

# Grand slams from Mac

In his new autobiography, John McEnroe scolds himself — and others — and shares painful memories of his life and career

By MICHAEL GILTZ

John McEnroe yelled at my mom.

He probably thought she deserved it: After all, she was a tennis umpire in the '80s, and being yelled at by McEnroe was part of the job. She also served as a line judge during McEnroe's 1981 Wimbledon first-round match against Tom Gullikson.

That's the match in which

McEnroe threw one of his most notorious tantrums, screaming at the chair umpire: "You cannot be serious!"

McEnroe laughed after I relayed our six degrees of separation. We met at the Greenwich Village offices of his publisher to discuss his new autobiography, "You Cannot Be Serious," co-written with James Kaplan.

He was polite if a little wary: McEnroe had spent the morning responding to negative comments from his ex-wife, Tatum O'Neal, who called his book "bulls—t."

During their volatile relationship, McEnroe and O'Neal have exchanged verbal blows in public. McEnroe called her an unfit mother; O'Neal called him a sociopath.

O'Neal's drug use and subsequent stint at Hazelton

prompted McEnroe

to sue for custody of the couple's three children. He won.

Knowing that his kids were likely to someday read his book was uppermost in McEnroe's mind as he weighed whether or not to take on the project, he says.

"That's one reason I didn't do the book for a long time," said McEnroe, who avoids the blow-by-blow descriptions of a tell-all and attempts to accept blame for his personal and professional failures.

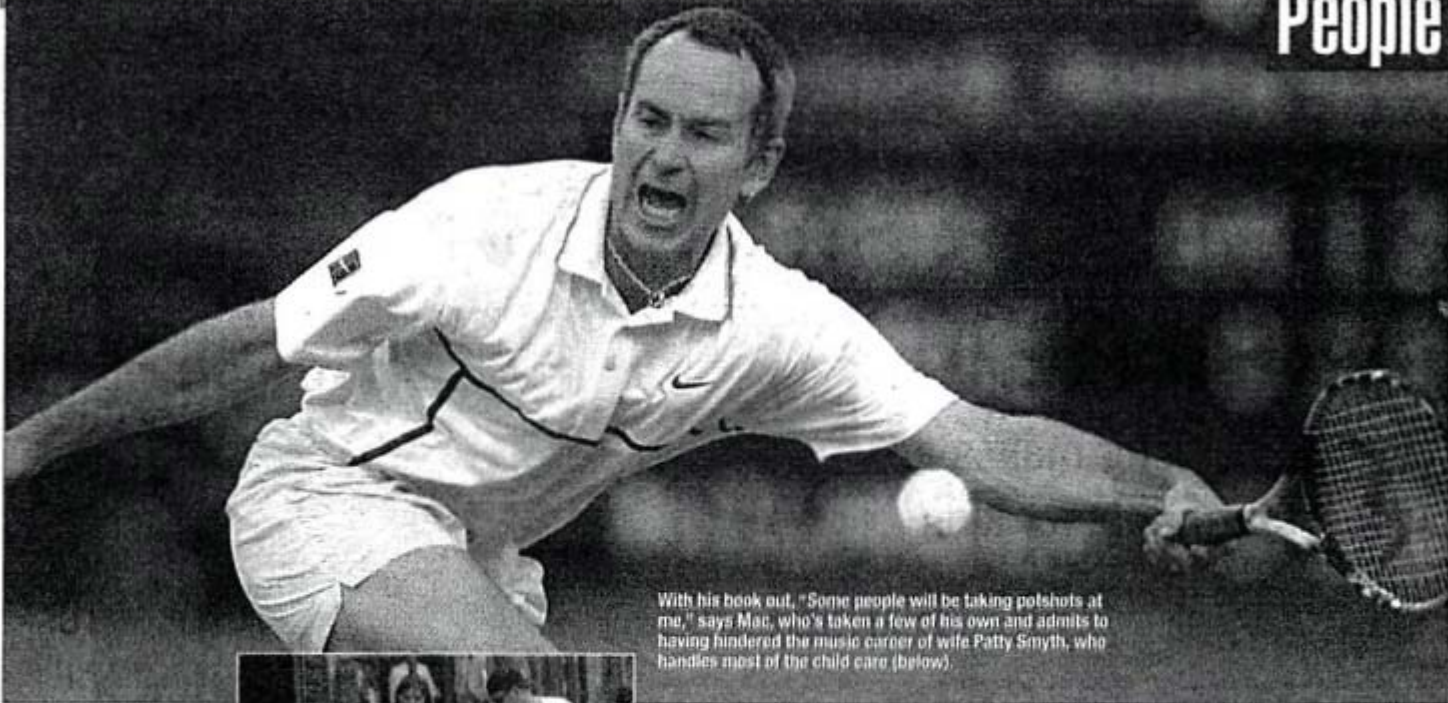
He does cover his entire career in detail. He explains his hot temper, taking most of the blame himself; describes his relationships with Jimmy Connors, Bjorn Borg and other tennis greats; and reveals that top players on the senior tour (including himself) have tanked a game, a set and even a match.

