

RENÉE RICHARDS

b. August 19, 1934

“I made the fateful decision to go and fight the legal battle to be able to play as a woman and stay in the public eye and become this symbol.”

Dr. Renée Richards became a transgender icon in 1977 when she won a lawsuit against the United States Tennis Association. Richards sued the USTA for its refusal to let her compete in the U.S. Open women’s division following male-to-female gender reassignment surgery. In a landmark decision, the New York Supreme Court ruled in Richards’s favor.

Richards started playing tennis at an early age. Ranked among the top-10 Eastern national juniors, she won the Eastern Private Schools’ Interscholastic singles title at age 15. She captained her high school tennis team at the Horace Mann School in New York City and Yale University’s men’s tennis team in 1954.

In 1959, Richards graduated from University of Rochester Medical School. After serving in the Navy as a Lieutenant Commander, she pursued a career in ophthalmology and eye surgery while continuing to compete in tennis tournaments.

At the height of her tennis career, Richards ranked 20th in the nation. In her first tennis tournament as a female, she reached the semifinals in the U.S. Open women’s doubles competition. Following retirement, Richards coached tennis star Martina Navratilova. In 2000, the USTA inducted Richards into its Hall of Fame.

Richards has published two autobiographies: “Second Serve Renée” (1986), which was made into a TV movie, and “No Way Renée: The Second Half of My Notorious Life” (2007). She is a renowned eye surgeon and professor of ophthalmology at New York University School of Medicine.

Renée Richards is a transgender pioneer who, in 1977, successfully sued the United States Tennis Association for denying her participation in the U.S. Open.



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