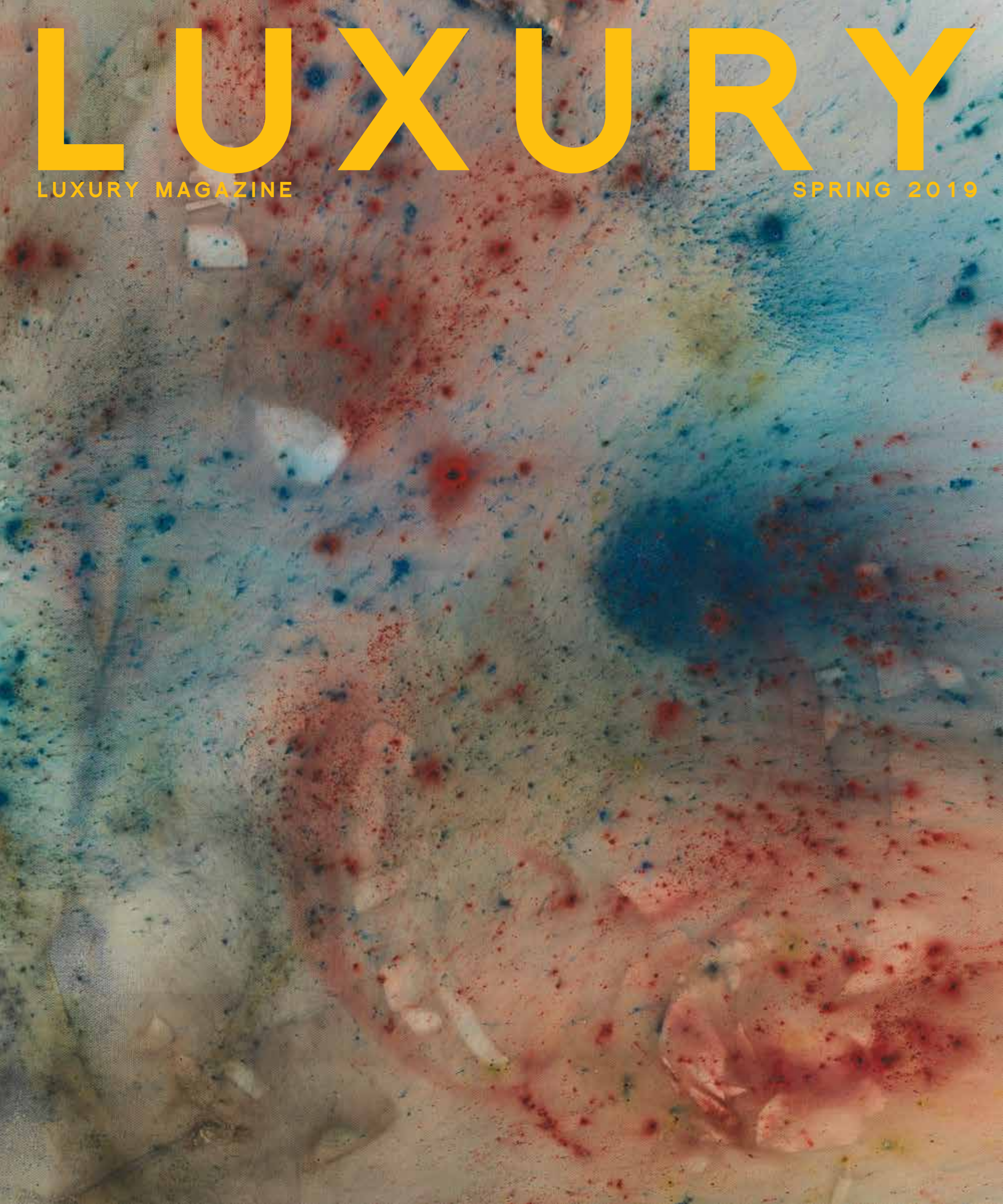


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TENNIS, ANYONE?

