



All the Best Podcast
Episode 33: “The Ranking Committee”
Featuring International Hall of Fame Tennis Superstar, Pam Shriver

Pam: Spring 1989. A photo taken after losing a doubles match to Jeb and Marvin. To Pam: Let me explain the bet. Love from these three Bush boys and the rest of the family, too. You're a champ. George H. W. Bush.

George H. W.: Well, first place, I believe that character is a part of being president.

Barbara: And life really must have joy.

Sam: This is "All the Best", the official podcast of the George and Barbara Bush Foundation. I'm your host, Sam LeBlond, one of their many grandchildren. Here, we celebrate the legacy of these two incredible Americans through friends, family, and the foundation. This is "All the Best".

Brad: We're Mountaineers, we're Volunteers
We're the Tide that rolls, we're Seminoles
Yeah, we're one big country nation, that's right

George H. W.: I remember something my dad taught me. He said, "Write your mother. Serve your country." And he said, "Tell the truth." And I've tried to do that in public life, all through it.

Brad: Yeah, we're one big country nation, that's right.

Barbara: You are a human being first and those human connections with children with friends are the most important investments you will ever make.

George H. W.: We stand tonight before a new world of hope and possibilities for our children, a world we could not have contemplated a few years ago.

Sam: On behalf of our family and the George and Barbara Bush Foundation, this is "All The Best".

Brad: Yeah, we're one big country nation, that's right.

Sam: Pam Shriver is revered as one of the greatest double players in history and is one of only six women players in the open air to surpass 100 career titles. She is a Grand Slam winner, Olympic gold medalist, and International Tennis Hall of Fame inductee. Pam befriended my grandfather, George H. W. Bush, back in the early 1980s where they faced off in many tennis matches. After forming their relationship, Pam became an active campaigner for my grandfather in the 1988 election and Pam continued to play tennis with our entire family throughout the years.

Following her playing days, Pam then embarked on a highly successful broadcasting career with several networks including ABC, CBS, and most notably with ESPN. Pam, thank you so much for joining us today and all the best.

Pam: Thank you so much, Sam, on the other coast from you. I'm in Los Angeles. It's a beautiful day, and I have three teams home. Like we all do, we're getting through this as best we can.

Sam: Pam, so much is known about your renowned tennis career, but I want to start on the personal side of the ledger because I don't think enough of our listeners know that you also hail from a family with national politics in its background. I read a story that, as a 10-year-old, you watched your distant cousin, Sarge Shriver, for whom our family always had such affection and respect, run on the 1972 democratic ticket with George McGovern. What do you recall from that time and did it have a big impact on you?

Pam: At 10 years of age, I actually remember a lot from that era. I grew up in Baltimore from the state as Sargent Shriver. I didn't know him growing up. We were pretty much distant cousins. I did get to know him more when I started to play the professional tour because the WTA and Special Olympics had a really good partnership but I just think Sargent Shriver, whenever you see your last name on a ticket, it certainly gets your attention whether you're 5 years old, 10 years old, or 20, or 57.

Sam: Well, success was not to be in that election but, 12 years later, you were the Maryland chairperson for the Reagan-Bush reelection campaign. Was that how you met my grandparents? How did that relationship evolve?

Pam: I turned 18 in 1980, and the first presidential-vice presidential ticket I could ever vote for was Reagan-Bush in 1980 and I think it's something special actually. When you're 18, you can vote and there's a presidential election. I just really admired both Pres. Reagan and Pres. Bush. I felt I had a connection with a love of sports. It seemed like a natural thing growing up and playing my tennis so close to Washington, D.C. that I wanted to be involved, and then that is how I met your grandfather because it was actually at the Washington, D.C. football club. They have a big dinner and they honor different athletes from different sports, not just football, and it was at that dinner, at that banquet table where I met Pres. Bush for the first time. That started a great friendship.

Sam: Well, my grandfather was famous or maybe infamous, as a better way of putting it, for his ranking committee by which a committee of one, him, assess the talent in our family when setting up family tennis matches. My grandfather was very much a kinder and gentler soul in much of his day to day life, but these assessments from the ranking committee were absolute and final. No complaints or appeals were tolerated. Did you ever encounter the ranking committee? Turning the tables on Gampy, how would you assess his game?

Pam: Well, first off, I do remember his rankings because your Uncle Marv and Gov. Jeb Bush, they were one and two. I'd say Marv was the best. Neil, George, they were sort of on the lower end of the sibling rankings. Your mom held her own, believe me. As far as Pres. Bush, the strengths of his game were his forehand and his first serve without a doubt—forehand and first serve. He used to have this word "power outage", a word he would use usually when he was ribbing somebody in his family or someone like myself, a guest, but his backhand and his second serve could have pretty serious power outages.

What I like was he could give as good as he could take, and it was just a lot of fun. Whenever I was around a family tennis match, I especially remember the ones at Camp David because they had two courts. Whenever you could have eight people out side by side, the verbal pings that were going on, they were priceless.

