

Interview with Martin Rogers
SESSION 1 (9/23/2020)
Timed Log

[00:00:00]

Martin Rogers was born on January 28, 1950, in St. Louis, Missouri. His mother and father migrated to St. Louis from Tennessee and Mississippi, respectively, during the Great Migration. Despite seeking a more hospitable area in the Midwest, St. Louis proved to be a very racist and segregated city. His father had “the talk” with him at an early age. Except for George Washington Carver, he didn’t learn about Black history until leaving for college in 1968. This is the same year, Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy are assassinated, and Arthur Ashe first came on his radar after winning the U.S. Open. St. Louis remains polarized today, as he’s been engaged in protest for 52 years.

[00:07:23]

Though less aware of segregation as a child, he knew not to venture beyond his community. After returning from college, he learned the depths of division across lines of race, political power, education, and economics, including redlining. * Delmar Street, which runs east to west from the Mississippi River, functions as the dividing line between Blacks in the north and whites in the South.

* According to St. Louis Magazine, in 1916, St. Louis passed the nation’s first residential segregation ordinance. After the U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Buchanan v. Warley* made the ordinance illegal in 1917, racial covenants were reimposed. These covenants remained legal until the U.S. Supreme Court decided on *Shelley v. Kraemer* in 1948.

[00:11:06]

Charles [H.] Sumner High School was the first Black high school west of the Mississippi River, and it became the preeminent school for Blacks of his generation. Later Hadley Technical High School and Vashon High School [1927] were also opened.

[00:12:54]

The community around Sumner [known as The Ville] was close-knit and self-sustaining. Many Blacks owned or operated businesses, including his family, which owned a confectionery. His family lived northwest of the Fox Theater, which serves as the center point of St. Louis. He was largely sheltered by the community until leaving for college in 1968.

[00:17:00]

Father first has “the talk” with him at age twelve, just 2-3 years before white policemen first harass him. Since he began driving at age sixteen, he’s been in traffic stops eighteen times, always by white male officers. The most recent occurrence came in 2017, when he was 67 years old and, on his way to teach a tennis lesson. The recent situations with [George] Floyd, Trayvon [Martin], and Michael Brown reflect what’s been happening for decades. Yet, as the filming of Rodney King’s beating demonstrated, despite a lack of repercussions for officers killing Black [men and] teenagers, now everything is in the open.

[00:23:05]

Attended Augustinian Academy, a predominantly white preparatory school, for high school. Despite the harassment, the school prepared him for college and taught him to assimilate into white society.

[00:24:51]

Follows his brother to Lane College [in Jackson, Tennessee] after he transfers from Tennessee State University [in 1968]. His father paid his first year of tuition. His father's strong belief in the community

meant that most of their business was done on credit. Thus they weren't affluent. Augustinian Academy was in South St. Louis, and once, he was beaten by a police officer. According to a study, the 16-25 age group is the most vulnerable period for Black society. *

* According to Jones-Eversley et al., (2020) between the ages of 15-24, Black males in the U.S. are disproportionately susceptible to premature death.

[00:27:23]

Introduced to tennis at Lane College after he begins attending in 1968. After freshman year, he financed his education with a Pell Grant, student loans, and work-study. When the school's accreditation standards change, they need several new sports teams, including a tennis team. Initially, no one volunteers to play, but after scholarship money is mentioned, he and his friends raise their hands to join the team.

[00:29:36]

Professor Braxton coached the team on two courts that had weeds and cracks on them. They played another historically Black university, the University of Alabama in Huntsville, during their first road trip. Despite the Alabama team's nice uniforms and warm-ups, they played just as bad as them in their t-shirts and cut-off jeans. Alabama won at home, but when they played at Lane, the home team won by recruiting their girlfriends to cheer for them and using the nuances of their home court. Rogers earned an \$800 scholarship per semester during his two years on the team.

[00:33:21]

Regained interest in tennis after graduating in 1972. Met Richard Hudlin, a social studies teacher and tennis coach at Sumner, in 1973. He coached Ashe during his senior year in St. Louis from 1960-61 [See Raymond Turner oral history interview]. Hudlin won a lawsuit [against the Municipal Tennis Association of St. Louis] in 1945 to open tournaments [played on public facilities] to players of color.

[00:35:04]

Rogers met Ashe for the first time in 1973 while Ashe was visiting Hudlin and conducting a clinic at Dwight Davis Tennis Center. Rogers met Hudlin at Fairground Park in north St. Louis. After completing a clinic with eight students, Hudlin approached him, joked about how he was hitting the ball, and spent three minutes correcting his grip. Rogers discovered Hudlin knew his father. Hudlin never gave him further instruction. When Rogers tried playing at Dwight Davis Tennis Center, no one would hit with him. However, at Fairground, Hudlin allowed Rogers to toss balls to his students.

[00:39:25]

Mentoring Juan Farrow. Dr. [Robert] Walter Johnson trained Althea Gibson, Bob Ryland, and started Ashe. * Juan Farrow was the last student Dr. Johnson started and mentored before he died suddenly [in 1971]. Farrow was sent to St. Louis to work with Hudlin, but the age divide between 15-year-old Farrow and 70-year-old Hudlin made it difficult. Since Rogers was a young teacher at Southwest High, Hudlin asked his father if Farrow could stay with them while Rogers was a liaison coach. This continued for almost four years.

* Gibson was the first African-American to win a Grand Slam (1956), and Ryland became the first to play professionally (1959).

[00:41:41]

Ashe's instrumental role in supporting Farrow and other young athletes. Ashe claimed Farrow was further progressed in his abilities than he was when he was in St. Louis. Ashe supported several young Black prospects, including Renee Blount (also in St. Louis) and Rodney Harmond [See Renee Blount oral

history interview]. Ashe poured most into Farrow, who was also from Richmond, Virginia, and the last player started by Dr. Johnson. He intermittently called while on tour to check in on Farrow.

