

In the annals of sports, no individual rivalry matches the intensity, longevity, and emotional resonance of the one between two extraordinary women: Chris Evert and Martina Navratilova. Over sixteen years, Evert and Navratilova met on the tennis court a record eighty times—sixty times in finals. At their first match in Akron, Ohio, in 1973, Chris was an eighteen-year-old star and Martina, two years her junior, was an unknown Czech making her first trip to the United States. It would be two years before Martina finally beat Chris, and another year—after Navratilova had dropped twenty pounds and improved her game—before Evert publicly betrayed her first hint of concern. By then, the women were already friends and sometimes doubles partners, and the colorful story that would captivate the world was under way. *The Rivals* is the first book to examine the intertwined journey of these legendary champions, based on extensive interviews with each. Taking readers on and off the courts with vivid, never-before-published material, award-winning sportswriter Johnette Howard shows how Evert and Navratilova came of age during the rambunctious golden age of tennis in the 1970s, and how—“together”—they redefined women’s athletics during a time of volcanic change in sports and society. Their epic careers unfolded against the backdrop of the fight for Title IX, the gay rights movement, the women’s movement and the fall of the iron curtain. Howard draws entertaining, intimate, and myth-shattering portraits of Evert and Navratilova, describing the personal migrations each woman made, and showing how enmeshed their lives became. Navratilova and Evert’s ability to forge and maintain a friendship during sixteen years of often-cutthroat competition has always provoked wonder and admiration. They were a study in contrasts, a collision of politics and style and looks. Chris was the crowd darling while Martina, her greatest foil, was often cast as the villain. Chris was the imperturbable champion who proved toughness and femininity weren’t mutually exclusive; Martina was portrayed as both emotionally fragile and some fearsome Amazon. Chris’s off-court life was presumed to be bedrock solid, the stuff of Main Street America; Martina’s was derided as outrageous and sometimes chaotic, even during her invincible years. Yet, through it all, the two remained friends who lifted each other to heights that each says she couldn’t have reached without the other. Women’s tennis now is more popular than ever, thanks in large part to the trailblazing of Evert and Navratilova. A rivalry like theirs, filled with so many grace notes, is unique in sports history.

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