Sam: Well, Pam, in the Spring of 1989 after my grandfather became president, you and my grandparents, other wonderful friend, Chris Evert, played a unique match on Capitol Hill against two of my uncles. Would you share that story with our listeners?

Pam: Yes. It was just a couple of months, as you mentioned, into your grandfather's presidency and he'd always wanted to see how his two highest ranked sons would fair against Chris Evert, who had won 18 singles majors, quite a few doubles, and Pam. I had just finished my partnership with Martina

Navratilova. We were supposed to play at the White House but it rained that day so of course the president of the United States can get the court in Capitol right away. The court was cleared.

We ended up playing indoors on a much faster service. I'm not making excuses; I'm just giving reasons why Chrissie and I ended up losing the match 6-4 in the third set. We could not break your uncle's serves. They came down and they felt like 150 miles an hour. We couldn't break them. They were so happy to win a match in front of their dad who was now president so Chrissie and I, wink-wink, we were happy to help the Bush family along with that nice tennis moment.

I saw Jeb at your grandfather's funeral when Jim Nantz took charge of the athlete delegation, and we reminisced about that match.

Sam: That was a special week, and it was so nice of Jim to bring together all those sports figures who all had a connection with my grandparents in some way. It was great to hear the stories and celebrate my grandfather's life when you guys were there.

Well, looking at your incredible resume with 21 singles titles and 111 doubles titles, the impressive Fed Cup record and Olympic gold medal, what do you consider is the proudest moment or most important accomplishment of your career?

Pam: In the landscape of sports, it takes a lot to top an Olympic gold medal and I actually won it with somebody who was born and raised and still lives in Houston, Texas. That was Zina Garrison. My long-time partner, Martina Navratilova, decided not to compete in the Seoul Olympic games of 1988. Zina and I were a new partnership. We weren't as much of a sure thing, and we won the gold medal over the Czechoslovakia team and we won it 9-7 in the final set on our seventh match point. To have a gold medal put around your neck and represent your country is pretty special, but finals in the U.S. Open when I was 16, I'm still the youngest finalist ever, that was in '78, that was a lot of fun. Winning all those doubles majors with Martina and the Grand Slam in the mid-80s, meaning we won all four majors in one calendar year.

I never won a singles major. Doubles was more my thing, but I feel grateful to be in the International Tennis Hall of Fame in Newport where I also had a great moment with your grandparents because they came to present Chris Evert into the International Tennis Hall of Fame when she was inducted in the mid-90s. I feel blessed to have fallen in love with the sport of tennis when I was just a child.

Sam: Winning an Olympic gold medal is a huge accomplishment. Where do you keep your medal?

Pam: Two years after winning the gold medal, a good friend of mine who helped start women's professional tennis, Joe Cullman, he was being inducted in the International Tennis Hall of Fame and I used that occasion to donate it to Newport, Rhode Island and have it be at the museum because I really felt, especially since '88 was the first time tennis was back as a full metal sport in the Olympics since the '20s, because it was always seen as a professional sport and the Olympics for so many decades was just for amateur athletes. And then they changed that starting in the mid to late-80s. It's Newport, Rhode Island. I encourage, when we can all travel again, that people get up to see that great museum at the International Tennis Hall of Fame where Pres. Bush and Mrs. Bush had many of fun moments.

Sam: That's so nice of you to do that. Let's switch gears. What's the difference between being out there in the arena—in your case, on the court as a player—and calling the action as a broadcaster?

Pam: It's actually pretty easy because there's nothing I will ever know better than the sport of tennis. I was a pretty good student of the game when I played. I actually had the opportunity to first broadcast for CBS when I was just 19 years of age. They asked me, if I was finished with the tournament, if I would consider doing some broadcasting. I did. That was a really good example of, if you're given an opportunity when you're a top athlete, take it as long as it doesn't encroach too much on your training and your play because you never know what that opportunity will lead to when you retire because most of us have to retire from our sport way earlier than any other profession.

In 1990, when I was still playing the tour also, that's when I started to work for ESPN. I can't believe that's been now 30 years ago. We were lucky enough earlier this year to actually have our first major of the year down in Melbourne, Australia. It was actually difficult with the bush fires going on and we didn't know at the time what was developing to the north in China that would change the sporting landscape for this year and maybe next year. We're lucky that we at least got in one major in this difficult year of 2020.

Sam: Well, Pam, having served as president of the USTA Foundation and on the board of directors of the USTA, what's the state of the game today? Where do you see it going in the future?

Pam: Well, listen, it's a crowded, difficult competitive field out there to get families and kids interested in a sport like tennis. I feel like there are some great cities and programs and the USTA foundation help support NJTL chapters, that's afterschool programs in urban areas. To me, it's an unbelievable sport how global tennis is. It's the best professional sport for women. It has been since Billie Jean King in the Original 9 back in the early '70s helped march women's tennis towards equality as we have today in the four majors that are played.