[00:43:47]

Farrow was quiet but carried burdens of family issues and high expectations to become the next Arthur Ashe. Rogers provided regular reports to Ashe when he called. Ashe or Donald Dell would send whatever they needed [to practice]. Rogers reported difficulty getting Farrow to practice. At times, Farrow would purposefully tank competitions to party despite Ashe sponsoring him. The relationship between Ashe and Farrow severed after Ashe learned about his chain-smoking. Though Ashe did a lot for Farrow that he was likely unaware of, in Harmond's words, Ashe helped those who helped themselves.

[00:49:23]

Ashe began severing ties with Farrow in the late 1970s (likely in 1976 or 77). Rogers mentored Farrow for about three years, beginning in his freshman year. Kent DeMars recruited Farrow to Southern Illinois University [Edwardsville] (SIUE), where he played for four years. He remains the only collegiate player to win the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) [Division II] Championships three years in a row. Farrow also succeeded in the juniors, beat John McEnroe in the National Clay Courts, reached a 270 ranking on the professional circuit, and was inducted into the Intercollegiate Tennis Hall of Fame in 2014. Despite natural ability, insufficient practice in high school led Farrow to stagnate.

[00:53:40]

Last speaks with Ashe in 1989 or 1990 while Ashe was commentating at the U.S. Open. Ashe was being interviewed outside of the National Tennis Center, and the first thing he asked was, "How's your dad doing?" Ashe was genuinely interested in people on an individual level. He and Jeanne made a point to send Rogers's family Christmas cards every year.

[00:56:26]

Ashe juggled a lot and did everything with tremendous acumen and dignity, including likely influencing the dismantling of apartheid. References Ashe's involvement in the anti-apartheid movement and his encounter with Mark Mathabane during his visit in 1973 [See Mark Mathabane oral history interview].

[01:01:43]

Ashe's visits to St. Louis. Met Ashe at a clinic around 1972, before he visited South Africa. Met Ashe again in 1974 while Ashe was visiting Mr. Hudlin. Ashe visited St. Louis again after winning Wimbledon in 1975, and Rogers took photos of Hudlin and Ashe in the Armory.

[01:03:40]

Ashe continued to engage in activism even after his health declined and he contracted AIDS. He founded the Arthur Ashe Foundation [for the Defeat of AIDS], destigmatized the disease, and protested [for Haitian immigrants] while immunocompromised.

[01:06:07]

The Armory was an old military installation where Hudlin conducted tennis clinics on the hardwood courts. Tennis balls traveled quickly, forcing players to modify their strokes. Ashe came to St. Louis as a backcourt player, but Hudlin helped transition him to a serve volleyer while training at the Armory. This technique was commonly used at Wimbledon, and Ashe used it to win Wimbledon a few years later.

[01:09:35]

The Armory is located south of Delmar Street in the white semi-industrialized area. Ashe played with top white players like Butch Buchholz [See Butch Buchholz oral history interview]. Though Ashe came to St. Louis from Richmond for more opportunity to play in sanctioned tournaments, it was still like the South.

[01:13:58]

Did not speak with Ashe about his experience in St. Louis but learned about it through books. Speculates that Ashe might have considered Hudlin a tough coach, but his stance later softened. Ashe flew Hudlin to England after his Wimbledon win, and he returned to St. Louis to accept Hudlin's award posthumously.

[01:15:17]

He spoke with Ashe for the last time [in 1992] when he came to St. Louis to accept Hudlin's award. After accepting the award, the first thing Ashe said was, "How are you doing?" Ashe spoke about continuing to work in his finite time left. Ashe was a great man and left the world a better place than he found it.

[01:17:56]

Closing remarks and expressions of gratitude for participating in the project.

Interview with Martin Rogers
SESSION 2 (9/23/2020)
Timed Log

[00:00:00]

Hudlin was a tennis pioneer. While researching for an article he was writing on his website, Rogers discovered Sundiata Djata's book *Blacks at the Net: Black Achievement in the History of Tennis* and learned about Hudlin. Hudlin was the first Black on the University of Chicago's tennis team from 1926-1928. The University was the most preeminent school in the Midwest, and Hudlin became the first Black captain at a Big Ten school in 1928. After calling the University, they sent pictures of Hudlin on the team.

[00:04:58]

Hudlin filed a lawsuit in 1945 because Blacks could not play tennis at municipal parks or public parks, except for Fairground, which was located in a predominantly White area on the street Natural Bridge.

[00:06:35]

Hudlin's clinics were held in north St. Louis and mostly involved Black children. Ashe's clinics were held for everyone at the Dwight Davis Tennis Center in south St. Louis. During Ashe's first clinic, there were a lot of kids running and trying to get autographs. Every Black person who knew tennis was there, particularly because Hudlin had coached Ashe.

[00:09:04]

Though Hudlin introduced him to Ashe in 1972, Rogers only learned Hudlin coached Ashe later. Hudlin avoided talking about himself and focused on advancing his people, so Rogers learned much about his life after his death [in 1976].

[00:11:20]

Rogers learned Hudlin worked with Althea Gibson, and he wanted to interview him, but he passed before he could. Hudlin had a great sense of humor, even if strict as a coach. The Hudlin family is quite accomplished, including the movie producer Reginald Hudlin. Ashe's family also seemed to have a notable history with a rumor that some played a role in the Underground Railroad.

[00:13:26]

Stepping back on the tennis court always brings back more memories. Additional memories may be recalled and added after the interview.