

Striving for Excellence

An Interview with Martina Navratilova

EDITORS' NOTE *The most successful female tennis player of the Open era, Martina Navratilova amassed an unmatched number of professional records over the course of a career that spanned four decades. She won an unprecedented 59 Grand Slam titles, including a record 9 Wimbledon singles championships, along with 167 singles and 177 doubles championships. Over the course of her tennis career, Navratilova was distinguished as the WTA's "Tour Player of the Year" seven times, named the Associated Press' "Female Athlete of the Year" and declared one of the "Top Forty Athletes of All-Time" by Sports Illustrated. After being inducted into the International Tennis Hall of Fame, she continued to take part in WTA events as well as the 2004 Olympics Games. As she approached her 50th birthday in 2006, she decided to leave the tour circuit behind after her final Grand Slam, a mixed-doubles championship with Bob Bryan at the US Open which saw her become the oldest player to ever win a Grand Slam title. Navratilova provides commentary for the Tennis Channel during its coverage of Grand Slams. She is an ambassador for the WTA and is a regular commentator for the BBC and Tennis Channel at Wimbledon. She has also worked for Amazon Prime Video beginning with the US Open 2019. In September 2019, she starred in the Netflix comedy drama The Politician. She enjoys spending as much time as she can with her family in Miami, and often finds herself traveling the world, speaking at events, playing in numerous exhibition matches, and tirelessly promoting all of the issues that are close to her heart.*



Martina Navratilova

Did you know at an early age that your passion was for the sport of tennis?

Yes, I did. I started hitting against the wall at age 5 and then stepped on a real court at 7 and never looked back. I always loved tennis as it's always a challenge since the ball never comes back the same way.

What were the keys to your success and leadership in the sport?

The key is striving for excellence every step of the way. In other words, always giving my best effort on and off the court, not quitting and, most of all, being willing to take chances by changing techniques, strategies and having a willingness to step outside of my comfort zone.

You have been vocal about societal issues throughout your career. Do you feel that this is a responsibility with the powerful platform that you have to reach people?

It is not a responsibility, but a great opportunity to make a difference off the court. Having the freedom to speak up and not be punished for it is a privilege I have always appreciated and still do to this day.

How critical is resilience to being successful in professional sports?

Resilience is essential to success in any endeavor and in any field and is represented by the willingness and strength one must have to deal with setbacks, losses and failures. One must have the strength to keep coming back every day to try to improve and there can be no quitting – champions don't quit. By the way, I don't look at failure as a negative – I see it as an opportunity to improve.

The resilience of the human body, particularly for athletes, often defies many people's understanding. What role does mental resilience play in driving the physical resilience needed to be a professional athlete?

One needs both – the mental resilience drives you to work out harder and get yourself in the best shape possible which then gives you the physical resilience. When you know you're in great shape, it not only gives you the freedom to play the "right" way without physical limitations, but also gives you a huge confidence boost, thus helping your mental state.

Who are some of the resilient leaders you see today?

Resilience also means to me that you keep trying to do the right thing, and perhaps nobody embodies that better than Jimmy Carter, Ruth Bader Ginsburg and the recently passed John Lewis. We could all learn from them. ●

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