

### **Jack Jones, Women's Professional Tennis Pioneer**

Jack Jones, the co-founder and promoter of the groundbreaking Family Circle Tennis Cup has died. He was 97.

Jack was a multi-talented tennis promoter, TV producer and business executive. Though he'll be most recognized for his contribution to women's tennis his love for the game was exceeded only by his love and devotion to his family. He revelled in their achievements and was steadfast in his support for every member of the close-knit family. He thrived watching his children form families of their own.

Launched in April of 1973, The Family Circle Cup was the first exclusively women's professional tennis tournament that offered prize money commensurate with what male professionals were earning at the time; which predated the United States Tennis Association's much publicized equal pay initiative.

Conceived and promoted with John Moreno, this tournament, primarily held at Sea Pines Plantation on Hilton Head Island, SC, was broadcast on NBC virtually every year the tournament was run under Jack Jones' direction. In fact, 1973 marked the first time a women's tennis event was ever broadcast on network television. The broadcast provided consistent and brilliant coverage of the sport, contributing to women's tennis' increasing exposure and unquestionably raising its profile during this period of the sport's growth. The Family Circle Cup developed into one of the most important tournaments on the women's pro schedule, not just for its prize money but for the unique and trailblazing way it brought players, sponsors, and fans together.

Rosie Casals was the tournaments' inaugural champion. Upon learning of Jack's death, Casals, a multiple major tournament

singles and doubles champion and leader in the equal pay movement for women players commented:

“I loved Jack Jones and John Moreno. They were pioneers of women’s tennis and marketing. They envisioned more than the women expected and taught us to think big. The 30K (at the inaugural FCC event) I won has come a long way for women’s tennis. Because of daring to put us on a national network—NBC—and providing the largest purse for women, we are equal at the US Open! The two “Js” were ahead of their times.”

This clay court tournament saw the sport’s top professionals participate on a regular basis. Billie Jean King, Chris Evert, Martina Navratilova, Pam Shriver, Steffi Graff, Jennifer Capriati, Evonne Goolagong Cawley, Gabriela Sabatini, Virginia Wade, Martina Hingis among many others, all graced the courts of the Family Circle Cup during Jack’s tenure as the Tournament Director.

Tracy Austin, a multiple Grand Slam title winner as well as the youngest ever US Open tennis champion and multiple winner of the Family Circle Cup said after learning of Jack’s passing:

“Jack was such a warm, kind and intelligent person who used his business acumen and people skills to own and run one of my favorite tournaments—Hilton Head which was a trailblazing event because it was the first women’s event to offer \$100,000 in prize money and to be televised on national TV. The impact of this event was far reaching!! Women’s tennis is indebted to Jack! His family was near & dear to him, especially his beloved wife Mickey. Love you Jack. RIP.”

Pam Shriver, an Olympic Gold medalist, a Grand Slam doubles champion and currently a heralded tv commentator observed:

“Jack helped make women’s tennis a global leader in sports by taking risks in the 1970s and investing in the WTA (Women’s Tennis Association). Jack also helped build a strong relationship between tournaments and players.”

Jack also invited other fast rising amateurs for exhibitions as well. It was during one tournament in 1992 that Jack invited two relatively unknown young girls from Los Angeles to play in an exhibition doubles match with several of the Cup’s participating Pros, Billie Jean King and Rosie Casals. Those girls, making one of their earliest public appearances were 11 and 10 year old sisters Venus and Serena Williams.

In the mid-1970s Jack also served as the promoter for the Women’s U.S. Indoor Championships in Minneapolis. Soon thereafter, with the same goal in mind to raise the profile of Women’s Professional Tennis, Jack established the Playtex Challenge whereby any player who won four tournaments on four different surfaces –Wimbledon (grass), The U.S. Open (hard court) Family Circle (Clay) and the U.S. Women’s Indoor (indoor surface)-- would win \$1,000,000 in prize money. A player capable of winning three of those four tournaments would win \$500,000. Once again, Jack was setting new standards in the world of women’s tennis in the effort to raise the profile of these athlete’s talents and accomplishments.

Jack also served as President of the US Women’s Professional Tennis Tournament Association.

Jack Jones was born on December 31, 1925 to Julius and Fay Jones and raised in Chicago, Illinois. He enlisted in the US Navy shortly after the outbreak of World War II, becoming one of the youngest officers at the time while serving in the Pacific Theatre. Following his service, Jack enrolled and graduated from Northwestern Law School.

His career path led him from the legal profession and eventually into the world of Chicago advertising. In 1961, Jones moved with his wife Myrna (“Mickey”) and four children to Los Angeles to take a position at Mattel Toys. It was during his tenure as Executive Vice President of Marketing for the renown toy manufacturer, that the country witnessed the ascension of Barbie as America’s iconic doll. Jones was also responsible for the introduction and launch of other seminal products such as the celebrated line of miniature cars, “Hot Wheels.”

One of Jack’s signature policy initiatives at Mattel and not to be overlooked for it’s impact on national TV advertising was to include children of color in every TV ad the company placed for its popular toy products.

After leaving Mattel, Jack sequed into TV production. His most notable show was “Ara’s Sports World”, a “Wide World Of Sports” for kids. Hosted by legendary Notre Dame University football coach Ara Parseghian, each episode famously contained an instructional segment such as how to improve your defense in basketball featuring Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, or passing on the soccer pitch starring international soccer icon Pele.

But other challenges beckoned for this avid tennis fan. Ultimately Jack Jones created a way to meld his passion for the game of tennis with his marketing acumen to raise the profile of a sport for which he profoundly cared about his entire life.

Jack will not only be remembered for his achievements in promoting women’s tennis and in business, but also for his many humane qualities. Jack was a phenomenal storyteller and known for his outstanding sense of humour. Perhaps most importantly, he had a deep sense of compassion and commitment to improving the general condition of humankind.

Jack Jones, whose wife Myrna died in 1996, is survived by his four children: Cary Jones, Adam Jones, Amy Jones and Candace Alexander and five grandchildren.

In lieu of flowers, the family requests donations be sent to:

Jack Jones Scholarship  
Northwestern Pritzker School of Law  
28274 Network Place  
Chicago, IL 60673-1282

WTA Foundation  
St. Petersburg, FL  
<https://wtafoundation.wtatennis.com/campaign/wta-charities/c410257>