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# Rainbow Flags Over Margaret Court Arena: Commemoration vs. grassroots LGBTQ social activism at the Australian Open tennis championships

## ABSTRACT

*At the 2012 Australian Open tennis tournament, fans created a social movement in response to Margaret Court's stance against marriage equality that she publicly stated in December 2011. 'Rainbow Flags Over Margaret Court Arena' was a loosely formed collective of people who used a Facebook page to organize. Court, now a fundamentalist minister with her own church, has, like so many fundamentalist Christians, likened homosexuality with sin. The actions of the 'Rainbow Flags Over Margaret Court Arena' group primarily involved being spectators at the Australian Open, in Margaret Court Arena, while waving or being adorned in rainbow flags. The enthusiasm and actions from this group compelled Laura Robson and Martina Navratilova to wear a rainbow headband and rainbow-adorned polo shirt, respectively, during their matches, and compelled Court and Navratilova to post full-page responses in the Melbourne newspaper. The friction between Court, Navratilova and Billie Jean King has its origins in the 1960s. The*

## KEYWORDS

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*historical underpinnings of this social movement include the squabbles between Billie Jean King, and later Martina Navratilova, lesbian icons of women's tennis, and Margaret Court, a top player who was a contemporary of King.*

At the 2012 Australian Open, fans created a small social movement that affected and influenced the players participating there as well as public policy in Australia. 'Rainbow Flags Over Margaret Court Arena' was a loosely formed collective of people who used their Facebook page to organize, and their name was their mission. They formed in response to Margaret Court's homophobia-laden interview regarding the Australian Parliament's upcoming vote to allow marriage equality at the national level, an interview which had followed decades of homophobic comments from her. The movement was galvanized further midway through the Australian Open of 2012 when Court was nominated as a 'national living treasure' by The National Trust of Australia (National Trust of Australia 2012). Court, who is the most decorated player in the history of tennis, became a conservative Christian minister upon retirement from tennis. In that capacity, she has likened homosexuality with sin and damnation, causing friction within women's professional tennis as well as society at large. Of note, on 9 December 2017, marriage equality became legal in Australia.

In 2003, Show Court 3 at Melbourne Park, where the Australian Open has been played each year since 1988, was renamed Margaret Court Arena. This naming followed the naming of Rod Laver Arena at Melbourne Park which occurred in 2000. Margaret Court Arena honours her and the 24 Grand Slam singles titles that she won, which is more than any other player, male or female. The debate, then, is always regarding the arena: Does Margaret Court Arena bestow honour for only her tennis record or her as a whole person, a person with homophobic baggage in tow?

The actions of the Rainbow Flags Over Margaret Court Arena primarily involved being spectators at the Australian Open, in Margaret Court Arena, while waving or wearing rainbow flags. The actions from this group compelled Laura Robson and Martina Navratilova to wear rainbow-themed clothing during their matches, and compelled Court and Navratilova to post full-page responses directed to each other in the leading Melbourne newspaper, the *Herald Sun*.

Fans participating as social movement actors at sporting events is not new. Davis-Delano and Crosset (2008) conducted a qualitative study of two groups of fans – those who protested the funding of public sports facilities and those who protested the use of American Indian mascots in sport. The Gay Games emerged as a form of social activism for LGBTQ athletes (see, e.g., Symons 2010). Brian Wilson, too, has done extensive work on fan-based social activism, including analysing a fan-based movement to revive the Ottawa Rough Riders football team in Canada (Wilson and White 2002) and looking at how Internet interactions complement social movements (Wilson 2007). Furthermore, there has been extensive study of the power of fans, especially the 'hooligan' soccer fans of England (see, e.g., Nash 2001), online activism among women and sports (see, e.g., Plymire and Forman 2000; Antunovic and Hardin 2012), and online activism opposed to gender violence (see, e.g., Dimitrov 2008).

Fans participating as social movement actors protesting a former athlete by occupying the venue named after the athlete is new. The Rainbow Flags Over

Margaret Court Arena was a very small grassroots movement that specifically used Margaret Court Arena at the Australian Open to draw attention to Court's anti-LGBTQ rhetoric. It was this focus on Margaret Court Arena that made this movement unique.

The Rainbow Flags Over Margaret Court Arena social movement caught my eye from its inception. I have a deep interest in identity politics and social activism that occurs within women's professional tennis. I played tennis professionally from 1988 to 1992, and, as a player, I was coached by Rosie Casals, one of the Original 9. The Original 9 was a group of nine women, contemporaries of Court, who protested the upper-class, male tennis establishment to create their own tennis tour, a tour that has grown into the women's tennis tour we know today (for an in-depth discussion, see Tredway 2016). Additionally, I have written on the media and player responses to Amélie Mauresmo when she came out after her semi-final match at the 1999 Australian Open (2014). Had my tennis career not been cut short because of a knee injury, my own coming out would have occurred almost exactly in between the coming out of Billie Jean King and Martina Navratilova in 1981 and Amélie Mauresmo in 1999, and I, likely, would have had to endure the hostility of Margaret Court.

