economies included efforts to remove the crippling "dependency culture" and instilling a sense of personal responsibility for prosperity.[51] These ideals were influential across much social life,

and signals of a cultural manifestation of greed, individualism and ostensible lack of public concern for others – to look after "number one" – were particularly apparent among the young and upwardly-mobile. This phenomenon led Robert Putnam to report on the "civil malaise" that Americans shared, underpinned by the "erosion" of "social connectedness and community involvement", whereby he contended that Americans had been "pulled apart from one another and from [their] communities".[52] Douglas Hurd, Tory Home Secretary, described in similar disparaging terms the situation as he saw it in middle-Britain:

> You do not find much poverty or social deprivation there. What you do find are too many young people with too much money in their pockets ... but too little notion of the care and responsibility they owe to others.[53]

These commentators could have easily been describing that generation's crop of professional tennis players, who were not spared from the post-war societal reorientation to individualism, materialism and consumerism.

While countless players in the amateur era were embroiled in the corrupt and hypocritical system of "shamateurism", which involved receiving "under-the-table" tournament appearance fees, their behaviour was largely justified by the leading sportswriters because of their general modesty as players and the huge fortunes they generated for amateur tennis. Open era sportswriters, however, were far less willing to excuse unethical/unsportsmanlike behaviour from the newest players, and wrote critically on their growing tendencies to behave like unreliable, greedy and petulant children: skipping tournaments they were contractually obligated to play, "tanking" matches so they could depart to their next destination early, and demanding inflated guarantees from tournament directors.[54]

The behaviour of top American players in particularly reflected badly on tennis and their nation as a whole. The British press had a field-day throughout McEnroe's 1981 Wimbledon run, which culminated in both the singles and doubles titles amidst widespread controversy over his apparently immature, ill-disciplined, and uncivil conduct. Barrett and Little remarked on his opening-round match against Tom Gullickson:

> Never in the history of the sport was there so public a display of bad court manners when his temperament caused him to behave beyond acceptability. ... His offensiveness to the official – including the phrase "You're the pits of the world" as a term of abuse – was established as an example of what sportsmanship should not be.[55]

"The Shame of John McEnroe; Disgrace of Super Brat" ran the next day's headline from *The Daily Mail*.[56] Shortly after, the American magazine *World Tennis* received a letter to the editor that discussed McEnroe's behaviour in the broader context of American foreign relations within the Cold War context: "Not only did John McEnroe insult his British hosts, disgrace himself, and degenerate the game of tennis; he betrayed his country. He reinforced the American image our enemies like to promote, ... as spoiled and domineering children".[57]

There was a sense that the behaviour of some male players reflected the most unsavoury aspects of the burgeoning secular, neo-liberal, free-market-inspired consumer culture. In fact, Adams described McEnroe as a "poster boy" for the emergent youth culture in Britain, which as a nation was being led by Thatcher to redefine itself along cruder American-derived capitalist ideals:

> Thatcher had been elected on the basis that she would import American ideals of winner-takes-all economics and, to some establishment eyes, McEnroe looked a lot like the

> living, spitting embodiment of that new free-market individual. His behaviour signalled the end of deference in the most deferential of sporting arenas.[58]

He appeared to demonstrate an increasingly commonplace narcissistic drive for recognition and status and, among the working classes and the left-wing media, McEnroe's behaviour was explained as a manifestation of collective frustrations with the irrelevance of ostensibly elitist institutions. *The Sun*, alongside other British tabloids, was in the midst of their own war against "the establishment", and they "seized on McEnroe's attitude and exploited it for all it was worth".[59]

Signalling the extent that entrepreneurial free-market principles came to dominate the running of professional tennis, individual corporations sought to control players' images to suit their strategic marketing objectives. After the US Davis Cup team displayed objectionable behaviour in the 1984 final against Sweden, during which Connors was fined $2000 for racket abuse and "frequent audible obscenities", the team's sponsor Louisiana-Pacific Corporation threatened to withdraw its support unless the USTA instilled a Code of Conduct for Davis Cup play to protect the sport's, and their own corporation's, image.[60] There was an inherent irony and contradiction, however, in that many of the corporate sponsors attached to tennis in the "boom" period that profited from the "mass, popular, 'red-blooded' sport" that Năstase, Connors, and McEnroe helped create then demanded "bland, good behaviour" from their own players.[61]

Conversely, a handful of other companies sought instead to manipulate and exploit the players' "bad boy" images once they recognized their commodity value as entertainers. At around the same time as McEnroe's rise to prominence, Phil Knight was seeking athletes to endorse his new brand of sports shoes. Nike's branding centered on the concepts of fearlessness, intensity, will-to-win and self-expression, which complimented McEnroe's constructed image.

