

Women Tennis Pros Chose Cigarette Tie

To the Editor:

Billie Jean King correctly states that women tennis players who participate in events like the Virginia Slims tournament are not "being used" to promote smoking (letter, Dec. 2).

Like the cigarette executives she characterizes as "enlightened people" who "acknowledge the possible hazards of smoking," those tennis players have made a decision, either conscious or less examined, to accept prize money for indirectly promoting cigarette consumption.

The relationship is a mutually profitable one. The only losers are the millions of American women who suffer and die from the effects of cigarettes.

Ms. King argues that no tennis players have ever been asked by Philip Morris to smoke. Presumably if she were so approached, she would decline the risks of lung, esophagus, pancreas, kidney and bladder cancer, heart attack, stroke, high blood pressure and low birth weight infants

caused by her sponsor's product.

Perhaps Ms. King is not convinced of the medical evidence. After all she writes "possible hazards." In last month's issue of the Journal of the American Medical Association, Drs. Michael McGinnis and William Foege published the authoritative study on the "Actual Causes of Death in the U.S." in 1990.

Tobacco was the number one contributor to external (nongenetic) mortality, causing approximately 400,000 deaths a year. This figure exceeded the totals for alcohol, firearms, motor vehicles and illegal drugs combined. Put another way, every two months tobacco kills more Americans than were killed in the entire Vietnam War, or enough to fill Giants Stadium.

I have admired Ms. King's commitment to women's tennis. I hope this letter encourages her, and other female athletes, to embrace a larger commitment to women's health.

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