

**MELBOURNE HERALD TRIBUNE  
WEEKEND PEOPLE**

By Megan Miller

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**MY BRILLIANT CAREER**

She has helped shape the career of several tennis greats and counts the sporting elite among her friends. For Australian-born sports agent Karen Scott Happer, it all began with a trip to Wimbledon as a newly crowned beauty queen almost 40 years ago.

TENNIS young gun Andy Roddick found his wife in the pages of Sports Illustrated swimsuit edition.

He proposed to bikini model Brooklyn Decker four months later after getting his agent to track down her number. They tied the knot in April. Roddick's long-time friend, Sir Elton John, was the wedding singer.

Karen Scott Happer tells the story to show the power of celebrity in the tennis world.

For more than 30 years, the Australian-born sports manager - think a female Jerry Maguire with the same megawatt smile - has worked with the tennis elite on and off the court and rubbed shoulders with the sport's A-list aficionados such as Vogue high-priestess, Anna Wintour and the crocodile rocker.

Her beauty may have got her into tennis, but her brain has kept her in the game all this time.

When the now Florida-based Aussie triumphed in the Miss Australia Tennis Quest beauty pageant, she won a trip to Wimbledon.

The next year; 1973, she chaperoned her successor to the strawberries-and-cream championships, where she forged friendships that remain today.

After the breakdown of her first marriage, Happer returned to Melbourne from South-East Asia, where she'd been living, to take a job as tournament manager of the Australian Open.

With a background in sports marketing, she held the role from 1977 to 1980, a post never before held by a woman. She says she's still the only woman to have managed a Grand Slam.

"It's sad because there are so many talented women out there," Happer says. "They are not getting the opportunity because maybe, just maybe, the national associations are too stodgy to invest in women."

“Women are so creative and they will look at all angles to promote it. We think outside the square”.

Though Happer has been instrumental in changing the face of tennis with her marketing and sponsorship ideas and helping to elevate the Open from being a “poor cousin”, she believes more money in the game has been a double- edged sword.

“It’s a much more sterile environment and it’s all created by money. The money is so incredible that (players) are so much more serious about it.”

Happer would throw players’ parties at her South Yarra digs, and cook dinner and play surrogate mum to those who missed the comforts of home while on tour.

“I gave Tracy Austin her 21st birthday. She was living with me then and working with Tony Roche who’s still coaching successfully. ‘The players were much more approachable in those days.

‘That’s not to say anything bad about them now, but there’s so much money involved. The agents protect them so much that they don’t have the freedom and they are not allowed to enjoy themselves as much because they could lose an endorsement.

‘They are more disciplined today because of the amount of money involved.’”

Happer’s Taste of Tennis event aims to make players appear more accessible, and get them into the social as well as sports pages.

After “a bout with breast cancer” three years ago, she scaled down her commitments to looking after the career of long-time friend, US tennis legend Jimmy Connors; and later running a Hall of Fame event with Ivan Lendl at New York’s Madison Square Garden and bringing Taste of Tennis to Melbourne.

“I just wiped the slate clean except for Jimmy”, she says. “When I came back I could see the bad times coming so I thought I’d work on events that are recession-proof if there’s such a thing.”

She joined forces with the Learner sisters, who had run Taste of Tennis at the US Open for 10 years, convincing them food and sport-mad Melbourne would be the ideal place for the event to leave the Big Apple for the first time.

“I found out from (Australian Open tournament director) Craig Tiley that 80 per cent of the people who go to the Open come from Melbourne, 10 percent from the rest of Australia and 10 per cent from overseas — it’s the perfect mix” Happer says.

Melbourne hosted its first Taste of Tennis at this year’s Open, and aces, including Roddick, teamed with celebrity chefs such as George Calambaris and Guy Grossi to

make dinner for 600 guests at the Grand Hyatt. The money went to the Starlight Children's Foundation.