I feel like tennis, as a global sport, is set up beautifully and I think there's going to be some exciting things coming after the pandemic in a way of merging the WTA and the ATP for a stronger player association. Tennis is in a great spot. It's just, in the United States, we just have to figure out how to market it a little bit better. I feel like tennis singles is a great social distance sports. We need to jump on this opportunity and get kids out playing because we know that parents want our kids to get out there and be active again. The sport has been around a long time but you have to be able to evolve, change, know how to bring young people in at a time when social media pulls at them, screen time, devices, gaming, e-sports. It's competitive but we have to be smart.

Sam: I can't help myself. I have to ask...I'd love to hear, from your point of view, maybe some up and coming women tennis players we should look out for. Is there anybody that catches your eye that you said, "You know what? This is the next great player in the game"?

Pam: Coco Gauff last year, starting in Wimbledon, when she came through qualifying at 15 years of age, really took Wimbledon by storm. She made it to the middle weekend. She beat Venus Williams in her first match, which was the most hyped first round women's match at a major in a long time and Coco carries herself beautifully. Her parents have done a great job. She also had a good run at the U.S. Open. She has an exciting game, very dynamic, fast. You sort of feel for the younger athletes. They have eyes on developing and playing their full calendar and all of a sudden now she's 16 just has to pause. It was such an unexpected pause.

I'll mention another young U.S. player, Sonya Kenin, who just won the Australian Open, the first major of 2020. She got up to four in the world. She's zoomed up the rankings. She had all the momentum in the world and again just to pause.

So, we're going to see what athletes mentally can handle this and come on the other side of the pandemic and pick things up hopefully where they left off because you would hate to see something like this interrupt the flow of

someone's career. On the other end, you wonder, "How many chances will Serena Williams have winning her 24th major? And same with Federer. He's not going to be able to play Wimbledon, his best surface, on grass as he chases 21 and he tries to distance himself from Rafael Nadal and Djokovic. It's an exciting time in professional tennis, and we all want to see it get started again.

Sam: You're not the only one. Pam, our theme on this podcast centers around service, and we've been so fortunate to talk to so many accomplice athletes for various sports for whom giving back to their communities and helping others is a core value. You've done a tremendous amount of charity work as well. For example, your annual charity tennis event in your hometown of Baltimore raised \$4 million for the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation. More recently you've been active with the First Break Academy in California. What else are you doing and why is this important to you?

Pam: There are so many great causes we can all help, especially right now in the middle of a pandemic. You mentioned First Break Academy. That's an afterschool program in Carson that's an NJTL chapter under the umbrella of the USTA Foundation. I don't think we can have enough afterschool safe programming that includes tutoring and includes great sports like tennis. I'm involved with WTA charities. I'm on the board there, and that's basically the whole professional women's tennis world, all the different things they do. There's a lot of great public service.

I feel like tennis has had some athletes like Arthur Ashe, Billie Jean King, Andre Agassi. Chris Evert's had her own charity event. Actually your grandfather played in Chrissie's charity event year after year and supported that. You always want to have a great service. As a tennis player, it really helps but then you want to be of service. I feel like we've done that very well as a sport and as individuals.

Sam: Pam, first thank you so much for spending time with us on "All the Best". It's so great to catch up and hear all your amazing stories but I'd like to end with this. Are there any other memories of my grandparents you would like to share?

Pam: Well, there's one doubles match that I didn't talk about yet. It was at the Naval Observatory when your grandfather was vice president. Mrs. Bush was watching this match as well. The crown prince of Japan was in D.C., and he loved tennis. He actually met his wife, the empress, at the tennis club in Tokyo. The crown prince wanted to play a doubles match. I was off-tour at the moment. I was invited to come up from Baltimore, and we played a doubles match against your grandfather and then Secretary of State George Shultz. It was George and George against the crown prince and Pam.

The mixed doubles team ended up winning fairly comfortably. It was 6-3, 6-2. Not as much verbal ribbing going on when you have the crown prince of Japan on the court. He was very serious, but he could really play. That was a fun match. Always at the Naval Observatory, when your grandfather was vice president, it was some of the most relaxed, fun times that we would enjoy before and after a tennis match.

Sam: Pam, thank you for sharing your stories with us today. Thanks for joining us on "All the Best".

Pam: Thank you very much.

Sam: I'm Sam LeBlond, reminding you to listen, share, and subscribe to "All the Best" on Apple Podcast, Spotify, and everywhere great podcasts are found. Thank you for joining me as we celebrate "All the Best".

Brad: Yeah, we're one big country nation, that's right.

Barbara: Both George and I believe that, while the White House is important, the country's future is in your house, every house all over America.

George H. W.: Preparedness, strength, decency, and honor, courage, sacrifice, the willingness to fight, even die, for one's country. America, the land of the free and the brave. And God bless the United States of America. The greatest country on the face of the Earth.