This study used media analysis, press conference interviews, and textual analysis of autobiographical writing to contextualize the issue. To begin this study, a framework of public memory through monuments as politically contentious sites needs to be grounded. It is the contention here that named stadia operate similarly to monuments one may see in a park, at least politically. Then, I will briefly describe Margaret Court's tennis career, followed by her career as a Pentecostal minister. It is this latter identity that provoked those who organized as the Rainbow Flags Over Margaret Court Arena movement and disrupts the consistent and positive public memory that Margaret Court Arena is meant to exemplify. Last, I will analyse the demands and successes of the Rainbow Flags Over Margaret Court Arena movement.

### **The politics of commemoration and public memory**

Using a place as a spatial marker for public memory is not unique. Margaret Court Arena is a monument to the success and dominance that Court exhibited throughout her tennis career. Analogous to the issue with Margaret Court Arena may be the issues currently taking place in the United States regarding Civil War monuments for those who fought for the institution of slavery and their state's secession from the United States. To some, these monuments conjure positive memories of a time when southern white people were powerful and economically autonomous. To others, these monuments reflect a valorization of inhumanity and anarchy, the enslavement of Black people and seceding from the nation, and those who defend the monuments are viewed as condoning these ideas.

Margaret Court Arena is similarly placed. Sanford Levinson notes that 'one aspect of *multiculturalism*, after all, is precisely that different cultures are likely to have disparate-and even conflicting notions of who counts as heroes or villains' (1994: 1081, original emphasis). On the one hand, the stadium valorizes one of the greatest tennis champions in history. On the other hand, the stadium gives the homophobic views of Court legitimacy which, in turn, victimizes LGBTQ people. This contention over the

social memory of Court is what is at the heart of the debate surrounding the naming of Margaret Court Arena.

'Naming a stadium or arena is essentially a commemorative event that communicates a message about the past and present relationship among the facility, the city, the fans', as Boyd explains (2000: 333), and, in the case of Margaret Court Arena, Australia. Furthermore, Boyd claims that 'commemorative naming is an overt element of public memory, which forges links between a public's past and present' (2000). Michael Butterworth concurs with the linkage between past and present when he asserts 'scholars agree that public memory emerges most dramatically at times of shared anxiety or crisis. Memory invites audiences to recall the past as a means for managing the needs of the present' (Butterworth 2014: 205). This linking of past and present is an important feature to consider when thinking of Margaret Court Arena. As Australians considered the issue of marriage equality for its LGBTQ citizens, the public memory attached to Margaret Court Arena did not offer a way to balance the past with the present. In fact, Court herself, in her dogged determination to keep marriage equality from ever being legalized in Australia, had replaced the original public memory attached to Margaret Court Arena, that of a world-class tennis champion from Australia, to a public memory of a person who is, quite simply, filled with bias towards a distinct minority population of Australian citizens. This contention over the shared public memory of Margaret Court Arena is what sprung Rainbow Flags Over Margaret Court Arena into action.

### **Explaining marriage equality through the 'matrix of domination'**

The level of change in the status of LGBTQ people from 1960 to the present has been enormous. This change can be understood through Patricia Hill Collins' 'matrix of domination' which helps explain how power is organized to contain various intersecting identities. The matrix of domination works to maintain the dominant power structure. This matrix consists of four domains: (1) *Structural*: institutional structures; includes a nation's constitution and system of laws (Collins 1990: 277–80), (2) *Disciplinary*: surveillance and policing; includes the prison system (Collins 1990: 280–83), (3) *Cultural*: common sense ideas (which serve to reify the power held by the structural and disciplinary domains) (Collins 1990: 283–86) and (4) *Interpersonal*: personal, one-on-one relationships (Collins 1990: 287–88).

Regarding the issue of LGBTQ rights, specifically marriage equality, there were no rights for LGBTQ people in the 1960s apart from general basic needs rights. Slowly, beginning in the 1980s, LGBTQ people began to demand for equal rights and protections. As people met more and more LGBTQ people, and began to be able to relate to them, a shift happened that caused the interpersonal and cultural domains to become pro-LGBTQ rights, and for less policing of LGBTQ people and LGBTQ rights groups to occur. Marriage equality, then, is the culmination of this change in attitudes. The structural domain is changing like how it was forced to change to allow women the right to vote and to extend equal rights and protections to minority citizens. Granted, not every person is pleased with these changes when they occur, and we can see with Margaret Court; however, societies progress and marriage equality is a marker for progress.

## Margaret Court and the emergence of women's professional tennis

Margaret Court dominated women's tennis from 1960 to 1970, and again in 1973. In total, Court won 24 Grand Slam singles titles which leads all players, male or female, in the history of tennis. As the women's tennis tour emerged during the early part of the 1970s, Court distanced herself from the perceived 'women's lib' of the players advocating for equality with what men were paid, especially Billie Jean King. King was a solid contender in women's tennis beginning in 1966 until 1974; however, King dominated women's tennis from 1971 to 1972, breaking into Court's reign, winning half of the available Grand Slam singles titles during those two years. Of King, Court wrote

Billie Jean has changed tremendously from the person I first met at Wimbledon in 1962. We got on very well then despite our intense rivalry. She had high moral standards and was a good person. She'd talk about her faith in God and reading the bible and having a family – that's a long way from the Billie Jean who told the whole world about her abortion, when she became an active women's libber.