Adams explained: “If you bought a Nike shoe you were also, the theory went, buying into something of that anti-establishment spirit”. McEnroe soon became Nike’s first global sporting icon, and the clever slogan ‘Just Do It’ reflected the impulsive decision-making that epitomized McEnroe’s ultra-competitive playing style.[62]

The idea that McEnroe was complicit in his own commodification is lent credence when considering how in control of his emotions and behaviour McEnroe actually was, despite often appearing otherwise. McEnroe also believed Connors “had the ability to turn his anger on and off”,[63] and similarly, by McEnroe’s own admission, his outbursts were often deliberate and conscious efforts to push the boundaries of appropriate conduct. Thus, his out-of-control image was as much a commodity as Bjorn Borg’s handsome, clean-cut image. McEnroe admitted that he did “play the system”:

> I manipulated more than some people realized. ... In most cases I was fully aware of what I was doing on the court during an outburst, and I knew how I was – or wasn’t – going to have to pay a price for it.[64]

Indeed, his ejection from the 1990 Australian Open came not as a consequence of him *losing* control per se, but because he forgot the recent rule change that dropped the number of warning stages before a player was ejected from three to two. In the interview room afterwards he was remorseful and upset with himself, and he reflected in his autobiography: “I truly believe ... that if I had known the rule change, I would have contained myself. I sometimes went off the rails, but I always knew where I stood”.[65] Wimbledon Referee, Alan Mills, agreed: McEnroe’s “modus operandi was to push a disciplinary situation right to the wire before reigning himself in. He was clever like that. He always knew exactly how far he could push it”.[66]

As time passed, it began to irk and worry McEnroe that he was becoming a corporate man, "selling out" and behaving according to what corporations like Nike expected and wanted from him; he felt a loss of personal autonomy.[67] Moreover, up-and-coming players began to mimic McEnroe's image, which suggested the significant influence that McEnroe and his constructed "bad boy" image were having. The Aussie Pat Cash played up the similarities: "We were two of the sport's most notorious outlaws. ... The fact that both of us are of Irish descent might explain our fiery nature".[68] Jeff Tarango's outburst at Wimbledon in 1995 had a touch of McEnroe about it, though his comparative lack of tournament success or personal charisma made him a less viable commodity, yet Nike's future ambassador Andre Agassi was often heralded as having a similarly tempestuous personality. Agassi reflected that in effect he had been spoiled by the financial rewards and perks offered long before he won his first major championship.[69]

It is certain that the shifting social, political and economic landscape of post-war America and Britain had an impact on the commercialization of tennis, though these elements alone cannot explain the noticeable shift in the behaviour of male players, particularly given the same shifts and developments similarly impacted women's tennis. Class barriers were removed to a similar degree for women as men, and prize winnings and media/endorsement attention came to approach equality by the mid-1970s. In 1975, for example, Chris Evert earned $370,000, which was more that year than the top-earning male player, Arthur Ashe. Both male and female bodies became commercialized; the sportswear and accessories that adorned it, the make-up worn, the styles of hair and overall "look" had become highly-prized commodities, which were invested with cultural meaning and valued according to crude market principles.[70] Outside from a handful of isolated incidents, however, there is little evidence to suggest behavioural transgressions were committed equally between the men and women. In short, there were no equivalents of Năstase,

Connors and McEnroe on the women's tour, which suggests that an overall explanation of this phenomenon centred solely on shifting class relations and broader political-economic developments is inadequate. The following section considers shifting gender relations, in the context of feminism and women's emancipation more broadly during the 1970s and 80s. It discusses the gendered aspects of male behaviour that developed partly as an outcome of shifting behavioural norms among their (rival) female tour players.

