

# SPORTS BOARD

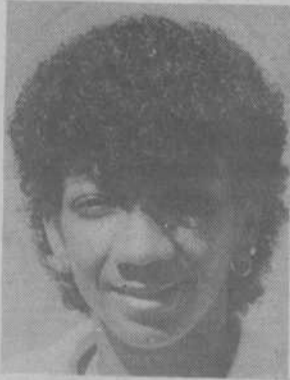
SPORTS, GAMING, HORSERACING

October 3, 1985



## SPORTS ON PARADE

By B.J. RICHARD



### Wall Springboard For James' Career

When Michael James was 15 years old, he swatted balls at a wall behind the Cleveland Avenue YMCA until the dead of night, disregarding taunts from classmates and orders from library attendants across the street. "Everybody thought I was crazy," he said. "People used to come out of the library from across the street and tell me to stop because I was disturbing everybody inside. But I'd keep hitting balls until they left. Those people never thought I'd get anywhere in tennis."

Those people in Alabama were wrong. Today 11 years later, James is the professional tennis instructor at Center Court Racquet Club in Las Vegas and the No. 1 ranked player in men's open singles and top-ranked in men's doubles. In Alabama, James is the former No. 1 singles player at Alabama State and Auburn University. The combination of confidence and ability has carried James to many prestigious titles. James' victories created some resentment.

There were some people

who didn't like a black man winning a tournament in which the previous winners had been white. "I faced a lot of racism," James said. "There were a lot of stereotypes and a black man winning totally blew some people's minds. A lot of those people hadn't been exposed to black people. There was a lot of hatred." He said there was also backlash from blacks. "There were blacks who wanted to see me lose worse than some of the whites," James continued. In high school he got a lot of hassle for playing tennis. "Everyone said we were gay. The football players pushed us around a lot. They called us cheerleaders in school," James recalled.

In spite of the hassles, dreams have come true for James but there are still dreams yet to be realized. "I want to get enough ATP points to qualify for a major event. "Some have said playing on the national or world class level is unrealistic. But to me, a challenge is everything. Take the challenge away and I quit," he further ventured.

#### TENNIS TALK

Tennis players take to the courts during the month of October with a busy

schedule. Kicking off the month is the fourth season of the Junior High League. The league is sponsored by the Southern Nevada Tennis Patrons Foundation. The league is for boys and girls in the 6th-9th grade. The deadline has passed, but if you are interested in getting involved, call 369-0031.

The Las Vegas Fall Open and Senior Tournaments kick off Oct. 10-13 at Spanish Oaks Tennis Club. Deadline for registration is Oct. 8. Divisions are Men's and Women's Open; Men's 35, 45, 55 singles and doubles; Women's 30, 40, 50 singles and doubles; Mixed open, Mixed 30, and Mixed 35. Fee is \$13 for singles and \$18 for doubles. Applications are available throughout the city. Call 878-5836 for more information.

October 12-14 Las Vegas will be invaded by hundreds of juniors from the intermountain section. They will be on hand for the first junior circuit tournament for 1985. Entry fee is \$25. The tournament is also the qualifying round for the Girls Seventeen Tournament. For more information call Matt McDougall 733-5341 or Hans Riehemann 733-4577.

Twin Lakes Racquet Club will host a citywide

### Holmes was never accepted as a full accepted champion

The sad thing about Larry Holmes is, he never really was the champ. Not in the sense that Jack Dempsey was. Or Joe Louis. Or Muhammad Ali.

He was one of the others.

You know. The guys who held the title in between the great ones -- Tommy Burns, Marvin Hart, Ezzard Charles, even Jess Willard. The whozits.

The world never forgave Larry Holmes for supplanting Muhammad Ali. But that's all right. Holmes never forgave the world, either.

The world never forgave Gene Tunney for beating Dempsey. But Tunney didn't care. He never wanted to be a hero to his bartenders or his shoeshine boy.

His stockbroker, maybe. Tunney was snob.

More details will follow in next issue. The Senior tournament sponsored by First Interstate Bank and Eastern Airlines (Sept. 30-Oct. 6) will be hosted at the Sands Hotel. Entry fee is \$30 for singles and \$36 for doubles. For more information call the Sands Tennis Shop.

He treated his pugilistic career as if he was slumming. He sat in a corner and read Shakespeare. He didn't date floozies and he thought Texas Guinan was vulgar.

He was an immigrant's kid from Greenwich Village but he never cared for the sensation. He courted aristocracy. He wore the most conservative clothes, drank the finest whiskies and was never seen at a lunch counter or a subway in his life. He went by yacht or private car whenever he could.

But he was a great fighter. Tunney was, the most underrated of his time. He lost only one fight but he avenged that four times over, and on his good nights he never even got his hair mussed.

Guys who fought him weren't sure what he looked like. He engineered a fight like a guy building a bridge. People only remember Dempsey had him down.

They forget Dempsey was down when that fight ended.

Larry Holmes was a good fighter but he never added the grace note. I used to think his trouble was that he tried to imitate Muhammad Ali and he didn't have the background for it.

The name-calling, the boasting, spouting and outrageous comment that came from Ali with a twinkle in the eye and was forgivable and seemed like good clean fun sounded sour and mean-spirited from Holmes. Ali was a lovable con man. Ali could sell you the Brooklyn Bridge. Holmes couldn't sell you bread in a famine.

Holmes made his graceless exit on a typical down note the other night.

He fingered the late champion, Rocky Marciano, whose record he just missed breaking but who never did him a bad turn in his life.

--by Jim Murray



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