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# Sex-change tennis: the big money factor

BUT WHAT SHE TOLD ME FROM CALIFORNIA  
YESTERDAY MEANS SHE WON'T PLAY HERE

**by Laurie Pignon**

LEGALLY Dr Renee Richards, who as a man played tennis for Yale University, is now a woman.

And not surprisingly, following her successful sex-change operation, Dr Richards, 42, wants to break into the £3 million women's world tennis circuit.

Only one thing prevents her: an insistence by the Women's Tennis Association that she should submit to a chromosome test.

The women are afraid less of Renee than the precedent she may set. They do not want the door opened to the possibility of a new breed of 'female' athletes who could change the face of women's sport in all fields.

### It mous

They remember how the infamous Russian sisters Tamara and Irena Press were allowed to win Olympic gold medals before the threat of chromosome tests put them out of the running. Not that they were ever tested — they just failed to appear in the 1966 European athletic championships in Budapest after tests were inaugurated and we never heard of them again.

The threat that Renee Richards poses is that she, and possible future sex-change tennis stars, could mop up the millions of pounds to be won on the Women's Tennis Association circuit. For the hard fact is that a mediocre male tennis player can beat a women tennis star.

No one is denying that Renee Richards is



**DR RENEE RICHARDS** ... pictured before her sex change operation.

*legally a woman as far as the law goes — but she's also 6ft. 2in. and previously played men's tennis.*

She refuses to submit to chromosome tests because she believes they are 'non-conclusive' and inaccurate.

Instead she will only agree to be tested by a gynaecologist and that may not be enough for the tennis professionals in either the U.S. or Britain.

However, Dr Richards herself believes that her

case is dramatically different from that of athletes like the Press sisters.

She began hormone treatment five years before her operation. She lost 45 pounds, her muscles weakened, the big serve she had when playing as a man for Yale and Rochester Medical School is gone.

She sweats a lot while playing and tires easily, that's why she practises every day at the John Wayne Tennis Club in California and why this week she is going for special training sessions with Pancho Segura who coaches Jimmy Connors.

*What does she have to say to a world who can't forget that Dr Richards married a girl called Barbara in 1969 and is the father of a four year old son.*

'My wife knew my problem but we were both hopeful that marriage would turn me around. It was futile. The divorce was friendly. We are still very close, and I try and see her and my son regularly,' she told her friend Gladys Heldman of *World Tennis*.

### Ridicule

Why should such a person want to enter international tennis? Why does she want to play the Dewar Cup, at the Royal Albert Hall next month? Why is she willing to become the bearded lady of the tennis circus? These were the questions I put to Renee Richards herself.

'I think it is important for me to suffer the unhappiness, the humiliation, the stress and the public ridicule and I am willing to accept all this to gain an important point.'

'What point?' I asked.  
'As a trans-sexual I am

in a minority. There are all sorts of minorities with all sorts of problems.

'I am fortunate. Many can't get jobs, many get kicked out by their families, many are ostracised by their friends

'If by being in the public eye playing tennis I can show them that hope is not dead then it is well worth all the stress I suffer. No matter the pressures, I will survive. I could have stayed in my job and only a few people would have known of my change of sex, but I got to thinking.

'I said to myself, look, Renee you have an unpleasant choice to make. You can stay in the background and carry on with your work, or you can do something socially which very few others have had the chance to do.

'I have taken that chance.'



**ON COURT:** Dr Renee Richards who this week starts special training sessions with Jimmy Connors' coach Pancho Segura.