

At Tennis N' Crumpets benefit

Rod Laver shows skills in Southfield

By MARY MULVEY

Tennis pro Rod Laver was the final offering at the annual Tennis N' Crumpets Benefit for Children's Hospital. Close to 650 fans filled the Franklin Racquet Club on Saturday, Sept. 24 to watch Laver play tie-breaker games with 16 players. Each player paid \$50 for the privilege and two of those players were Southfield residents Dr. George Blum and Jodi Ross.

Dr. Blum is a pediatrician with offices in Southfield and is an assistant professor at Wayne State University Medical School.

"I was one of the first ones to play. I wasn't nervous. I knew I wasn't going to beat him so I was out there for the fun of it. I hit the ball back a few times and had a few good shots but he had better ones," Blum said.

The doctor said he participated because, like most men, a part of him dreams of becoming an accomplished athlete. After the match he remarked:

"I learned I should stick to being a doctor and not aspire to being a tennis pro."

Blum also played to help Children's Hospital where he is a staff member.

"I WAS really happy to meet Rod Laver, but especially pleased that so many people came out to support the hospital."

Southfielder Jodi Ross is assistant pro at the Franklin Racquet Club where she's been giving private and semi-private lessons and tennis clinics along with club pro Dean Pinchoff for five years. Her tennis career goes back a dozen years.

She started at age eight and began competing at nine. By the time she was 11, she qualified for the westerns. In 1974 and 1975, representing Southfield High School, she was Michigan State High School Champion.

Twice she participated in the nationals and was ranked 10th in the westerns. She toured the Junior Tournament until she was 17, and had a sectional ranking at the time. As a number one singles and doubles player and a Big Ten doubles runner-up in 1976.

Jodi's serve has been clocked at 95 miles per hour but she said she had no particular strategy in her game against Laver.

"I just went to have a good time," she said. Recalling the play-by-play she said, "Rod won the first point when I made an error at the net. I won the second point. We had a couple of rallies going when I hit an approach shot to his backhand and he made a mistake at the net."

"I lost the third point with a long forehand shot and in the fourth point, I made another net error. Then we had a rally and I hit an approach shot down the line. He ran one way and I hit a volley in back of him to win the point."

SHE SAID the encounter ended with a picture session together, a sip of beer and then Laver returning to the court to face his next opponent.

Jodi was impressed, saying Laver was personable, nice and a real gentleman. "He took time to talk to people and was very warm. The crowd really responded to him."

Among other players was 16-year-old Mark Pinchoff, son of Franklin Racquet Club pro, Dean Pinchoff. Mark is only the best junior player in his age group in Michigan. Four games were scheduled but at 3-1 Laver and Pinchoff decided to play one more. The final score was 4-2 Laver although Pinchoff made some excellent shots.

In addition to playing the 16 tiebreakers, Laver conducted a doubles clinic by critiquing strategy and play used by four local pros in a sample doubles game. Playing were Dean Pinchoff, Jon Hainline, Brian Marcus and Rudy Hernando.

Concluding the evening were the awards to Oakland County winners. Laver presented the silver bowl to Open Division winners Brian Marcus and Nancy Davidson and silver framed pictures of the winning teams to A division winners Judge Berne and Chris Shol. B division winners Jennie Crawford and Paul Felix, and C division winners Marianne and John Sloan.

The winners go on to the Super Finals of Tennis and Crumpets at the Down River Racquet Club on Saturday, Oct. 1. Competes from Grosse Ile, Grosse Pointe and Dearborn will vie for the championship spots and the honor of being the best of 5,000 entered in the benefit.

OAKLAND COUNTY chairperson Julie McKnight said although it was a lot of work, the benefit was the largest and best it has ever been. She estimates the county earned \$20,000 and the total will be from \$80,000 to \$90,000 for the entire area.

"It's been great to have so many people involved in Tennis and Crumpets," she said. "The Rod Laver night was a huge success; first because it was a sellout and second because Rod was wonderful with the people. He wandered through the lobby meeting people and signing autographs. The evening was a perfect success."



Rod Laver serves one up at the Franklin Racquet Club. (Photo by Jack Margolis)

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