

SPORTS BOARD

SPORTS, GAMING, HORSERACING

June 16, 1988



SPORTLIGHT

By R.L. Greene

PARIS—Don't look now, but another Black player has captured a Grand Slam tournament tennis title.

If you want to find it in your local daily newspaper, you'll have to look in the extra-small print, what's known in the newspaper business as agate type. There, along with men's singles champion Mats Wilander of Sweden and women's singles champion Steffi Graf is Lori McNeil of Houston.

Lori didn't do that well in the women's singles, the slow clay courts of Stade Roland Garros not being her favorite surface. She much prefers the fast grass at Wimbledon or the hardcourts at the U.S. Open.

But Lori, the daughter of former San Diego Chargers player Charlie McNeil

climbed the champions' steps at the French Open after she combined with Jorge Lozano of Mexico to capture the mixed doubles crown. That's the same title John McEnroe won to begin his rise to the top in tennis.

The Tex-Mex combination of Lori and Lozano defeated Brenda Schultz and Michiel Schapers of the Netherlands 7-5, 6-2 in the final.

Earlier this year, Lori's closest friend and former doubles partner, Zina Garrison, also of Houston, won the mixed doubles crown at the Australian Open, the first of the four tournaments that make up the Grand Slam. The others are the French Open, Wimbledon and the U.S. Open.

The latter tournament, the U.S. Open, is where Lori first became visible to the American public when, in a

nationally televised match, she upset Chris Evert, then ranked third in the world, and came within one missed forehand volley of defeating top-seeded Steffi Graf of West Germany in a semifinal match.

In 1986, Lori reached the quarterfinals at Wimbledon. Last year, she was a quarterfinalist at the Austrlain Open before her remarkable run at the U.S. Open.

She also won five doubles titles in 1987, teaming with Zina at the Canadian Open and New Orleans, and with Gigi Fernandez of Puerto Rico at Mahwah, N.J.; Newport, R.I., and the U.S. Indoors Championships.

In November, she was presented with the "Player on the Rise" award by the National Association for Female Executives (NAFE) for her on-court accomplishments.

NAFE, the largest and fastest growing businesswomen's organization in the country with membership available to all career-oriented women, gave the award to Lori because she "demonstrated tremendous improvement, good sportsmanship and true determination."

Lori has become a role model, and not just for Blacks or just for tennis players.

"Our admiration and respect goes out to Lori not only for her professional accomplishments, but also for her unwillingness to set limits on her professional growth," Wendy Reid Crisp, national director of NAFE, said when the award, a crystal "cathedral" sculpture, was presented to the right-hander. "Her achievements serve as an example for others to follow, and reflect what NAFE is all about — excellence in achieving career successes and financial independence."

At one time, Lori and Zina were a team. They had the same coach, John Wilkerson, who found both of them on the playgrounds in Houston. But since Lori zoomed up in the world rankings, now just one spot behind Zina, they have split up on the court but not in off-court activities.

Lori is now being coached by Willis Thomas, who had worked alongside Wilkerson. And now her schedule isn't dove-tailed with Zina's, which caused the two of them to meet frequently across the net.

"Zina always pushed Lori, so to keep up she had to ride Zina's coattails up the ladder," Thomas says. "But when their rankings got close, Zina straightened up a bit and put a little distance between them."

They have met once in a final, during a tournament in Tampa, Fla., in 1986, a match Lori won. At last year's U.S. Open, Lori again defeated Zina in singles play.

"It was terrible," Thomas remembers of the Tampa match. "It was just some-

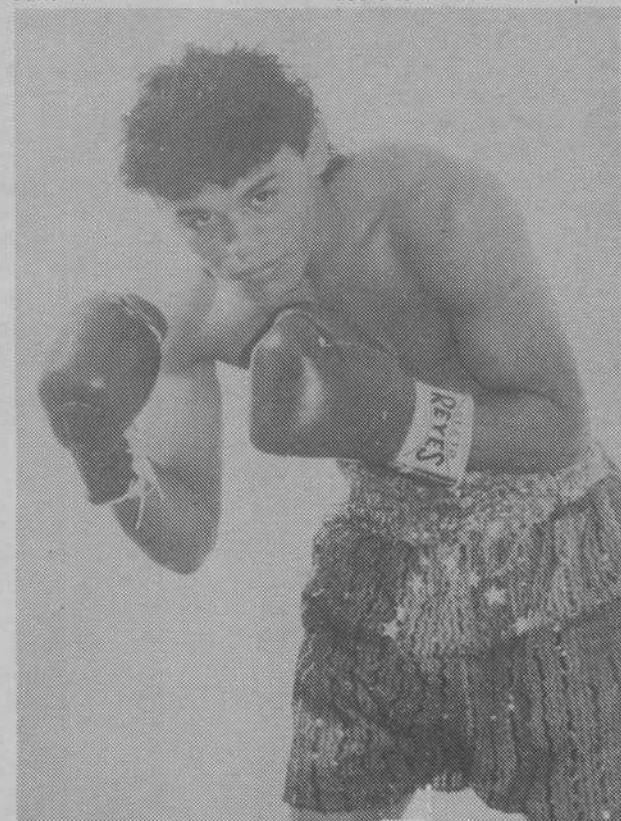
WORLD-RANKED, UNDEFEATED SLUGGER PEDROZA IN MAIN VS. JOHNSON FRIDAY, JUNE 17

Undefeated and world-ranked slugger Engels Pedroza of Long Beach, Calif., returns to the Showboat Hotel, Casino, Country Club and Bowling Center against Mike Johnson of Ann Arbor, Mich., in the 10-round main event of a special edition of "Boxing at the Boat" Friday June 17.

the World Boxing Association and No. 7 by the International Boxing Federation.

Johnson has a record of 15-1-1 with 10 knockouts, and could be Pedroza's toughest test yet.

This special "Boxing at the Boat" card starts at the usual time of 7 p.m. with doors to the Showboat Sports



Engels Pedroza

Pavi 's opening at 6.

The popular and much-heralded Pedroza has a record of 19-0 with 19 knockouts and is ranked No. 6 by

thing they weren't accustomed to. John and I also had to deal with what do we as coaches do? So we just let them play.

"Usually they don't play well when they have to play each other."

Lori didn't have to play Zina in the mixed doubles final at the French Open. It was a Dutch couple on the other size of the net.

And, by the end of the match, Lori had joined Althea Gibson, Arthur Ashe, Yannick Noah and Zina as Blacks who have captured Grand Slam tournament titles.

Tickets remain priced at \$12 for general admission and \$20 for ringside reserved. Tickets are on sale from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Saturday at the Showboat Sports Pavilion Ticket Office.

Also on the card prompted by the Showboat and assembled by matchmaker Mel Greb will be three Las Vegans: undefeated lightweight Jeff Mayweather, younger brother of World Boxing Council super lightweight champion Roger Mayweather, and unbeaten Kevin Grantham against Thomas Hundley in a middleweight bout.

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