(Court 1975: 164)

To Court, King was interchangeable with 'women's lib' and the fight for equal prize money. When she distanced herself from women's liberation and feminism, she also distanced herself from King. Court wrote that

Since I'm no women's libber I wasn't crazy for an exclusively female tour. Naturally I sympathized with the aim of increasing women's prize money, but I honestly didn't believe we were entitled to equal money with men until we could prove that the public wanted to see us play as much as they wanted to see the men.

(Court 1975: 157)

Looking back, Navratilova noted that 'there was no love lost between [King and Court]. Margaret didn't really do anything of note to help the tour then' (Navratilova 2014). However, because she was the top female player in the most high-profile female sport, Court was, whether she liked it or not, a symbol for women's liberation. Court continues by stating:

[Billie Jean King] also won't let up on women's lib and me. 'Margaret says she's not a women's libber, but she is,' Billie Jean declared on a recent television sports show. 'Look at Barry – he doesn't work, she's supporting the family.' She says this everywhere she goes. In some stupid way she thinks I'm playing only because of the big money in the game. I'd probably still be playing if tennis were strictly amateur because I enjoy the game. Barry understands this. Despite what Billie Jean says, he has a full-time job.

(1975: 165)

Indeed, Barry Court, Margaret's husband, did have a job, of sorts. He was his wife's manager while she was playing on the tour. Male players have wives who do these duties, but they are just called wives. Husbands of female tennis

players are, apparently, called managers. This would be a double-standard that King is exposing.

Interestingly, Court's resurgence in 1973 helped fuel the artificial binary between King and Court, between feminists and those perceived to be anti-feminist, or at least not willing to push against the traditional (i.e. white, upper class and male) tennis establishment. This division was exacerbated by Court's failed attempt at beating Bobby Riggs in the first Battle of the Sexes match. Played on Mother's Day in 1973, it has been dubbed 'The Mother's Day Massacre'. Court's failure to beat Riggs – and, in fact, Court was obliterated by Riggs 6-2, 6-1 – forced King to play Riggs whose requests she had otherwise been ignoring (King 1974). King won that five-set match in a very convincing manner, 6-4, 6-3, 6-3. Women's liberation was here to stay.

### **Margaret Court, the minister**

In retirement, Margaret Court was unsatisfied. She had 'feelings of uselessness, inferiority, unworthiness' after retiring from tennis (Maloney and Grosz 2009). In 1972, Court converted from Roman Catholicism to Pentecostalism. In 1983, Court gained the theological qualifications to become a minister; however, she did not become a practising minister until 1991. In 1995, Court founded the Victory Life Centre, in Perth and, in true mega-church fashion, her evangelical television show, *A Life of Victory* (2007–present), began airing on the Australian Christian Channel in 2007 and continues to be aired today.

Entering into tennis commentary from her ministerial pulpit, a week after Martina Navratilova won her record ninth Wimbledon singles title in 1990, Court gave an interview in which she stated that Navratilova and other lesbians were ruining tennis and that Navratilova herself was a poor role model for children (Associated Press 1990). More specifically, Court stated that Navratilova

is a great player, but I'd like to see somebody at the top to whom the younger players can look up to. It is very sad for children to be exposed to it [homosexuality] [...]. There are now some players who don't even go to the tournament changing rooms because of the problem.

(Associated Press 1990: n.pag.)

This turned out to be Court's first foray into merging her current occupation as a Christian minister with her former tennis career. This is significant later when defenders of Court assert that to protest at the Australian Open is inappropriate because these two lives of Court are separate. However, to Court they are not separate, and she is continuing to write and re-write the public memory that Australians have of her.

By 1994, if Court's religious conservatism was not already known to Australians, it certainly was after she proclaimed in a speech to Parliament that '[h]omosexuality is an abomination to the Lord!' (Bradshaw 2011). Court unsuccessfully campaigned against. When this act was passed, it added a new definition of 'de facto partner' into 62 Parliamentary Acts which worked to remove all remaining legislative discrimination of sexual orientation in legislative law.

Court asserts that she dislikes politics and even claimed that politics were the reason that she did not join the Original 9 in pushing for equality for women's tennis (Court 1975: 157); however, she fails to see that gay rights

issues are political issues and her statements become political statements, not religious statements.

Prior to a 2012 Parliamentary vote on two bills that would have allowed marriage equality (the Marriage Equality Amendment Bill and the Marriage Amendment Bill, (Marriage Amendment Bill 2012 [and] Marriage Equality Amendment Bill 2012 [and] Marriage Equality Amendment Bill 2010 2012), Court again went on the offensive. The public supported the bills 2:1; however, Parliament ultimately struck them both down. In an interview conducted in December 2011, Margaret Court claimed that

Politically correct education has masterfully escorted homosexuality out from behind closed doors, into the community openly and now is aggressively demanding marriage rights that are not theirs to take. [...] No amount of legislation or political point-scoring can ever take out of the human heart the knowledge that in the beginning God created them male and female and provided each with a unique sexual function to bring forth new life. [...] To dismantle this sole definition of marriage and try to legitimise what God calls abominable sexual practices that include sodomy, reveals our ignorance as to the ills that come when society is forced to accept law that violates their very own God-given nature of what is right and what is wrong.

