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Thursday, February 05, 2009

Shattering the competition

Bondurant Mixson partner hasn't let smashing through a glass racquetball court wall keep him from playing

By Tammy Lloyd Clabby, Special to the Daily Report

Closing in on the final points of the match, the fiercely competitive Tim Rigsbee sprinted to the back wall of the glassed-in racquetball court to get at the ball that he knew could break the tie with his frequent opponent and law firm colleague Geoff Frost.

"I jumped up with my back and arm extended and my back hit the 10-foot glass door. It sounded like an explosion, the door crumpled and I landed on big piles of glass."

Though Frost claimed the point advantage, Rigsbee adds proudly, "And I did return that ball."

A partner and commercial litigator at Bondurant, Mixson & Elmore, Rigsbee, 41, tries to play a racquetball match two to three times a week, having rediscovered the game he learned as a boy under the tutelage of an athletic mom.

"If I won she would let me pick out what we would have for dinner," he says, recalling his youth in California where the game was especially popular in the 1970s and '80s.

This was no small prize for a boy who competed against two brothers, both athletically and academically.

"We would compete for who would finish dinner first when we were kids. Now, with the addition of two brothers-in-law, we might compete—not for money—but maybe what barnyard animal noise you have to make at dinner if you lose the annual Thanksgiving Day golf outing!"

Rigsbee, who also enjoys basketball and golf, recently recounted that fateful day on the court last fall and his thoughts on the game and competition.

Q: I thought that could not happen, that you really could not go through the glass on those courts?

A: That's two of us! I got up and was brushing it all off. I had a lot of blood mixing with sweat and I looked like something out of the movie "Carrie." Everyone stopped, of course, and were just staring. I could tell by their faces that I must have looked bad.

Q: Were you seriously injured?

A: I was very fortunate. I had little cuts all over, enough to bleed but I did not get medical treatment.

I landed half in and half out of the court. The door had three hinges and when the door gave way those were left sticking out with broken glass, like little saws. If I had hit one of those it could have been very bad. So I went and took a shower, and they closed down the area because of all the little pieces of glass. I returned to the court and asked what the score was. Geoff claimed it had been 10-10 and he took that last point which I always thought was outrageous!

Q: So you continued play. Did you win?

A: I absolutely did! That's the best part of the story, even though there were still little pieces of glass on me and even coming out of my hair.

Q: So you like to play one on one?

A: It's a fun game. It's like a chess match, trying to play shots where the other guys can't get a "kill shot" or set up a shot

you want to get your kill shot.

Q: What do you play to?

A: Fifteen points wins and you must win by two. Those last points can make it really intense. I like to play ceiling shots, one that bounces high and comes in to a back corner (of the court) trying to force the other player to dig it out and maybe put it in a place where I can get my own kill shot.

Q: What is the "kill shot?"

A: Essentially one that rolls off the front wall. That's hard to get at.

Q: Are you in good shape? It seems very aerobic?

A: I always played a lot of sports and pretty well. I'm certainly not an Atlas, not skinny either. Racquetball does require a lot of strength and fitness.

Q: What about your equipment, is it expensive?

A: Not so much so. You can get a starter racket for \$20 to \$30. Last year I got a more expensive one for about \$100. You can wear any type of tennis shoes. You know, it's like basketball. You can buy Michael Jordan shoes, but that does not mean you'll play like Michael Jordan. You should wear goggles, though I was not wearing them that day. I frequently get too sweaty and they fog up, but I don't want to tell people not to wear the goggles.

Q: Without them, is the speeding ball a danger?

A: Actually the most injuries are from being smacked by a racket. When you are jockeying for position it's easy to catch a racket in the head. I've seen guys get lots of stitches from that. Really, the most expensive part might be to join a gym. But it's a great sport and easy to find someone at your level, then you can just get into it.

Q: Do you watch your weight and other health statistics?

A: I don't keep up with the numbers. I love competing. It's more about that than keeping fit and trim.

I probably should watch the health issues. I have a high stress job and should worry more, but I love playing. That's really what I like about the sports I'm involved in.

Q: After crashing through the door, did the incident change your feeling for the game or make you fearful of the glass court?

A: Not so much. Now, people I play with know not to get between me and the glass wall.



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