

2017/09: Free speech and community attitudes to homosexuality: should the Margaret Court Arena be renamed?

What they said...

'It is unfortunate that someone with her stature has chosen to propagate discrimination...'

Australian doubles champion and gay rights advocate, Rennae Stubbs, referring to Margaret Court's views on homosexuality

'I have my views and I can express my views just like gay people expressing their views. I think it's important we do have that freedom of speech'

Margaret Court claiming a right to express her opinion

The issue at a glance

On May 25, 2017, a letter was published in the West Australian newspaper from Australian women's tennis champion, Margaret Court.

Court, Australia's most successful tennis player, who retired from competition in 1977 and has since become a Christian minister, stated publicly that she would do her best no longer to fly with Qantas since its CEO had announced the organisation's support for same sex marriage.

Court's comments met with immediate opposition from a range of commentators both within and apart from the gay community.

Czechoslovakian tennis champion and gay activist, Martina Navratilova, was among those who have called for the renaming of the Margaret Court Arena. The arena is part of the National Tennis Centre at Melbourne Park and is also used on occasion as an entertainment venue. Navratilova tweeted, 'Maybe it's time to change the name of the Margaret Court Arena then...'

On May 27, 2017, a petition was posted on Change.org calling for the renaming of the arena. It had attracted 3,767 supporters within two days.

On May 30, Australian grand slam champion, Samantha Stosur, suggested some players might not be prepared to compete on the Margaret Court Arena, stating, 'I guess we'll cross that bridge when we all get down to the Australian Open next year and (see) who wants to play on Margaret Court Arena and who doesn't...' The same day world number one male tennis player, Andy Murray, called on Tennis Australia to resolve the issue, stating, 'If something was to be done, I think it would be a lot more beneficial to do it before the tournament starts.'

The next day Stosur seemed to withdraw the suggestion she might boycott the arena. 'I've never said I was going to boycott or anything like that.'

A range of public figures have opposed the renaming of the arena, including the Prime Minister, Malcolm Turnbull and former Victorian Premiers John Cain and Jeff Kennett. Most have argued that Court's views have no bearing on her sporting achievements, and that it is for the latter that she has been commemorated through the naming of the arena.

Meanwhile, Margaret Court's reported remarks have become more extreme, with her stating on Vision Christian Radio that attitudes towards transgender are a threat and that 'There's a whole plot in our nation and in the nations of the world to get in the minds of the children.'

Background

(The information below has been abbreviated from the Wikipedia entry titled 'Margaret Court Arena' accessed at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Margaret_Court_Arena and the Wikipedia entry titled 'Margaret Court' accessed at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Margaret_Court)

Margaret Court Arena

Margaret Court Arena is an Australian tennis and multi-purpose sports and entertainment venue located in Melbourne, Victoria. The arena, which was built in 1987, has a capacity of 7,500. The venue is part of the National Tennis Centre at Melbourne Park, which is part of the Melbourne Sports and Entertainment Precinct.

Originally named Show Court One, the venue was opened in 1988, the year the Australian Open tennis championships moved from Kooyong Lawn Tennis Club to Melbourne Park. The show court

had a capacity of 6,000 people and was renamed to Margaret Court Arena in early 2003, as a tribute to Australia's most successful female tennis player.

In May 2017, following Margaret Court's open letter in *The West Australian* opposing Qantas' support for same-sex marriage, a social media campaign was instigated to boycott events at the venue until it received a change of name. The venue responded on Twitter stating that it did not support Court's comments and 'embraced equality, diversity and inclusion'.

Margaret Court's tennis career

Margaret Court AO MBE, was born Margaret Smith on July 16, 1941. She is a retired Australian tennis player and former world No. 1. She is currently a Christian minister in Perth, Western Australia, but is best known for her sporting career, in which she amassed more major titles than any other player in history.

In 1970, Court became the first woman during the open era (and the second woman in history) to win the singles Grand Slam (all four major tournaments in the same calendar year). She won a record 24 of those titles (11 in the Open era), a record that still stands. She also won 19 women's doubles and 21 mixed doubles titles, giving her a record 64 major titles overall.

Margaret Court is the only woman to win the mixed doubles Grand Slam, which she accomplished twice. Her all surfaces (hard, clay, grass and carpet) singles career winning percentage of 91.68% (1180-107) is one of the best of all time. Her open era singles career winning percentage of 91.37% (593-56) is unequalled, as is her open era winning percentage of 91.7% (11-1) in Grand Slam finals. Her win-loss performance in all Grand Slam singles tournaments was 90.12% (210-23). She was 95.31% (61-3) at the Australian Open, 90.38% (47-5) at the French Open, 85.10% (51-9) at Wimbledon and 89.47% (51-6) at the US Open. She also shares the open era record for most Grand Slam singles titles as a mother with Kim Clijsters.