(Lacy 2011: n.pag.)

Court further asserted that

The fact that the homosexual cry is, 'We can't help it as we were born this way', as the cause behind their own personal choice is cause for concern. [...] Every action begins with a thought. There is a choice to be made.

(Lacy 2011: n.pag.)

Court views marriage equality as an individual choice that needs to be controlled through structural means. As a minister, she views herself as a member of the structural establishment, ready to offer her instructions on how Australians should be living. She seems unaware of the cultural shift that has taken place regarding marriage equality, both in Australia and worldwide. It is viewed as a human rights issue now that goes beyond LGBTQ issues, as Martina Navratilova stated in her responses to Court (Navratilova 2012a, 2012b).

### **Rainbow Flags Over Margaret Court Arena, 2012**

After three decades of demeaning comments from Court, LGBTQ advocates in Australia reacted. With the 2012 Australian Open only weeks away from Court's December 2011 public ridicule of LGBTQ people, Rainbow Flags Over Margaret Court Arena was born. Doug Pollard, one of the group's organizers wrote that

Enough is enough, Margaret. For 20 years we have quietly tolerated your attacks on us and your predation on our young. But we've had enough. It is time for you to read something else besides the Bible and get acquainted with reality.

(Pollard 2012: n.pag.)

As a social movement, Rainbow Flags Over Margaret Court Arena was quick to action, finding an opportunity with the Australian Open taking place mid-to late-January, establishing the group on Facebook, and creating, and most importantly maintaining, a clear and concise mission. Rainbow Flags Over Margaret Court Arena's mission, as stated on their Facebook page was 'to support the gay community by inundating MCA [Margaret Court Arena] with rainbow flags during the Australian Open' (Rainbow Flags Over Margaret Court Arena 2012). Their motivation was stated as being

In response to Ms. Court's dehumanizing rant about the gay community: Don't give in to hatred or be silenced by apathy or fear. We ask that you unfurl your rainbow flag in pride to support the gay community. Let's ensure that this is the last generation of gay youth to be isolated by silence in the face of bigotry. Be the change you want to see. Straight or gay – be a role model.

(Rainbow Flags Over Margaret Court Arena 2012: n.pag.)

Most directed their attention to Court herself. Others were demanding that the Australian Open change the name of the arena, possibly back to its original name of Show Court 3 which it held prior to 2003. Pollard asserted that, in creating their message

The risk lay in attacking someone who was considered something of an Australian icon. I neutralised this by making it clear that I was not calling into question her achievements in tennis (although, by modern standards, they're not that wonderful) but her fitness to pronounce on gay issues. Other people not involved with the organising of the protest did not make this distinction.

(Pollard 2014: n.pag.)

Upon hearing of the proposed demonstrations at the arena that bears her name, Court emphatically stated

Are they not wanting me to come to the Australian Open? Is that what they are trying to do? I don't run from anything.[...] I have always been a champion and always loved what I do and love tennis. I think it is very sad they can bring it into [the Australian Open]. It is hard that they can voice their opinions but I am not allowed to voice my opinion. There is something wrong somewhere.

(LeGrand 2012: n.pag.)

Court clearly does not understand that many believe that she is voicing her own opinion, but through the thin veil of her church. Indeed, Rennae Stubbs, a former Australian tennis player and out lesbian, said that

Margaret has said her feelings and it's public, and it has leverage. [...] So I think this is the only way the people feel that they can be heard, through a sign of solidarity. As long as it [a protest] is done tastefully, that's the most important thing for me.

(Anon. 2012: n.pag.)



The demands of Rainbow Flags Over Margaret Court Arena originally included changing the name of Margaret Court Arena. A petition for this reached its goal of 1500 signatures on the Change.org website and the petition was delivered to Tennis Australia (Newburrie 2012). However, by 16 January 2012, the organizers, responding to those who had voiced concern about the name change, listed three demands: (1) on the last day of the Australian Open 2012, replace all *Tennis Australia* flags with rainbow flags; (2) join the *Fair Go, Sport!* programme run by the Victorian Anti-Discrimination Commissioner and (3) help Australian Open players make *It gets better* videos.

In the end, Tennis Australia joined the *Fair Go, Sport!* programme. The other demands were not met.

In addition to Court's public admonition of homosexuality, midway through the Australian Open, Court was nominated as a 'national living treasure' by the National Trust of Australia. The National Trust of Australia's CEO Brian Scarsbrick stated that 'the title National Living Treasure is conferred when someone accomplishes an outstanding achievement, swelling the country's consciousness with admiration, pride and acknowledgement' (Australian Christian Lobby 2012). The 'national living treasure' registry began in 1997 and includes 100 people who were selected through a vote of the Australian public. In 2004, replacements were voted upon for those who had died since the 1997 list was made. In 2012, replacements were again voted upon to replace those who had died since the updated 2004 list was made. Court was nominated at this time but was not selected. Incidentally, the list does include five tennis players – Evonne Goolagong, Rod Laver, John Newcombe, Ken Rosewall and Pat Rafter.

