

In His Court
Betsy Nagelsen McCormack
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Betsy McCormack's inspirational book titled *In His Court* portrays how tennis and scripture can go hand-in-hand. She has woven bible verse with the playing experiences of a wide variety of tennis stars, both past and present, and from all walks of life, to explain how Jesus Christ can impact our lives on and off the court. This book reads very much like a "Chicken Soup for the Tennis Soul" in that it provides comfort and inspiration to those tennis enthusiasts and fans that flip through its pages.

The first such example come to us in the forward for the book written by Monica Seles. In this brief section, in conjunction with a later chapter, Monica describes the gruesome scene surrounding her stabbing incident at a tournament in Hamburg, Germany while on tour. In her time of need, Betsy, a lifelong friend, was there to help in her recovery and ultimate comeback to the pro circuit. Through prayer and bible study, Betsy shared her faith with someone in need. And through this book, she is now sharing it with all of us.

Perhaps one of the most profound stories in the book is provided by Michael Chang in the introduction. Here, Michael tells of his many accomplishments on the court, most notably his historic French Open run in 1989. However, he poignantly reminds the reader that, "My walk through life is a 5-set match, not a 12-point tiebreaker, and I'm going to follow Him to the end of my days." (McCormack, 9) Chang realizes that while he has had a tremendous career, it is his faith in the Lord Almighty that will define him, not his resume.

Following a similar theme, McCormack writes in the preface that while the phrase “practice makes perfect” can be applied to anyone’s tennis game, the same can be said about people’s faith in God. Diligent study and prayer are needed to fine-tune our faith, just as hitting the courts with a coach for hours on end will improve a player’s strokes.

The next sixteen chapters to follow, all of which are very short lasting only a few pages each, pertain to a specific player, or group of players, who have overcome struggles and obstacles to achieve success. The glossary reads like a who’s who for tennis including Pete Sampras, Andre Agassi, Margaret Court, Arthur Ashe, and Jana Novotna. Perhaps the crescendo of the book comes during chapter seven, where McCormack describes the circumstances through which she lost her coach. In the twilight of her career, McCormack traveled to Moscow for a tournament and invited her coach, Paul Wilkens, with her. At the start of a practice prior to her first round match, Paul collapsed on the court. Needless to say, Betsy was terribly upset and lost her match. Dealing with loss is something that all of us deal with at one point or another, and this emotion she felt is very evident in the writing.

Chapter eight’s story is similar with Andrea Jaeger and a sense of loss. In 1979, Andrea took the tennis world by storm at an extremely young age. However, her fame did not come without a price, as she was shunned by her much older and experienced colleagues on tour, and simultaneously, her friends back home. Andrea became a household name, while at the same time, losing a chance at a normal adolescence. She resolved herself to overcome her loneliness and despair and give back to her community. She started the Silver Lining Foundation, an organization that assists terminally ill children in finding joy in their lives. McCormack reminds us that we are never truly alone when she quotes Matthew 25: 35-40, “And the King will answer

and say to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.’” (McCormack, 55)

McCormack has written a book that reads very well. The chapters seem to flow into one another, seemingly guiding the reader into each story. The bible verses at the end of each chapter serve as a finishing touch, summarizing the moral for each story. Any tennis enthusiast would enjoy reading about their favorite players from history, all the while feeling inspired and hopeful with each turn of the page. In particular, it is the reviewer’s belief that tennis coaches and their students could use *In His Court* as an invaluable teaching aid. We all know of those coaches who put the wins and losses above everything else; or those players who berate and degrade themselves and others with their obscene outbursts on the court. One cannot take the trophies and prize money when we inevitably leave this world. *In His Court* can serve as a medium through which to remind us that it is, after all, just a game.