

THE NEW YORK TIMES, MONDAY, AUGUST 23, 1993

-a satire by Douglas Alan Frank

Maine Island Classic Revels in Traditions

Special to The New York Times

GREAT CRANBERRY ISLAND, Aug. 22 - Most connoisseurs of the game of tennis consider it an unlikely setting: an island off the coast of Maine, two and a half miles long with one court surrounded by spruce trees and sleepy spectators. But once a year, in the middle of August - when it feels more like autumn in Tennessee - the Great Cranberry Island Tennis Club holds its tournament.

Nestled among the enthusiastic gallery this weekend could be found a variety of semi-famous residents. Among them was Stanley Seimer, the retired college professor who few people know was the runner-up for the Nobel Prize in Economic Science in 1976. "If I had won that Nobel, you'd be looking at a bubble over this court with a press box," stated Seimer. "Friedman wouldn't tell the press how he was going to invest the \$225,000 prize. He said if he told them it would no longer be a good investment. Well, I would have told everyone."

Fred Moss, President of the Cincinnati Stock Exchange, and current Vice President/Treasurer of the Club, describes tennis on the Island as, "pedestrian at best. But we are an elite, entitled private tennis club," he boasted. Moss spends more and more time playing golf in Northeast Harbor with rich Philadelphians. "My social climbing days are not entirely over," he humbly confessed.

Fleeting seen at courtside during quarterfinal matches was the famous Skadden Arps litigator, Rodman Ward, who has been summoned off the court on many occasions to receive bad news from juries and parole boards. "How about if I ask you the questions," he demanded. "Do you want to know why I wear button down shirts playing tennis?" This reporter turned off his laptop and told him our readers would never know.

Hans Noether, who will be seen on cable television this fall with the new talk show, "1,001 Serves," mingled among the gallery at the mixed-doubles finals exchanging recipes and anecdotes from past tournaments. Betty Hartley, the grand-dame of the Island and Cincinnati society, was unimpressed with the ingredients for Noether's hot crab dip. "I've seen them all," she demurred, "and the best do not have shallots. Excuse me - but you are stepping on my dog."

The mixed doubles was won by the most unlikely pair: an oboist, Sally Bloom, and a road construction consultant, Owen Roberts. Bloom's accurate shots and self-congratulatory court behavior complemented the machine-like performance of her partner. Roberts also won the men's singles, defeating his brother-in-law, Richard Pierson, whose wife, Kitty, won the women's singles fight. "The dominance of this one family in the tournament will be addressed next year," promised current club president, Frank Douglas. "I've ordered ankle and wrist weights for both Piersons and Owen Roberts. If that doesn't work we'll try sleep deprivation and sedatives."

I could not stay for the club's "Victory Party" which was rumored to be an orgy of fresh crab, finger sandwiches and island vegetables with ranch dressing, my favorite. I gazed back on the Island from the last mailboat and wondered what it was about this bizarre assortment of people that captured my imagination. Was it their nonchalant sense of self-importance? Or perhaps their inability to recognize that they cannot relive the athleticism of youth? Club President Frank may have summed it up best: "On our island we love the game beyond the prize."