Following Court's statements against marriage equality, Billie Jean King responded by saying

I totally respect her opinion, but I don't agree with her at all. We have a rising problem with homophobia globally. [...] This is about civil rights. It's about equality, having equal opportunities and rights. Everyone gets too wiggled out on it. I guess because it's sexual, people get funny. But it's just about equal rights. That's all it is. And I don't know what they're trying to make it into. It's just equal rights. [...] Talk about it, get it out in the open. Just because you find something in the Bible? Well, I can find something else in the Bible. Judge not that ye be judged, so stop judging. Get your own act together, everyone deserves the same rights and that's it. [...] To me, it should be a non-issue. Someday it will be, but we have to fight like crazy until it is. It goes along with bullying. The bullying and homophobia go hand in hand.

(Ginn 2012: n.pag.)

Court responded to King and others who found her original statement offensive, in what she called an apology, through an op-ed piece for Melbourne's leading local newspaper, the *Herald Sun*. In it, she wrote

We live in a blessed nation but Australia is on a steep moral decline. Everywhere you look we are making excuses for a sliding lifestyle and more people are blind to it than ever before. [...] As a society we are losing touch with fundamental Christian values, as our leaders lean towards an agenda of political correctness to keep the minorities happy. [...] Minorities are now making it harder for the majority. They

are increasingly taking everything that is good in society and pushing it to the side. Looking back, you can see that there has been a steep decline, especially when it comes to the issue of sexuality. Let me be clear. I believe that a person's sexuality is a choice. In the Bible it said that homosexuality is among sins that are works of the flesh. It is not something you are born with. My concern is that we are advocating to young people that it is OK to have these feelings. But I truly believe if you are told you are gay from a young age, soon enough it will start to impact your life and you will live it. If somebody is told they are gay they often start to believe it [...] I can't understand, if we are a blessed nation under a biblical Constitution, why there is such a push to change it? We will only start to tear away at the rich fabric and sustained values. Then God will take his hand off our nation and the lights will go out.

(Court 2012: n.pag.)

Court is grasping at straws here instead of facing the cultural challenge of marriage equality. Homophobia has very real negative impacts of people. Furthermore, by broadly explaining what 'minorities' are doing, she is expanding her scope of criticism from sexual minorities to racial and religious minorities, and many other minorities, as well.

Court's statement in December 2011, and her so-called apology above, did not go unnoticed in tennis circles. Navratilova and King quickly responded to Court. Navratilova responded using Melbourne's *Herald Sun*, the same venue Court had used. Navratilova wrote:

You were one of my role models, and I felt so privileged to be on the same court with you, even as your ball girl. I think that is why it truly pains me now that we can't see eye to eye. And while I still admire all your accomplishments on the court, I'm disappointed by your inability to acknowledge me as your equal off the court. [...] Giving gays and lesbians the right to marry isn't just a gay rights issue; it is a human rights issue. It is about equal rights and protection under the law for all human beings. Quite simply, it is the right thing to do. [...] Perhaps of the many things you said in your opposition to granting same-sex marriage rights was your statement that Australia is in moral decline and giving us equal rights would further this decline, basically labelling us immoral. That one really hurts. [...] I really have a hard time seeing how two people who love each other and want to affirm that love by certifying their commitment to each other by getting married are acting immorally. Loving another human being is immoral? Really? I see Australia as one of the best countries in the world, a democracy that strives to be just, a nation that has historically been ahead of most of the world when it comes to human rights, and thus, a fantastic place in which to live.

(Navratilova 2012b: n.pag.)

During the press conference after Navratilova's legends doubles match on Margaret Court Arena, she was asked about playing on that court. Navratilova responded by stating

Playing on Margaret Court Arena, it's an honour, as always, to be on that court. You know, it's not a personal issue. Clearly Margaret Court's

views that she has expressed on same-sex marriage, same-gender marriage, I think are outdated. But it's not about any one person. It's not about religious rights, it's about human rights. It's a secular view, not a religious view. She's only seeing it from one viewpoint.

(Navratilova 2012a: n.pag.)

When asked whether she had spoken to Court recently, Navratilova said

I have not seen her. I have spoken to her years ago, but, you know, she was all about Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve. She repeated that about four or five times, so I just felt I couldn't get through to her. Maybe she thought she could get through to me.

(Navratilova 2012a: n.pag.)

On 13 January 2012, prior to the start of the Australian Open, Rennae Stubbs posted a warning on the Rainbow Flags Over Margaret Court Arena Facebook page. Stubbs is an Australian player who won 60 doubles titles with various partners before her retirement in 2011. She wrote

Remember, this is not about one person, this is about human rights for all. Wear your rainbow colours, but just know, any major flags or signs will NOT be accepted and peaceful will be a bigger statement. This is still a place for a tennis tournament and there are players to consider. Do the right thing and support with honour and respect. Let's change the world a little but let's do it with honour.

(Rainbow Flags Over Margaret Court Arena 2012: n.pag.)

Stubbs guided demonstrators to an excellent middle ground between protesting and tennis, so that neither were interrupted. Indeed, this tactic proved to be the best course of action given that Tennis Australia, when asked by Court supporters when they were going to start confiscating the rainbow items, firmly stated that they had no intention of confiscating items or ejecting people given how the demonstrations had been unfolding thus far. In speaking about the fans in the arena, Stubbs noted that

I didn't really notice anything that different, other than some interesting outfits of people wearing rainbow colours. Australians like there sport too much to disrupt anything but they also always want the world to know, we won't stand for intolerance, ignorance or inequality.