Shifting Gender Relations, the "Crisis of Masculinity", and "Bad Boy" Behaviour in Tennis

Given its mixed-gender participation and high profile, tennis has always represented an important cultural domain where shifting attitudes toward gender, sexuality, masculinity and femininity were highly contestable, but I argue that before the early open era when the leading female players began to campaign vociferously for equal prize money and recognition, these developments occurred mostly in isolation from one another. In other words, while women's tennis throughout the interwar and early post-war periods witnessed a marked advance in playing styles and standards, alongside the liberalization of playing attire, this did not necessarily reflect shared developments in, or lead to any notably consequences for, men's tennis, in terms of how they played or looked, or conveyed masculinity. However, I argue that the emergence of "bad boy" behaviour by Connors and company in the 1970s and 80s came partly as an indirect consequence of advances by female players during this same period, in terms of developments in the women's tour that progressed the cause of women's rights toward prize-money parity with

men, and concomitant shifts in how femininity was conveyed in tennis. At the heart of these developments were Billie Jean King and Chris Evert.

King became not only one of the most dominant female players in the 1960s/70s, winning twelve major singles championships, but also a leading figure in the feminist movement. Her straight-sets defeat of Bobby Riggs in the 1973 "Battle of the Sexes" exhibition match, in front of an estimated 37 million American television viewers, was heralded by Tinling as "probably the most important event in the history of women's tennis".[71] She also championed the creation of an independent women's tour and the formation of the Women's Tennis Association (WTA), which compelled the USTA to guarantee equal prize-money at the US Open from 1973 onwards. Many male players seemed content to sustain the marked prize-money disparities that existed in most tournaments, given their long-standing frustrations with the inequitable and exploitative system of remuneration during the amateur era, and the insecure financial future of their own tour. Arthur Ashe reasoned: "Men are playing tennis for a living now. They don't want to give up money just for girls to play. ... Why should we have to split our money with them?"[72]

Equally worrying for men it seemed was the challenge that successful female players posed to established gender roles and masculine ideals. Lamenting the efforts of King and company to achieve gender parity, Stan Smith told the *Daily Mirror*:

> These tennis girls would be much happier if they settled down, got married and had a family. Tennis is a tough life and it ... defeminises them ... they become too independent. ... They want to take charge, not only on the courts, but at home.[73]

The common accusation of tennis as defeminising, coupled with a burgeoning homophobic discourse, undermined King's best efforts to create a viable women's tour able to compete for sponsorship, television contracts and media attention with the men.[74] The Renée Richards sex-

change scandal of 1976 added to the widely-publicized images of butch, steroid-enhanced Communist-bloc female athletes that provoked anxiety over the potential loss of (heterosexual) femininity in sport generally,[75] and the public outings in 1981 of King as a bisexual and Martina Navratilova as a lesbian brought homophobic abuse and hate-mail for both and millions lost in endorsement earnings, and compelled papers like the *National Enquirer* to commence in effect a "lesbian witch-hunt" by offering money in exchange for information about other lesbians on tour.[76]

It is important to note that these developments ran counter to the effects of Chris Evert, who overtook King as the leading female player in the mid-1970s – winning 16 major singles championships between 1974 and '86 – and legitimized the athletic-looking female body as not only permissible but unequivocally "feminine" and desirable.[77] Her constructed public image as ultra-feminine and heterosexual – she had relationships with players like Jimmy Connors and the good-looking Englishman John Lloyd – made her "America's Sweetheart", but behind closed doors, Evert was as much a fiercely-determined, ultra-competitive and finely-tuned athlete as any male player.[78] Her behaviour was in a sense apologetic; she attempted to boost the glamour and spectacle of women's tennis at a time when the masculinisation of female athletes was an important, if not growing, public concern. "That's the one thing women's tennis has, is femininity", she argued. "If women looked like men or played like men it would be boring. ... It's *important* to look feminine".[79] In this guise, by competing to new levels of achievement but in a way that anti-feminists – i.e. those who rejected the butch, radical lesbian image that other players sometimes projected – could not touch, I argue she became an important threat to male hegemony by encroaching on the men's territory but in ways not considered "deviant". In their

eyes, she was more of a woman: unmistakably feminine, yet successful and dominant in her sport. Essentially, she gave legitimacy to playing tennis "like a man".