NOTHING MATCHES THE THRILL OF YOUR OWN RACQUET-TO-RACQUET ENCOUNTERS, ON COURT AND OFF, WITH CURRENT AND FORMER CHAMPIONS.

by Roger Cox

Jay Reilly/Aurora Photos

Completing a personal Grand Slam by attending the four major international tennis tournaments—the Australian Open, Roland-Garros (the French Open), Wimbledon, and the US Open—is one thing. Playing the game with Grand Slam legends is another. Loosely dubbed “tennis fantasy camps,” these multiday events combine on-court instruction with professional athletes, clinics with former world No. 1 players, pro-am tournaments, and R&R in Switzerland and Texas, the Caribbean and Hawaii. ▶



THE ALPS WITH AN AUSSIE

Roy Emerson Tennis Weeks ● Gstaad Palace, Gstaad, Switzerland



Before Roger Federer won more Grand Slam singles titles than any male player in history, he topped Pete Sampras' record, who bested the count of Australian Roy "Emmo" Emerson—record holder for a whopping 33 years. And that's not to mention Emmo's success at doubles, which brings his Grand Slam count up to 28; still higher than anyone else's total, ever.

Now you can find the 82-year-old legend in Gstaad, Switzerland, for six or seven weeks each summer hosting an international gathering of enthusiastic amateurs drawn to the red-clay courts at the historic hotel Gstaad Palace. Emmo fell for the alpine valley and turreted, family-run hotel in the 1960s, when it was the site of the Swiss Championships (now the Swiss Open), a tournament he won five times. Slim, quick, and athletic while on the tour, the 6-foot-tall player is hampered by bad knees, but nonetheless shows up for every one of the five-hour days when campers are on

the court. Everyone benefits from his personal attention and acerbic asides: "Quite a few of you were working on how to hit a forehand with the least amount of footwork," he'll joke.

Campers are grouped by level (never more than four to a court) and, in addition to Emmo, work with a team of talented, often multilingual pros, usually at least one of whom competed on the tour. The camaraderie continues off court as Emmo, his wife Joy, and the teaching staff join guests nightly for four-course feasts. During a break midweek for a catered picnic amid jagged peaks at a high-alpine dairy farm, owner Ruedi Wehren often entertains on the accordion as his wife, Helen, serves their homemade cheeses. The week concludes with a farewell feast capped by a full-throated Emmo leading everyone in the Aussie standard "Waltzing Matilda." From \$4,200/person for six nights, including meals and five hours of tennis daily. royemersontennisweeks.com



THE HILL COUNTRY WITH HALL OF FAMERS

Tennis Fantasies ● John Newcombe Tennis Ranch, New Braunfels, Texas

Each October, former world No. 1 player John Newcombe gathers his former rivals and cohorts to mix with a hundred or so enthusiastic, racquet-wielding men at Newcombe's 28-court Texas Hill Country tennis ranch for five days of coaching, competition, reminiscences, camaraderie, banter, photo ops, locker-room humor, and world-class trash talk.

The cast comes straight from the who's who of tennis legends, including Roy "Emmo" Emerson, Rod Laver, Fred Stolle, and Owen Davidson—all inductees into the International Hall of Fame. Participants, who range in age from 20 to 80, are drafted onto teams and compete for pride and end-of-week bragging rights in singles and doubles as

their captains (74-year-old Newcombe, Stolle, Emmo, and Davidson) and a supporting cast of other world-class pros provide pointers and pep talks.

Woven into the week's fabric are lectures and demonstrations of strokes, instructional clinics, and one-on-one coaching sessions from each of the legends. After dinner in the Billabong bar, a panel of these tennis greats reminisce about fabled matches, Davis Cup ties, hated opponents, or the current crop of players, ever exposing their indefatigable devotion to the game, and each other.

There is also a co-ed Tennis Fantasies weekend in early March with Newcombe, Emmo, Davidson, and Ross Case that is open to singles, couples, and groups. It

incorporates the same team-competition format, amenities, and on- and off-court opportunities to hang out with the legends (though without the trash talk, locker-room shenanigans, and swag). From \$4,945/person for five nights, all-inclusive in October; from \$1,470/person for three nights, all-inclusive in March; tennisfantasies.net >

This page: In addition to 28 courts, the John Newcombe Tennis Ranch features a large pool and spa.
Opposite: Opened in 1913, the iconic Gstaad Palace offers breathtaking views of the Swiss Alps and red-clay court instruction with Australian legend Roy "Emmo" Emerson.



From Top: Courtesy Tennis Fantasies; istock/myshooter. Opposite Page: Courtesy Roy Emerson Tennis Weeks (2)

THE BVI WITH CELEBRITY PROS

Manuka Doctor Necker Cup
● Necker Island, British Virgin Islands

Billionaire entrepreneur Sir Richard Branson hosts this exclusive pro-am tournament on his private island and invites a who's who of current and former WTA and ATP pros as participants (the cast has included Björn Borg, Novak Djokovic, Rafael Nadal, Martina Navratilova, and the Bryan brothers). On Necker as much to chill as to compete, the stars mingle with guests on and off the court, and for the select group of guests who sign up to play in the tournament, the connections become even tighter.