(Stubbs 2014: n.pag.)

Indeed, Svetlana Kuznetsova, who played five matches on Margaret Court Arena in 2012 between singles and doubles matches, was surprised to hear that there had been a social movement in the stands while she played (Kuznetsova 2014). Despite signs not being allowed, Stubbs claimed that 'I think in the end, it's a sporting event and the message was loud and clear in the press and how people thought' (Stubbs 2014: n.pag.).

Laura Robson seemingly inadvertently stepped into the LGBTQ limelight when she wore a rainbow headband during her first-round match on Margaret Court Arena against Jelena Jankovic on 16 January 2012. When asked about it, Robson said '[i]t was just a rainbow-coloured hairband. [...] I didn't see anything about a protest today. I wore it because I believe in equal rights for

everyone. Thats it' (Mitchell 2012: n.pag.). Robson did know that there was a storm brewing in regard to Court. As she stated

I did [know about the comments] [...] but it was through newspapers and things. I never saw a direct quote from her. So I don't want to comment when I actually haven't spoken to her. I believe in equal rights for everyone – that is why I wore it.

(Mitchell 2012: n.pag.)

Upon hearing about Robson's rainbow hairband, Billie Jean King, said '[n]o way, she did? Laura? I would have never believed that.[...] She said it was about equality. Bingo that's exactly what it is' (Ginn 2012: n.pag.). When asked about the risks that Robson faced, Stubbs noted that there were 'none at all. It was a very sweet and heartfelt tribute by a young player to let the world know, she wouldn't stand for inequality. It was very well received' (Stubbs 2014: n.pag.).

Interestingly, two days before Robson's match, Tyler Green posted on the Rainbow Flags Over Margaret Court Arena page that 'Laura Robson is looking for a rainbow ribbon (apparently to wear onto MCA). Someone please point her toward one!' (Rainbow Flags Over Margaret Court Arena 2012). And, the day before Robson's match, the following was posted on the Facebook page: '[m]y new favourite tennis player, Laura Robson, will be wearing a rainbow ribbon for her match at MCA [Margaret Court Arena] against Jankovic. Go Laura!!!!' (Rainbow Flags Over Margaret Court Arena 2012). Clearly, this was no random accident on Robson's part. She had planned beforehand to make a statement regarding LGBTQ rights.

Martina Navratilova wore rainbow ribbons sewn around the sleeves and waistband of her polo shirt while playing on Margaret Court Arena. Her match on 22 January 2012, stirred controversy when there were no official photos or video of Navratilova and her doubles partner, Nicole Bradtke. The only photo of the match on the Australian Open website was one of Martina Hingis and Iva Majoli who lost the match to Navratilova and Bradtke. The Rainbow Flags Over Margaret Court Arena group was quick to point this out, and Tennis Australia offered no explanation.

As is traditional, Court is invited to the Australian Open each year as an honoured guest of the tournament director, Craig Tiley. Tiley acknowledged that Tennis Australia, the governing body for tennis in Australia, and the Women's Tennis Association, did not agree with Court's views (LeGrand 2012). Indeed, on 12 January 2012, before the Australian Open began, Tennis Australia, following the lead of the Women's Tennis Association, gave a respectfully damning statement in regards to Margaret Court. Tennis Australia stated that

Margaret Court has won more grand slam titles than any other player and has been honoured for her achievements in tennis and she is a legend of the sport. We respect her playing record, it is second to none. But her personal views are her own, and are definitely not shared by Tennis Australia. Like the WTA, we believe that everyone should be treated equally and fairly. We concur wholeheartedly with the WTA who stated that 'all human beings, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation or otherwise, should be treated equally. This is a fundamental right and principle, including within the world of sport. Anyone advocating otherwise is advocating against fundamental and essential rights. TA does not support any view that contravenes these basic human rights.

(Tennis Australia 2012: n.pag.)

This statement does little to alter the public memory surrounding Court. Indeed, inviting her as an honoured guest only presents the optics of condoning her beliefs. The public memory of Court is a linkage of her past and present, her status as a tennis player but also her conservative beliefs against marriage equality. The two cannot be uncoupled in the public's shared memory of her.

### **A renewed call for changing the name of Margaret Court Arena, 2017**

The French Open and the US Open have named courts on their grounds. The French Tennis Federation chose to honour Suzanne Lenglen and Philippe Chatrier. Lenglen is the champion from the 1920s who revolutionized tennis fashion, and all of the female champions of the French Open receive the *coupe de Lenglen*, the champion's trophy named in her honour. Chatrier was a former player, journalist and then president of the French Tennis Federation for twenty years, from 1973 to 1993. The grounds for the French Open are named after Roland Garros, and in Parisian and tennis circles, the tournament is colloquially called 'Roland Garros'. Garros was a famed French aviator during First World War who invented forward shooting rifles for fighter planes with deflectors for propellers. Lenglen, Chatrier and Garros are clearly highly esteemed individuals in French society.