Happer is in town to secure talent for a bigger and better event next year. It fits with the synergy between tennis and food in Melbourne she says. Just about every player seems to have their favourite noshery, whether its Roddick at Nob U, Leyton Hewitt at South Yarra's Fiesta Mexican or Marcos Baghdatis downing souvas at open all-hours Greek eatery Stalactites.

"Tennis players love to get to know the top chefs so they always have a good seat at their restaurant for the two weeks of the Open," Happer says.

"And the chefs love to hang with the tennis players. Let's face it, if I'm Guy Grossi and I have (Fernando) Verdasco sitting out the front of Florentino every night it's a good look".

Likewise, Gucci is a good look for Happer. I commented on her designer handbag, which was a Mother's Day gift to her from Connors. "We were in New York for a promotion and I glanced at it in a shop window as we were walking down Fifth Avenue," she says. "He said. 'That's all you', but I said 'Gucci's a little bit out of my price range. I'd just gotten over breast cancer. It was early May and the bag arrived at my home the next week, saying 'Happy Mother's/Best Friend's Day Welcome back to good health.'"

The two met when Happer opened the Aussie arm of American sports management company Pro Serve in 1980.

The business looked after- Connors, Pam Shriver; Lendl, Austin and basketball pro Michael Jordan.

After Connors made an improbable run to the US Open semi-finals at the age of 39, he and Happer began the senior's tour in 1993.

By 1996, it had grown to 22 events world-wide.

Happer also struck the deal in 2006 for Connors to coach Roddick.

They parted ways last year.

"The worst person in the world to put with Jimmy Connors, who 's considered to be one of the greatest competitors of all time is someone with natural ability, which Andy has, but doesn't want to work 365 days of the year" she says.

"He wants the playboy life and there's nothing wrong with that, but it 'doesn't work for Jimmy. But they parted great friends."

Happer also negotiated for Connors to commentate at Wimbledon for the BBC and to be the colour- commentator for the US Open in August.

She vows she'll push for him to work at Rod Laver Arena one day once Jim Courier's contract with Oz Open broadcaster Channel 7 expires.

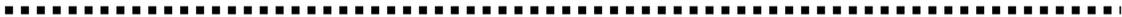
"Channel 7 wasn't interested in him, but they should have been. They'd already signed Jim Courier and didn't want two American boys at an Australian event."

Such is her passion for tennis that Happer will stay in the US, her second home for the past 21 years.

"Tennis is my life. I have played since I was, well, a lot younger and still play a couple of times a week," she says.

"I can do in the States things I could never do here and that's governed by the population – 300 million people in America. There are so many more diversions you can take."

Like calling your agent for the number of your future wife.



**KAREN SCOTT HAPPER ON:**

**Ex-tennis champ Chris Evert marrying Greg Norman:**

When I told Jimmy Connors (who was engaged to Evert in the 70s) about it, his glasses fogged up. They seem to be very happy.

**Leyton Hewitt:**

He's not a brat. He's misunderstood. Perhaps he should have had a PR company looking after him. He's a bit like (John) McEnroe. They were disgusting on the court sometimes, but they never let their country down and were always available to play Davis Cup.

**Maria Sharapova's grunting:**

It just drives everyone nuts. I think Monica Seles started it and it's become mainstream now. It's a shame because it's so unattractive. As a spectator, it is distracting. I walk away from it. It does annoy a lot of the other players. You don't hear the men do it.

**Pushy tennis parents like Damir Dokic:**

My husband used to be head of the US Tennis Association and there were several occasions when he had to get parents escorted from the court. Remember Mary Pierce? Her father had a gun one day at the US Open and Marshall had him escorted off the premises. You only have to look at Jelena Dokic and it's this deer-in-the-headlights face. She's a very gifted player.

**The lack of Aussie tennis talent rising through the ranks:**

Australia is in the depths like America is. There are no up-and-comers in America either. What's happened – and it's no fault of Australia or America – it's the French, the Spaniards, the Argentines and Russians have spent a fortune on junior development and all of a sudden kids came out of the woodwork and we've fallen behind.