Each pro takes up to two guests under his or her wing and plays with or coaches them in a team competition that is handicapped in a way to make it fun for every level of player. Meanwhile, those unable to secure a slot in the tournament can opt for a tennis or golf camp. Everyone gathers on the final afternoon for the Necker Cup finals and a pro exhibition; a charity dinner; and an auction followed by the spirited End of the World party headlined in years past by Kenny Chesney, Jamie Foxx, and Jimmy Buffett.

Cup participants stay in the Great House on Necker Island or on nearby Mosquito Island and, tennis courts aside, have access to the beach, pool, water sports, a zip line, and massages. Tennis and golf campers spend one day on Necker enjoying the island's amenities, and otherwise have the run of Oil Nut Bay and the boutique yacht *SeaDream II* anchored offshore to host overnights and meals. Proceeds from the weekend and auction fund Virgin Unite (rebuilding the BVI in the wake of recent hurricanes) and the National Tennis Foundation. From \$122,000/couple for five nights, all-inclusive for the Necker Cup Experience, which includes one entry to the Necker Cup main draw, an opportunity to partner with the celebrity players and pros, and lodging on Necker or Mosquito Islands; from \$19,995/couple for five nights, all-inclusive for the Tennis/Golf Camp Experience, which includes lodging aboard the *SeaDream II* yacht; neckercup.com



Clockwise from above left: A doubles match at the Necker Cup; Sir Richard Branson and friends; Necker Island's beach pool; Mats Wilander's traveling tennis clinic; Wilander as coach; serving it up; Necker Island's beach pavilion tennis court.

Courtesy Images Clockwise From Top Left: Necker Cup/Take Aim Photography (8). Opposite Page, From Top: Courtesy Wilander on Wheels (2); Sandro Di Carlo/Alamy (3)



HOME-COURT ADVANTAGE

Need something more flexible? Former world No. 1 and eight-time Grand Slam champion Mats Wilander will come to you, pulling up in his 37-foot RV and setting up shop either at your local club or on a private court.

Co-piloted by Cameron Lickle, who served as a nuclear officer and also played No. 1 for the US Naval Academy, Wilander on Wheels takes to the road 40–50 times a year, delivering a choreographed repertoire of drills that reflect Wilander's philosophy that "tennis is a running game, not a hitting game." A speedy and dogged back-courter in his early career, Wilander emphasizes footwork, believing that learning to move pays greater dividends than focusing on technique. Be forewarned: These are not hit-and-giggle sessions. A typical drill sends campers scrambling to retrieve a wide feed then racing to get back in position for yet another nearly unreachable ball. It sounds demanding yet this hardworking duo manages

to make it fun. The most basic booking includes two 60-minute clinics and packages that can be customized to add an exhibition, private lessons, and social time over lunch or dinner.

Alternatively, if you're attending the Australian Open, Roland-Garros, or the US Open, Wilander can be available there



for one-hour sessions. Lickle has an affiliation with several other world-class pros—the feisty former world No. 1 Jimmy Connors among them—who can be booked individually. From \$7,000 for two 60-minute sessions for up to eight participants; wilanderonwheels.com



THE CARIBBEAN WITH A GRAND SLAM TRIO

Antigua Tennis Week ● Curtain Bluff, Antigua

The Caribbean’s longest-running tennis festival takes place each spring at Curtain Bluff, the 72-room hideaway on Antigua’s southwestern coast. What began as a professional tournament in 1975 has morphed into Antigua Tennis Week, when an international crowd of 40 or so jets in to play with and learn from former World No. 1 Fred Stolle and two other amiable Aussies: Owen “Davo” Davidson and Ross Case. The trio collectively own 34 Grand Slam singles, doubles, and mixed doubles titles.

Together they offer a smorgasbord of daily tennis options—cardio tennis workouts, stroke-and-strategy clinics, pro-am round robins, men’s and women’s doubles tournaments, a Team Fred vs. Team Davo competition, and social mixers—supplemented by pro exhibitions, with Stolle as emcee; a handicapped tiebreak shootout; and a target-tennis contest (the latter two for lavish prizes). All of this takes place on the resort’s four hard courts, just steps from the calm, reef-protected waters of Bay Beach.

