

The WTA is deeply saddened by news of the death on May 29 of Larry W. King, a key figure in the birth and growth of women's professional tennis, and the former husband of WTA Founder Billie Jean King. He was 81 years old.

Born in Dayton, Ohio, Larry King was a child when his father made the fateful decision to move the family to Los Angeles in the late 1940s. After graduating from high school with plans to be a scientist, he attended what is now known as Cal State LA, where he met history student and budding tennis star Billie Jean Moffitt. After their wedding in 1965, the couple moved north to Berkeley, where Larry enrolled in Bolt Law School on the UC Berkeley campus.



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While Larry applied himself to his studies and Billie Jean's collection of Grand Slam titles continued to grow, the couple became increasingly frustrated with the sport's inequities, and ever more determined to do something about it. Together, their efforts would elevate tennis not just as an athletic endeavor, but as a force for equality across society as well.

Larry was involved behind the scenes when the Original 9 signed their One Dollar contracts with Gladys Heldman in September, 1970 and together with Billie Jean, he co-owned several tournaments on the nascent Virginia Slims Circuit that emerged from that revolutionary act.

Three years later, he performed much of the important legal work required to establish the WTA at a meeting of 60 players on the eve of Wimbledon in 1973, drafting the By-Laws

He was also at the center of planning for the historic Battle of the Sexes match between Billie Jean and Bobby Riggs at the Houston Astrodome later that summer, as well as the Women's Sports Foundation and Women Sports Magazine in 1974.

“Larry W. King was one of the unsung heroes in the establishment of women’s professional tennis in the early 1970s,” said Billie Jean King. “He opened my eyes to feminism and his love, commitment and humor helped me navigate my career. We were married for 22 years and in business together for decades.”

Larry served up ideas and used his promotional skills to build out her visions. Billie Jean had long dreamed of creating a team approach to tennis in which men and women were treated and paid equally. Sharing her mission, Larry worked to establish World Team Tennis and populated the league with teams. He also designed colorful courts and a revamped scoring system to popularize the sport.



Larry King alongside his wife, Nancy Bolger King, celebrating 50 years of the WTA.

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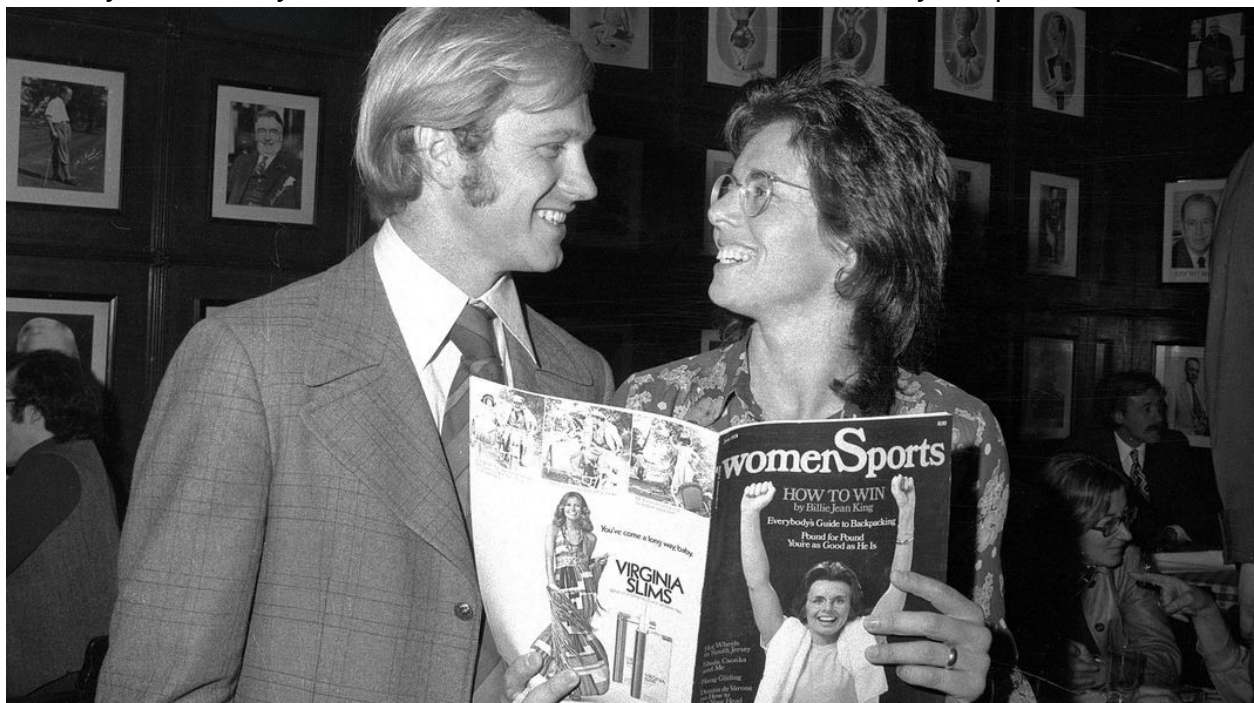
LARRY KING

1945-2026



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Three years later, he performed much of the important legal work required to establish the WTA at a meeting of 60 players on the eve of Wimbledon in 1973, drafting the necessary bi-laws to facilitate the election of officers for the new association.

He was also at the center of planning for the historic Battle of the Sexes match between Billie Jean and Bobby Riggs at the Houston Astrodome later that summer, as well as the Women's Sports Foundation and womenSports magazine in 1974.

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King married Nancy Bolger King after they met on the women's tour in the late 1980s. They moved to Grass Valley, California in the early nineties and built a life together with their son Sky and daughter Katie. Billie Jean King and her wife, Ilana Kloss, are godparents to Larry and Nancy's children, creating an extended family unit that has stood the test of time. King, who succumbed to prostate cancer, is also survived by his daughter-in-law, Caroline, and granddaughter, Athena.



Larry King alongside his wife, Nancy Bolger King, celebrating 50 years of the WTA.

"Larry was so much a part of the women and the women's fight for equality and recognition in the 1970's," said Hall of Famer Rosie Casals. "He was Women's Lib before it became fashionable. The Kingfish, which I affectionately called him, was ahead of his time. He recognized the potential Billie Jean had to lead the women and supported and pushed her to greater heights."

King was known for his impish humor and happy-go-lucky demeanor and was also fiercely loyal.. A strong opponent of smoking but a realist who understood that Philip Morris's sponsorship of Virginia Slims tournaments was a lifeline for women's tennis, he lodged a low-key protest, sporting a "No Smoking" tie at a Virginia Slims press conference.

King's entrepreneurial energies were extensive and undimmed later in his life. By the early 1990s, he had co-founded Roller Hockey International, a professional roller hockey league played on inline skates; Bridge Pro Tour, a professional bridge tour; and Bridge Today University to teach bridge, a longstanding passion. In earlier years, he had created a tourist boat company, a tourist magazine, and the Kaua'i Loves You triathlon competitions in Hawai'i, a televised event that led up to the Iron Man on the Big Island.



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In 2024, a characteristically humble Larry King was recognized by the WTA Foundation with the inaugural “Champions for Change Award”, for his contributions to the sport of tennis and women’s empowerment.

King’s memoir, *Idea Man*, is scheduled for publication in August.