



Around the World

"Tooth and Consequences"

By Dan Rosenbaum

The night before she played Gabriela Sabatini in the final of the Family Circle Cup in Hilton Head, South Carolina, Martina Navratilova bit into a carrot and lost her front tooth. In a panic, Navratilova did the only thing she could do – she called New York City Cosmetic Dentist Dr. Michael C. Iott.



“The last plane leaving LaGuardia was at 8:10 P.M. I had 25 minutes to get to the airport,” Iott recalls. “The plane flew into Atlanta and I had to

book a charter flight into Hilton Head. There was a big storm that night and I didn’t get in until 2 A.M. Then I had to rent an office. I was working on Martina by 10 A.M.

Unfortunately I couldn’t numb her up for the procedure – nothing that could possibly affect her playing. So she just went for it. I was finished in time for her to have a one-hour practice

session before the final.” (Navratilova then beat Sabatini in three sets.)

Iott first met Navratilova when both were on ski holidays in Aspen, Colorado. He clearly revels in being part of Team Navratilova, the extended family that forms the cornerstone of Martina’s personal and professional lives. “I get Martina’s schedules [sent to me] by fax,” says Iott, “I have to know her TV schedules, practice schedules, even her diet schedules. All those raw nuts and veggies she eats put a lot of stress on her teeth. I have to be aware of these things.”

Iott says that most of Martina’s dental problems date back to her early years in Czechoslovakia. “Eastern European countries are known for their big fillings, and their dental work isn’t too good,” he points out. “Right now we’re in the process of taking out all those fillings, Martina doesn’t care how long it takes: she wants everything right.”

“Martina takes an active interest in her teeth and everybody else’s teeth. [Her younger

sister, Jana, it turns out, is a dental student in West Germany.] She's an excellent patient."

Not to mention a fussy one. "She doesn't want silver fillings in her teeth because of the mercury in it, so we have to use porcelain instead," he says. "And I can't give her any of the usual anesthesia, her pulse, circulation and heart rate would react within 30 seconds. We have to use special things that have less additives. Her body is so finely tuned that one injection is good for five hours."

Of course, even Iott can't be there all the time. So when Martina arrived one late October morning, just prior to the taping of "Late Night with David Letterman," Iott could only complete a portion of the job. That's when he had to call in colleague Miriam Robbins, just four months out of residency, to finish up.

"Michael came up to me and said, 'I need a favor. I need you to put some temporaries [fillings] in for a patient.'"

"I said, 'Fine, how many?'"

"He said, 'Six,' but he didn't tell me who it was. Then he and Martina walked in. I nearly fell over."

"She said, 'Are you any good?'"

"I said, 'Michael has trusted me to work on you.'"

" 'It's not because you're a woman,' she said, 'it's because you look too young to be a dentist.' "

Everything went smoothly, but the experience left dentist, not patient, a little worse for wear. By the time I got to the next patient I was shaking for an hour, "Robbins recalls. "I'm sure she [Martina] thought I was an alcoholic."

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