

For octogenarians, tournament tennis never gets old

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Fred Sarkis returns the ball to Lyman Bond in the 85-over singles division of West Coast Super Senior Grand Prix of Sarasota at Payne Park on Tuesday.
STAFF PHOTO / ELAINE LITHERLAND

SARASOTA - Pete Bond's wife had just one question for her husband of 63 years.

"What are you doing playing in a singles tennis tournament?"

It seemed a legitimate inquiry for an 86-year-old spouse who had not really played much singles in a couple years, or any match since August.

The answers, for Bond, were simple. It was sunny. It was an opportunity to get on the court. And it was a chance for a little competition.

Lyman Threll "Pete" Bond, a father of 10 children and grandfather of 27, got more than a little competition in the first round of the West Coast Super Senior Grand Prix of Sarasota when he ran up against youngster Fred Sarkis.

"I had a nice lesson," said the former steel mill worker about the 6-1, 6-1 loss Tuesday to the top-ranked 85-Over player in Florida, who won't turn 86 until May.

The two octogenarians share some common bonds other than age. They both came from meager means and learned the value of hard work. They both are veterans of World War II. They became successful. And they each share a passion for tennis.

Bond also has a fervor for golf — he worked for years at the golf course at The Meadows Country Club in Sarasota and has five holes-in-one. He began playing tennis 60 some years ago.

Sarkis started when he was in his mid-20s and now plays three or four times a week. But he really got the tournament bug a decade ago and has set a goal to win a national tournament title before he reaches the age of 90.

Sarkis continues his quest for a tournament title this week in a semifinal match today against Rudy Antonio. Bond, who has lived in Sarasota since the late 1970s, will play in the consolation round.

Bond, who grew up in Indiana, and Sarkis, from Rochester, N.Y., both believe that tennis has helped maintain an active lifestyle. But each goes about it in a different manner.

Sarkis, who has eaten a heavy diet of fruits and vegetables his entire life, is a strong believer in good nutrition and a consistent stretching program.

Bond's pre-playing regimen consists of walking out to the court.

"Generally I just go out and play," he said.

Sarkis, meanwhile, developed his eating habits as a youngster, helping his father peddle fresh fruit and vegetables and reinforced when he married a health teacher 55 years ago.

He said nutrition and physical activity helped him beat prostate cancer in his 60s.

And it was those times spent with a demanding father, though conflicted, that helped shaped his outlook and remains a big part of his life today.

Accompanying his father, up to 18 hours on some days, he often resented his life and struggled in school. But some of life's lessons and a couple of stern talks with his father changed his outlook, and he learned to study in the back of the truck.

Sarkis, the oldest of 10 children became head of the household when his father died at the age of 54. He bought his mother a house while still a teen and made his first million before the age of 35, running a successful vending company. He built ski areas, a golf course and residential condominiums, lost his wealth and recovered.

Sarkis then wrote an autobiography — "Prisoner in a Truck" — which detailed his learning experiences.

Eventually, he established a foundation called "Yes, Pa" and made it available to schools, correctional institutions and youth groups. The foundation serves as a resource guide and has been downloaded by more than 1,700 schools.

Sarkis, when not winning tennis matches, spends his time enhancing the no-profit foundation and will go to great lengths — including dressing up as a clown and singing songs — to get his message out.

On Tuesday, the Bradenton resident's message was that tennis remains an important part of his life and he showed that with his strong performance over Bond.

And Bond, who has lost nearly 30 pounds in the last year by cutting down on meals and sodas, enjoyed playing against one of the top players in the country in his age division.

That's why he signed up to play.

Original Article at: [The Herald-Tribune Web Site](#)