The week kicks off May 4, with a cocktail party the following evening at owner Chelle Hulford’s house high on a bluff overlooking the Caribbean, and concludes there Friday night with an awards ceremony and charity auction. From \$7,200/person, all-inclusive; curtainbluff.com



Clockwise from above: Antigua’s Curtain Bluff resort and Bay Beach; the 1,500-acre Wailea Resort on the Hawaiian island of Maui; the courts at Wailea Tennis Club; the full-service tennis center at Curtain Bluff.

From Top: Courtesy Curtain Bluff (2), Opposite Page: Courtesy Topnotch Tennis Tours (2)



A HAWAIIAN ISLAND WITH A US CHAMP

Topnotch Fantasy Tennis Camps ● Wailea Resort, Maui, Hawaii

A pathway lined with lava-rock walls and magenta bougainvillea winds down a hillside to the 11 hard courts of the Wailea Tennis Club on Maui. Part of the multifaceted, 1,500-acre Wailea Resort, the club looks out to the ancient whaling anchorage of Lahaina Roads, the island of Lanai, and the verdant slopes of the West Maui Mountains—surroundings

not especially conducive to keeping your eye on the ball.

Over five days in November, campers spend five hours a day with three-time Grand Slam winner and television commentator Tracy Austin and a team of top ATP and WTA pros. The team conducts clinics, chalk-talks, pro exhibitions, and pro-am games

throughout the week, and their students retreat in between to ocean view rooms at the Four Seasons Resort Maui. There’s also Wailea Beach, three saltwater pools, and a state-of-the-art spa to enjoy. From \$5,995/person for four nights, including daily tennis clinics, a welcome cocktail party, a farewell dinner, and airport transfers; fantasytenniscamps.com >





FESTIVALS AND FUNDRAISERS

Current A-list tennis pros can be elusive, constantly competing or training. Some do, however, participate in tennis festivals and charity events that include exhibitions in intimate stadiums for a small group of spectators. Those events typically sell VIP packages, which bundle premium seating for the matches with the opportunity to participate on court and to socialize afterward at cocktail parties and galas.

The 30th Chris Evert/Raymond James Pro-Celebrity Tennis Classic

Names from the worlds of sports and entertainment—like Martina Navratilova, Seal, Jon Lovitz, and David Cook—join former world No. 1 Chris Evert for three days of festivities to raise money for at-risk families throughout Florida. The November event kicks off Friday with a pro-am and lunch with Evert (\$5,000) and cocktail reception (\$100) at the Boca Raton Resort & Club in Boca Raton, Florida, and continues over the weekend with pro-celebrity matches at the Delray Beach Tennis Center on Saturday and Sunday. A gala dinner dance and silent auction (\$750) at the Boca Raton Resort on Saturday evening features live entertainment (rock band Blood Sweat & Tears played the event in 2018). chrisevert.org

Tennis With the Stars

In March, before the BNP Paribas Open in Indian Wells, California,

ESPN commentator Cliff Drysdale (member of the International Tennis Hall of Fame) lures a handful of the tournament's players and coaches to the Omni Rancho Las Palmas Resort & Spa in Rancho Mirage for an afternoon of adult and junior clinics, a King of the Court competition, and a pro exhibition capped by a VIP meet-and-greet and dinner to raise money for ACEing Autism and Desert Arc (providing opportunities for people with disabilities). From \$2,500, including VIP all-access tickets and time on court with pros; tenniswithstars.com

Desert Smash

Also during the BNP Paribas Open in March, the star-studded Desert Smash event headlines Serena Williams alongside players from the tournament and a medley of sports and entertainment celebrities. Playing on the sunken clubhouse court at La Quinta Resort & Club, guests can sign up to join the marquee names in Tennacity: a high-energy, King of the Court contest. The rest of the day unfolds with lunch, celebrity interviews on the red carpet, a pro-celeb exhibition (with optional VIP courtside seats and cocktail lounge), a cocktail reception, and an after-party benefiting the featured pro's chosen charity. From \$3,500, including one Tennacity player spot, a pair of courtside seats, lunch for two, and a pair of VIP tickets to the after-party. desertsmash.com ♦



From top: Desert Smash in Palm Springs; Tennis With the Stars in Rancho Mirage; the Chris Evert/Raymond James pro-celeb classic; Serena Williams at Desert Smash.

Courtesy Images Counter-Clockwise From Bottom: Desert Smash/Shouber David (2); The 30th Chris Evert/Raymond James Pro-Celebrity Tennis Classic/Camerawork, USA; Tennis With The Stars/Cliff Drysdale; Tennis/Joey Hanf



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