The US Tennis Association opted to honour Arthur Ashe when they named centre court in 1997, and Billie Jean King with the naming of the grounds in 2006. Thus, Arthur Ashe Stadium is central to the Billie Jean King National Tennis Center. The secondary court to Arthur Ashe Stadium is the smaller Louis Armstrong Stadium, named in 1978 after the famed American jazz trumpeter. Opting for Ashe and King, the US Tennis Association focused on a blend of achievements on and off the court, rather than focusing solely on numbers of titles won, as neither Ashe nor King would have won that competition. James Blake, the former American player, said

I think in our country, in the States, there's good reason why our two biggest naming honors are for people who fought for equality, fought for civil rights: Arthur Ashe Stadium and the Billie Jean King Tennis Center [...] Both of them were fighting for equality and got courts named after them.

(Rothenberg 2017: n.pag.)

Some of the Rainbow Flags Over Margaret Court Arena demonstrators supported the idea of renaming Margaret Court Arena. Some have proposed honouring Evonne Goolagong since she did so much beyond tennis to help Aboriginal Australians, and indeed Google Australia changed the name of the arena to Evonne Goolagong Arena in their widely used maps application (Swan 2017). Others have proposed Rennae Stubbs Arena since she was so successful on the tour as a doubles specialist while being an out lesbian. King, however, countered the idea of renaming Margaret Court Arena. She said

No, no, no, get rid of her for that? Because you don't agree with her? Are you kidding? Just because you don't agree with someone? Please. She deserves it. She's a great player[...] I thought the centre court should be Laver and her name together. They're the two greatest champions in our game, and she had more Slams. [...] For her to have Court 3 is terrible.

I was furious. I went to the heads of Australia, I told them I don't agree with this. You can't do this, you can't give her court 3, she deserves much better than this. That's a disgrace to women. She won 63 Grand Slam titles, how could you ever give her court 3. It was diabolical.

(Ginn 2012: n.pag.)

As a player, King has the utmost respect for Court. Furthermore, it is interesting to think of this as a question of sexism against Court, having a smaller arena named after her, than it is about removing her name from an arena because of her conservative, non-tennis beliefs.

In 2017, Court once again stirred controversy, this time by writing a public letter in which she criticized Alan Joyce, CEO of Qantas, the Australian airline, for his company's support of marriage equality, and expressed her personal boycott of the airline. In a humorous show of support for Qantas, Greyhound Australia, the bus company, tweeted on 25 May 2017: '[I]ooks like we are being added to the boycott list 🙄 #WeSupportMarriageEquality' (@Greyhound\_Oz 2017: n.pag.). Given that Virgin Australia, the commercial airline, also supports marriage equality, there is little selection regarding transportation for Court to choose, and she is inadvertently galvanizing Australian corporations with global reach to make stands in support of marriage equality. The publicity of her open letter to Joyce led to multiple radio show interviews. During one, she likened homosexuality and the recruitment of children by LGBTQ people to Hitler's Nazis, when she said '[t]hat's what Hitler did. That's what communism did [...] get in the minds of the children. There's a whole plot in our nation and in the nations of the world to get in the minds of the children' (Brown 2017).

Following Court's public ostracizing of Joyce, Casey Dellacqua, the Australian tennis player tweeted 'Margaret. Enough is enough' with a clipping attached that appeared in a local newspaper in 2013 following the birth of Dellacqua's and her partner's baby (Dellacqua 2017a: n.pag.). In the attached clipping, Court wrote, among other things '[i]t is with sadness that I see that this baby has seemingly been deprived of his father'. That is an unfortunate statement; however, what is offensive to LGBTQ people is that Court clarifies her disdain for this 'fatherless generation' with, '[p]ersonally, I have nothing against Casey Dellacqua or her "partner"' with the word partner in quotes as if this is a disputed concept for Dellacqua or in society at large. This line, that Court could have easily left out of her letter to the editor, shows that Court is unwilling to engage in civil discourse on the topic of marriage equality.

Court's statement about Qantas Airlines and Dellacqua's subsequent tweet occurred the week prior to the start of the French Open, so the press had quick access to the top tennis players for comment. In addition, the international depth of the press coupled with the diversity of nationalities of the players made Court's latest statements an international spectacle. At the French Open, Dellacqua was asked about her twitter response to Court during a press conference. She said

I felt like it was time for me to speak up. I never come out and say anything. [...] Back in 2013, that was when [Court] wrote about me, obviously, but it was a really happy time in my life. You know, the birth of my first child, our first child, so it was a really happy time. So I did read the article and I left it alone. I thought, you know what, it's not worth responding to. So I left it. But then obviously more and more stuff just

keeps coming out and I just thought, you know what, that's why the tweet said enough. Because it is, it's just enough.

(Dellacqua 2017b: n.pag.)

When asked a follow-up question in regard to Court's comments, Dellacqua responded

I guess more to the point, I'm fine and I'm very conscious of the fact that everyone is allowed their opinion, but when you start singling out my family especially, that's when it's not okay. [...] That's when I thought, you know what, it's my time to speak up.

(Dellacqua 2017b: n.pag.)