The 43-year-old tennis Hall of Famer also bares some of the low moments of his private life, including discreet but still painful details about the divorce from O'Neal.

He admits in our interview that he wasn't sure if there was a point to writing the book, saying that it might hinder him from forming a clear



In "You Cannot Be Serious," the tennis great and devoted musician says he wept when he realized his marriage to Tatum O'Neal (that's them in '66) was over.



With his book out, "Some people will be taking potshots at me," says Mac, who's taken a few of his own and admits to having hindered the music career of wife Patty Smyth, who handles most of the child care (below).



vision of where he wanted his life to go.

"Agents kept telling me people would love to hear what I've got to say. But I have to be particularly careful because of the kids. Now people are coming out of the woodwork; my ex-wife, for starters.

"Some people will be taking potshots at me, and I'm trying to brace myself."

For a tennis star who personified the thick-skinned New Yorker, McEnroe's revelation that he often wept will undoubtedly surprise many of his fans.

One example of the waterworks came in 1992, McEnroe writes, when he and O'Neal attended the premiere of "Malcolm X." He says he sat in the dark of the movie theater with tears streaming

down his face, knowing his marriage was over.

"When I look back at it now, I think [the divorce] was far more inevitable than I was thinking at the moment," said McEnroe, who was facing the dual blows of the end of his career and the end of his marriage.

"One of my kids said, 'I don't

want you to cry anymore.' I didn't realize I was doing it so much in front of them. I thought I was hiding it a little better."

He's now happily remarried — to singer Patty Smyth — and is raising six kids while juggling a career as a tennis commentator, an art gallery owner (his gallery is on Greene Street) and a senior tour player.

He says he's also dealing with guilt — that his heavy schedule often takes him on the road while his wife handles much of the responsibilities of home life.

"From the time we met, there's been very little done [with Smyth's career], and sometimes I feel I'm a little responsible for that," said McEnroe, who won

seven Grand Slams, 154 career titles (a record that still stands) and represented the United States in several Davis Cup victories.

One of O'Neal's complaints is that McEnroe didn't want her to pursue an acting career. He disputes this in his book.

His offered solution to Smyth, however, was far from practical. A devoted musician (he's toured with his own rock band), McEnroe once suggested he play guitar in a group fronted by Smyth.

Her retort? "Let's play mixed doubles at Wimbledon," said McEnroe.

During the interview, McEnroe sometimes expressed regret that he hadn't remained more active on the tennis circuit. He says he's ready to play doubles for the Davis Cup team, for example, if his brother Patrick (the team's captain) should call.

He also still aches over the 1999 U.S. Open, in which he and Steffi Graf were steamrolling to victory in the mixed doubles competition when she pulled out to focus on her drive for a singles title.

The decision ended McEnroe's last shot at a Grand Slam. Not unexpectedly, he was furious.

He got the phone call, he says, from Graf in the locker room, and lambasted her to the only two people who were around at the time. One of those who heard his cursing tirade was Andre Agassi, who was secretly dating Graf at the time.

Sticking his foot in his mouth, McEnroe admits, is an art he's nearly perfected.

"That has to be one of the all-time foot-in-mouths," he said. "What are the odds that the only two people in the locker room would be Andre and his coach?"