It is conceivable that these developments for women's tennis challenged the men's collective ability to distinguish themselves both as a viable commercial entity and, concomitantly, as ultra-masculine athletes. Indeed, not only were female tennis players upsetting traditional gender roles by earning as much if not more prize-money than male players, they also adopted men's tennis fashions, cropped their hair, grunted on court and developed more aggressive and sometimes superior playing abilities. As the female body was politicized and the behaviour of female tennis players scrutinized in new ways, it is plausible that men reacted, if not often subconsciously, to these developments.

Some male players asserted their masculine prowess through off-court sexual conquests. Năstase was a known womanizer, claiming to have slept with over 2,500 women in his career, while Connors admitted cheating on Evert on numerous occasions.[80] He also became opposed to the idea of marriage, even after they got engaged, as Evert showed no sign of reigning in her competitiveness and adopting the more traditional female roles as wife and mother. In his autobiography, he reflected on the personal "inner turmoil" he experienced related to his contested masculinity in the light of Evert's ambitions: "What if we started a family? Would Chrissie keep playing? How would I feel about that? Something or someone had to give. ... In my eyes, I had to be the principal breadwinner in our household".[81] During her tournaments when she requested his presence in the crowd, he resented being treated like a "househusband", before remarking on their eventual break-up: "You can't have two number ones in a relationship. It's just not going to work".[82]

Such attitudes underpinned by patriarchal ideology not only reflected the model of hegemonic masculinity that came to influence the behaviour of male tennis players during this era, but also were connected undoubtedly to the historically-rooted stigma of tennis players as effete: they played a "girl's game", or a "soft" form of "pat ball".[83] In the "amateur" era, gender distinctions in appearance, playing style and behaviour were clear and easily sustained by the huge disparities in financial remuneration and media exposure, and the visibly different styles and standards of tennis played.[84] As these disparities lessened and the distinctions blurred, however, men had fewer opportunities to counter what they perceived to be the "stigma" of effeteness, and retained their conscious desires to publicly reject such notions and/or defend the sport and themselves from accusations. Cliff Richey, a leading American player in the late-1960s/early-70s, connected the sport's elitist image and its lack of masculine identity, as he sought to dispel the common myth of tennis as a "sissy sport": "I didn't like all [the] prim and proper bullshit. ... I was always proud of the fact that I brought a little more manliness to the game".[85] Bodo admitted similarly that tennis had an image of being "a 'sissy' sport, practiced by aquiline-nosed opera buffs", but cited Clark Graebner's attack on Năstase during a match in 1972, when he grabbed him by the shirt and threatened to smash the racket over his head, as a signal of widespread changes unfolding in how male players asserted dominance over one another.[86] Tennis historian Elizabeth Wilson also spoke of the sport's persistent "sissy" image, and recalled:

> In order to obliterate that slur, tennis had to become 'raucously authentic'. ... Authenticity was what the 1970s was all about. The idea was to 'tell it like it was' and if this involved raucousness, that was because the truths being exposed were not always pretty.

The "revolutionaries" like Năstase and Connors were considered more "real", "honest" and "authentic", as "good manners were easily perceived as yet another form of inauthentic hypocrisy".[87] McEnroe expressed his disappointment in this persistent image of tennis, which was dominated in America and Britain, he intimated, by an upper-class-derived ideology of civility that allowed little room for displays of aggression and excitement from players and fans: "I thought tennis had had enough of manners. To me, 'manners' meant ... the hush-hush atmosphere at tennis matches, where excitement of any kind was frowned upon". Making an important comparison, he recalled his first Davis Cup match in Chile, when, "if the crowd didn't like what was happening, they threw coins and seat cushions", and acknowledged: "I thought that was a step in the right direction. Nobody in South America seemed to feel that tennis was a sissy sport. Why shouldn't North America (and England) be the same way?"[88] In these examples, the fundamental message is that normative behaviours in tennis were not only reflective of class and (global) culture but also gender, in terms of how they are practiced, adhered to and enforced.

