

“What’s a girl gotta do for a little recognition?”

—-Wheelchair tennis legend Esther Vergeer can tell you.

Remember back in 2010-2011, when Novak Djokovic was putting together his 43-match win streak? Exciting stuff. At that same time, Dutch wheelchair tennis star Esther Vergeer was cruising towards her 470th consecutive match win. Remember that? Maybe not so much.

Born in 1981, Esther was a very energetic little girl who loved swimming, playing, and running around outside. Her active life was interrupted by severe headaches, and other alarming symptoms. In 1989, she was diagnosed with a spinal condition requiring risky surgery that was successful in saving her life, but left her without the use of her legs.

In rehab, Esther was enthusiastic about continuing to play sports. Through her teens, she excelled at both basketball and tennis. She loved the team aspect of playing basketball, and had great success as a member of the Dutch national team. She was also drawn to the individual challenge of tennis, and after the encouragement of trainers, made the decision to focus on that. It wasn't long before she was dominant, hitting winners past her opponents faster than they could even change directions.

She soared to #1 in wheelchair tennis in 1999, and never budged. In the Grand Slams, she won the Australian Open nine times, the French Open six times, and the US Open six times. Not to forget the Paralympic Games...she won singles Gold in Sydney, Athens, Beijing, and London. By the time she retired in 2013, she had won 470 matches in a row. She handed out more bagels (winning a set 6-0) than a New York City Deli.

It wasn't until, oh...around win #396 when people suddenly took notice of her amazing accomplishments. It just happened to be when she agreed to pose nude for ESPN Magazine's 2010 Body Issue. Esther, you go girl!!! There on the cover, in all her birthday-suited glory, was Esther posed artfully in her wheelchair, with strategically placed chair straps and tennis racquet. It's kind of strange that it took that kind of thing for her to be recognized.

However, her amazing career was no secret to top players. Roger Federer said: "I think what Esther has accomplished is absolutely amazing. She hasn't lost a match since 2003 and has gone on an incredible streak, which is impossible to imagine me being able to do." Wow, Fed's a fan.

Since retirement, she has remained involved in Paralympic tennis off the court, and created a foundation that focuses on introducing children with a disability to sports.

“IT IS NOT ABOUT BEING THE BEST, BUT ABOUT BECOMING THE BEST VERSION OF YOURSELF”

—Esther Vergeer

