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ALASTAIR MARTIN: 1915 - 2010

Tennis Official Let Pros Play in Slams

By [STEPHEN MILLER](#)

One of the most dominant champions of an obscure and ancient racquet sport, Alastair Martin helped usher in the Open era of professional tennis.

Mr. Martin, who died Jan. 12 at age 94, was a top executive of the U.S. Lawn Tennis [Association](#) from 1967 to 1970, years when the distinction between professional and amateur players was abolished.

In previous years, only amateurs were permitted to play in the national tournaments sanctioned by the International Lawn Tennis Federation, known as Grand Slam events. Players who sought to make a living off the game turned professional and could take prize money, but were excluded from playing in Slams.

The upshot, says former U.S. champion Tony Trabert, was there was no way of telling who was the best in the world.

"I toured playing against Pancho Gonzales, but the market was not that good," says Mr. Trabert, who turned pro in 1955 after winning three of the four tennis majors.

With Mr. Martin helping spearhead the movement, Mr. Trabert recalls, the USLTA decided in 1968 to allow professionals to play in the U.S. Open.

On becoming USLTA president in 1969, Mr. Martin announced, "We're moving into tennis as a big business." Rod Laver, who had been closed out of the majors since turning pro after winning all four Grand Slams in 1962, returned to win all four Grand Slams once again in 1969, a feat unmatched since then.

Mr. Martin stood on the grass court at the 1969 U.S. Open to present Mr. Laver with the winner's check for \$16,000 and told the Australian champion, "You are the greatest in the world, perhaps the greatest we have ever seen."

The money has since gotten better.

The son of an investor who was linked to the Andrew Carnegie fortune and who helped finance the Forest Hills, N.Y., tennis stadium in the 1920s, Mr. Martin was eight-time national champion in the 1930s and 1940s in court tennis, an archaic form of the game played indoors. He was also nationally ranked as a tennis player.

As president of the USLTA (now the USTA—"Lawn" was removed in 1975), Mr. Martin instituted the tie-break rule in 1970. He also loudly supported Arthur Ashe when the U.S. No. 1 player was refused a visa to play in South Africa by the apartheid government.

Mr. Martin went on to become president of the International Tennis Hall of Fame, which inducted him as a member in 1973.

He collected art on a large scale, with a diverse collection ranging from Mayan artifacts to works of the eccentric American painter Albert Pinkham Ryder. Items from his Guennol Collection (Guennol being Welsh for Martin) were lent to museums, including the Brooklyn Museum, where Mr. Martin served as chairman of the board of governors.

Of art collecting, Mr. Martin once wrote, "The fundamental rule is this: If something gives you pleasure, buy it."

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