

## Tennis Champ Macken reflects on storied career

By Jeff Doner

As Andy Murray became the first British player in nearly 80 years to capture Wimbledon's Men's title on Sunday, few people in Aurora were probably watching as closely as Brendan Macken.

When we left Mr. Macken, now in his 91st year, in the first part of our interview with the Aurora resident, and Canada's former reigning tennis champ, he was a 25-year-old working his way through William and Mary College to further his tennis dreams.

With his brother Jim and his sister Pat [who also won a Canadian Championship in the '40's] eventually following him down to William and Mary, the Mackens started to make names for themselves.

Macken was also an active figure in the school's student government, serving as class president and chief aid to the school president.

Then when we had some famous person visiting the campus, there were some male students that would help the college president entertain. I became the chief aid and when we had a Canada-US Day with President Harry Truman and Lester B. Pearson and when they were speaking, I was sitting with Mrs. Truman and Mrs. Pearson in case they needed anything. The only thing around me was a few secret service guys.

He even recalled being on the front page of the Newport News newspaper, which showed him walking with an umbrella with Truman and Pearson on either side of him.

Soon after that function, he met the bombastic Winston Churchill.

When he went down there, he knew school and tennis would be his focus, but he didn't predict he would meet the love of his life. It was while working a job where he collected laundry from students in the dormitories that he met his wife Libby of 63 years. That's when I snagged her, he said proudly.

A big tennis fan herself, Libby supported and travelled with Brendan while he was on the circuit.

His success in North America eventually garnered him a spot at Wimbledon in 1946, an experience he fondly looks back on.

The one time I went over to Wimbledon, I went with a French Canadian named Henri Rochon from Montreal and Lorne Main from Vancouver and we had \$500 for two months over there, so we were at the mercy of people putting us up in their homes, he said.

At that time however, Macken recalls stiff competition from the American and Australian teams, consisting of players who had fresh Wimbledon success.

They got more financial support from their association from than we did. There was just more in it for them because their stadiums held a lot of people. When we played our Davis Cup in Montreal there was maybe 2,500 people there.

At the time, Macken says the Canadian program simply didn't have the support or the training systems that the American's had, which was something that factored into his decision to train south of the border.

In 1950, Macken probably had the biggest win of his career, as he became known as the only Canadian to beat an Aussie in the Davis Cup. It was Billy Sidwell, he says. The Aussies were so upset with him losing to this rank outsider that he wasn't invited back the next year and he was their number two.

But as fate would have it, later that year, he won the Canadian Open in Montreal and the newly [secretly] engaged couple were featured on the front page of a local newspaper.

A copy of the paper somehow made it down to Libby's parents in New Jersey, which caused a stir among her family who had not heard of the engagement yet.

‘They weren't impressed,’ Macken says with a smile. ‘It was quite a job to sell them on the idea that I wasn't the worst thing in the world.’

However, selling was a forte of Macken's as he would dabble in sales after his successful run as a tennis pro.

Still living in the US, they would marry later that year and within 10 months they had their first of four children and he was looking for a job to support his family.

He soon landed a gig with Seagram distilleries in Montreal, leaving after three years.

‘I decided I didn't want to make my living in the whiskey business, because I was still playing tennis.’

He then became sales manager at new Pontiac and Buick dealership across from the historic Montreal Forum and according to Macken, it became the biggest Pontiac and Buick dealership in the country.

In 1966 the young family moved to Toronto where Macken would work selling janitorial chemicals and equipment and eventually started his own business in the same field.

He would also dabble in coaching at York University, where of his teams would win the Ontario Tennis Championship, edging out the powerhouse University of Toronto.

Over the years things have changed for Macken and his family. He now has eight grandkids and is happily retired in Aurora with Libby.

He even insisted he would keep playing if it wasn't for the painful arthritis in his wrists.

‘I can't play anymore, but I did play right up until my 70's in competitions for veterans over 45,’ he says. ‘They have those now for players over 75 and in the US they have one for over 90.’

He may not be able to play anymore, but his passion for the game remains, especially at a time where the sport is once again thriving in Canada.