Showing how Dellacqua is much beloved and respected on the tennis tour, players of all rankings, men and women, retired and still playing, even Samantha Stosur, winner of the 2011 US Open singles title, who had remained quiet on the topic of Court for years, were in almost unanimous agreement condemning Court's statements. A young Dutch player, Richel Hogenkamp, asserted that, for various personal reasons, 'maybe some players they don't feel comfortable playing in a stadium named after Margaret Court' (Hogenkamp 2017). If the arena's name was not changed, as Stosur warned, players may opt to boycott court assignments to play in the venue during the Australian Open, stating that 'I guess we'll cross that bridge when we all get down to the Australian Open next year and who wants to play on Margaret Court Arena and who doesn't and we'll go from there' (Stosur 2017: n.pag.). Concurring with Stosur, Andy Murray stated that:

If something was to be done, I think it would be a lot more beneficial to do it before the tournament starts. I think [...] for players to be in a position where you're in a slam and kind of boycotting playing on the court, I think would potentially cause a lot of issues. [...] I would imagine a lot of the players would be [...] pretty offended by that. So [...] we'll see what happens.

(Murray 2017: n.pag.)

Garbiñe Muguruza, winner of the 2016 French Open, had a quick response to the press when asked about Court '[q]uite honestly, I really don't give a damn what she says' (Muguruza 2017: n.pag.).

Malcolm Turnbull, the Prime Minister of Australia, who claims to be in support of marriage equality but does not want the arena's name changed (Rothenberg 2017), brings up an interesting disconnect. Jeffrey Olick explains that there are two cultures to public memory: the individual and the collective (Olick 2007). To Turnbull, his individual public memory of Court is that of a great tennis champion, nothing else. Indeed, he has declared 'the Margaret Court Arena celebrates Margaret Court the tennis player' (Rothenberg 2017). To many, though, there is a blending of both her tennis accomplishments and her religious pontifications, and yet to others who may not be tennis fans, they know only of the latter. Therefore, a collective public memory is vitally important. Rather than focusing on each person's individual preferences, the broader questions can be discussed, such as what Margaret Court Arena means to Australians as a collective, and, to a lesser extent, what message do Australians want to say with this arena at a Grand Slam tennis tournament site.

The irony of the controversy surrounding Court is that she was a part of the women's liberation movement. Whether she willingly chose the mantle or not does not matter. Court was one of the leading champions in women's tennis when women's tennis, the highest profile sport for women, was symbiotically linked to the women's liberation movement. To now denounce King and Navratilova, two pioneering women of whom Court competed alongside, along with all LGBTQ people, and slander the entire sport of women's tennis, is a smack in the face to the women's liberation movement and the LGBTQ rights movement, as well as women's professional tennis.

## Conclusion

Doug Pollard, the organizer of Rainbow Flags Over Margaret Court Arena, claims that the movement was a success. He asserted that

I would say that overall the action was successful. Although we were unable to flood the arena with flags, largely due to problems with supply – there was no supplier of rainbow merchandise in Melbourne, and there were stories of party shops claiming to have run out of rainbow flags when they were approached, which was also my personal experience – the issue gained wide TV, radio and newspaper coverage across Australia, and two players, including Martina Navratilova, wore rainbow symbols and made public comments.

(Pollard 2014: n.pag.)

Indeed, the movement was successful in two ways. First, it opened a space for dialogue around marriage equality in Australia, especially the limitations of the Church in being the arbiter of the sanctity of marriage. With this opened space in Australian society at large, discussions of Court's stance emerged in Australian popular culture. For example, the comedy sketch group TV Live On Stage created a parody song based on the music of *Proud Mary*, made famous by Creedence Clearwater Revival (1968) and Tina Turner, aptly named *Proud Margaret* (TV Live On Stage 2012). To this end, the demonstrations by Rainbow Flags Over Margaret Court Arena seem to have been the catalyst that kept Court from gaining enough votes to be listed as a 'national living treasure' in 2012.

Second, the civility which guided their demonstrations carved a space of legitimacy which others can follow for demonstrations at tennis tournaments or other sporting events in the future. Indeed, Tennis Australia supported the peaceful protests of the Rainbow Flags Over Margaret Court Arena demonstrators when detractors called for their removal from the grounds or, at minimum, a confiscation of their rainbow flag items. Rennae Stubbs claimed that

I think that most Australians support gay marriage and equality. I don't think it's a Margaret Court or Billie Jean King issue, it's a right and wrong issue of equality for Australians and their people and the majority now support that measure.

(Stubbs 2014: n.pag.)

Indeed, marriage equality is a much larger issue than these few athletes. However, that does not mean that covering Margaret Court Arena with rainbow flags was a waste of time. Indeed, it shone a light on Margaret Court



and helped people move to an understanding of the separation between Margaret Court the player and Margaret Court the minister. Most Australians decided they could do without Margaret Court the minister even while they fully respect her accomplishments on the tennis court.

The decision with naming a stadium is a difficult one. One thing to keep in mind, however, are the words of Andrea Petkovic, the German tennis player. She said

Maybe [...] naming courts should also move with the times, and not stay for tradition. As I've learned as I've been on tour for 10 years, sometimes it seems to be more difficult to be a character with principles than to be a champion.

(Rothenberg 2017: n.pag.)

Indeed, because collective public memory is always evolving, maybe the naming of stadiums should reflect this evolution.

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