Such efforts to redefine men's tennis in accordance with more traditional "manly" values suggest that male players were conscious of their behaviour in the context of their gender. It is argued that sustained perceptions of the sport's relative effeminacy, coupled with blurring gender lines and associated fears of female encroachment, compelled a shift among some male players toward the exhibition of more extreme ultra-masculine forms of behaviour. The extent to which such reactions were conscious or deliberate among all male players is certainly debatable, but what is most pertinent is that the structural changes that occurred in professional tennis generally made male tennis behaviour increasingly contested terrain. Connors, for example, when assessing his performance throughout the 1975 season, during which he failed to win a major championship, connected the loss of his "killer instinct" with being a "pussy" on court.[89] For

Connors, evidently, actions that conformed to hegemonic masculine ideals by way of demonstrating mental and physical toughness were idealized: e.g. fighting for every point, merciless attacking, intimidating opponents, and persistently challenging calls.

The media also assisted in constructing a more virile masculinity for male players. As a BBC radio commentator, Fred Perry remarked of Connors' comprehensive defeat of Vitas Gerulaitis in the 1978 Wimbledon semi-finals, using confrontational and abrasive language more fitting for a boxing title-fight: 'Today Connors became a man. He got the guy on the floor and tore him apart'.[90]

It is suggested that such narratives of masculine prowess served an important social function in the post-modern era when the "survival of the patriarchal sexual division of labour" was being threatened by a "crisis of masculinity".[91] Here, John MacInnes showed that between 1960 and 1990, both Britain and America realized a male-to-female shift in the workforce by over twenty-five percent. This, coupled with deindustrialization, a decline of manufacturing jobs, and the feminist movement, pushed men away from their traditional gender roles into largely unknown territories where new ideological constructions of masculinity were necessary for men to attempt to reassert their social dominance. Mariah Burton Nelson reached a similar conclusion when she talked of the "male backlash" to the feminist movement; the ways men proved and displayed physical dominance over each other shifted in accordance with the introduction of more extreme forms of behaviour.[92] In this sense, "bad boy" behaviour in tennis during this period of "crisis", for male players and their threatened masculinity, can be considered a kind of antidote to the sport's reputation as a "sissy" sport, and as an attempt to protect the commodity of men's professional tennis during a period of economic (and administrative) uncertainty.

Conclusion

This paper aimed to connect broader societal shifts in class and gender relations with specific commercial developments in tennis to illuminate a historical period when manners and behavioural etiquette seemed to shift in accordance with new values. The findings here suggest how the gradual departure from gendered constructions of appropriate play that privileged the traditional behavioural ideals of magnanimity, sportsmanship and self-restraint occurred, and offer new insights into the connections between on-court behaviour, sporting philosophies and broader social, cultural, economic, and political shifts. The breaches of etiquette that occurred in men's professional tennis threatened, and in some respects successfully managed, to undermine the authority of the amateur establishment, which was still hegemonic in the early open era. Over time, as the honour of being a "true sportsman" was replaced as the most significant personal attribute by one's ability to entertain crowds and generate profits for oneself and the corporations in support, avenues were opened up for "bad-boy" players to gain influence and wealth.

In the early-mid 1990s, following the retirements of Connors and McEnroe, Michael Chang, Jim Courier, Pete Sampras and Andre Agassi emerged as the leading American players. This coincided with the creation of the ATP Tour, which promised, and largely successfully delivered, a return to more "traditional" tennis values, alongside much greater economic stability for men's professional tennis generally. Due to increased official sanctions on behaviour, under pressure from the ATP, ITF, national associations, television corporations, sponsors and their own agents/management groups, players were pushed toward the exhibition of greater "professionalism" in conduct, which offered in essence financial rewards for more self-

restrained, respectable and "responsible" behaviour. The dominant trend-setting players, Sampras and then later Roger Federer, epitomized the controlled aggression that returned as the model – and most commercially marketable – behaviour for male players, who seemed content to align themselves with different masculine norms than their predecessors. Moreover, the greater economic stability offered by the new ATP Tour structure, which was the final answer to the administrative and political turmoil of the 1970s and 80s,[93] ensured that both the men's and women's tours could run simultaneously as complementary rather than competing entities. The assurance of lucrative corporate-sponsorship interest and near-capacity crowds at the major tournaments likely removed some of the pressure male players might have felt to "entertain" crowds as the "bad boys" of the 1970s and 80s did.

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