

Mewshaw, Michael. *Short Circuit: Six Months on the Men's Professional Tennis Tour*. New York: Atheneum, 1983. Pp. 306. \$13.95.

Michael Mewshaw earned a Ph.D. at the University of Virginia and was successful enough writing depressing novels (*Earthly Bread*, 1976; *Land Without Shadow*, 1979) and an equally depressing non-fiction book (*Life for Death*, 1980) that he moved his family to Rome. Evidently burned out from creative writing, he decided to indulge his love of tennis by following the men's professional tennis tour around Europe and the United States for six months in 1982. As the dust jacket blurb says: "(h)e planned to bask in the sun and watch the world's best practitioners of a sport he deeply loved . . . to enjoy the clean, uncluttered geometry of the game, the clarity of wins and losses."

What he found was a much different world than what he apparently anticipated. From the very first tournament he visited, he saw hostile, arrogant tennis players, venal officials, and promoters who had left their integrity far behind them in the chase for the almighty dollar. Mewshaw, who had intended to keep a journal as he went along and had even managed to acquire press credentials from the AP, turned that journal into an exposé of the many evils in men's professional tennis, written in the finest muckraking style.

Professional tennis exists in three areas: the Gran Prix tour, where the Association of Tennis Professionals (ATP) awards points based on performance; fed into a computer, these points become a highly important ranking system which determines seedings for future tournaments and invitations for lucrative exhibitions. There is also the World Championship Tennis (WCT) tour, where there is lots of money but no ATP points, and, finally, there are countless exhibitions and "challenge" matches which function outside the tournament structure.

Mewshaw, in his investigations, discovered sin principally in the areas of finances and drugs. The latter, while potentially more sensational, is not as important—we hear almost daily about athletes in every sport who are involved with illegal drugs, so it is neither surprising nor particularly alarming to learn that the tennis establishment blinks an eye to the fact that various leading players are similarly involved.

More interesting and less widely known or assumed are some of Mewshaw's allegations concerning various fraudulent financial practices. He describes the device of "tanking" a match, wherein a player will deliberately lose a match because a more lucrative exhibition awaits him in the next city or because moving ahead in the doubles competition will lessen his chances of winning the singles. Another apparent vice is the splitting of prize money, a temptation when there is a substantial disparity between the first and second place amounts. More frequent is the giving of guarantees and appearance money to ensure that the top-ranked players are at a tournament since without them, the crowds stay home and watch television. We are also told that some players bet on the outcome of their own matches, that others veto the appoint-

ment of certain judges and referees, and that the best players, perhaps as a consequence, get the benefit of close calls, so that they will remain in the tournament and keep the attendance up.

Mewshaw's *modus operandi* was to go from tournament to tournament, talk with some of the lesser players and gather information and then interview a well-placed tour administrator, such as Butch Buchholz, the executive director of the ATP, concerning the allegations of various impure practices within the ATP or the tennis circuit. One of the most revealing features of the book was the consistency of equivocation among the administrators with whom Mewshaw spoke. To a man (men's professional tennis is definitely a *man's* world), they all acted surprised and concerned that such activities were going on; to a man, they took absolutely no action in response to Mewshaw's information.

What are we to make of Mewshaw's muckraking? The book clearly has not had a major impact on the sports world or even that part of it devoted to tennis. In the February 1984 issue of *Tennis*, contributing Editor Peter Bodo refers to Mewshaw as a "stranger who wandered into the little kingdom of tennis," calls him cynical and naive and claims, rightly, that few of Mewshaw's accusations are more than hearsay. Although he has no use for Mewshaw, Bodo does recognize that the tennis circuit has serious problems in the same areas that Mewshaw examined, and he calls for a more honest attitude toward exhibitions and a shorter tournament season to allow lesser players more opportunities to do other, more profitable things than worry about their ATP computer rankings.

Mewshaw's position as an outsider in the tennis world is at once a strength and weakness in the book. His prior unfamiliarity with the abuses within the tour make his allegations more believable, but the difficulties he had, as an outsider, in gaining access to prominent players and administrators, are reflected in a tendency to launch personal attacks on some of these people. Peter Fleming, for example, probably would not have been described as having greasy, stringy hair if he had been willing to talk openly and at length with Mewshaw.

In the end, anyone who is interested in tennis as a spectator sport should read the book. There is probably more truth in Mewshaw's allegations than Peter Bodo and the others of the tennis kingdom would like to admit, and Mewshaw's experiences will probably pierce a few false illusions about the tennis tour one might have had. Besides, Mewshaw is an accomplished writer. The book reads well, and Mewshaw's descriptions of various tennis stars are themselves almost worth the price of the book. Anyone who can describe Ivan Lendl as looking "like he had spent the summer in a root cellar," (282). or Wojtek Fibak as a "Solzhenitsyn-in-jockstrap" (71) can't be all bad!