The International Tennis Hall of Fame states, 'For sheer strength of performance and accomplishment there has never been a tennis player to match (her).'

Margaret Court's views on homosexuality

Having grown up as a Roman Catholic, Court became associated with Pentecostalism in the 1970s and became a Pentecostal Christian minister in 1991. She later founded the Margaret Court Ministries, and in this capacity she has been a vocal critic of LGBT rights.

In her role as minister, Court has become a consistent critic of homosexuality in general and same-sex marriage in particular in Australia. In November 1994, when delivering a speech at a prayer breakfast held at Parliament House, Court exclaimed, 'Homosexuality is an abomination to the Lord! Abortion is an abomination to the Lord!' In 2002, she campaigned against laws proposed and passed by the Government of Western Australia that granted same-sex couples the equal legal rights to opposite-sex couples and in 2011 publicly spoke out against federal government plans to legalise same-sex marriage. Although stating that she does not hate homosexuals and welcomes them into her congregation, she has publicly expressed her opinion that same-sex sexual activity is a sinful choice and that the LGBT community is 'aggressively demanding marriage rights that are not theirs to take'.

Court has been criticised for such statements by openly homosexual tennis players Billie Jean King, Rennae Stubbs and Martina Navratilova; the latter called them 'truly frightening'.

An LGBT rights protest group urged spectators to display rainbow gay flag banners at the Margaret Court Arena during the 2012 Australian Open and called for the renaming of the venue. Court condemned their actions as 'a political stunt'. Parodied for her views online, Court has also been criticised by the Australian Press Council (APC) for propagating false and 'potentially dangerous' information about homosexuality in an article she had published in the *Herald Sun* tabloid. In response, the Australian Christian Lobby condemned the APC's decision, declaring it to be a 'dangerous precedent against free speech'.

Internet information

On June 1, 2017, *The Age* published a report titled "'The devil's after our kids': Margaret Court's second serve"

The report quotes from a Christian Vision Radio broadcast in which Court gave her views on how transgender children were being treated.

<http://www.theage.com.au/sport/tennis/the-devils-after-our-kids-margaret-courts-second-serve-20170531-gwhfbj.html>

On June 1, 2017, ABC News published a report titled 'French Open: Samantha Stosur marches into third round, rejects Margaret Court Arena boycott'

The report included Stosur's statement that she had never indicated she would boycott Margaret Court Arena.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-06-01/samantha-stosur-marches-into-french-open-third-round/8577816>

On May 31, 2017, ABC News published a report titled 'French Open: Andy Murray says Margaret Court Arena boycott threat could spark scheduling chaos' in which Murray is reported requesting that Tennis Australia take action to resolve the issue of the possible arena boycott.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-05-31/andy-murray-warns-of-tennis-chaos-if-margaret-court-arena-not-r/8574754>

On May 30, 2017, ABC News published a report titled 'French Open: Samantha Stosur says players could boycott Margaret Court Arena'

The report included Stosur's statement that some players who found Margaret Court's views offensive might boycott the arena bearing her name.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-05-30/samantha-stosur-wants-margaret-court-arena-boycott-french-open/8571338>

On May 27, 2017, Mamamia published a report titled 'Margaret Court cops a serve from The Project over her anti-marriage equality stance' detailing the nature of the questioning Margaret Court received in response to her boycotting of Qantas.

The full text of the article can be accessed at <http://www.mamamia.com.au/margaret-court-on-the-project/>

On May 27, 2017, The Herald Sun published a report titled 'Margaret Court accused gay lobby of intimidation, bullying'

The report gives Court's view of some of the criticisms she has received and quotes a number of others who see the reaction to Court's views as extreme.

The full text can be accessed at <http://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/margaret-court-accused-gay-lobby-of-intimidation-bullying/news-story/61e3cf5eb4e75c38c5ea9cec723956b3>

On May 27, 2017, The Herald Sun published an editorial titled 'Margaret Court's right to her view' The editorial argues that irrespective of whether one agrees or disagrees with Margaret Court's views on homosexuality, the former tennis champion is entitled to express her opinion.

The full text of this comment can be accessed at

<http://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/opinion/margaret-courts-right-to-her-view/news-story/3e166462bde163f0b4d492b600338f06>

On May 27, 2017, a petition was posted on Change.org calling for the Margaret Court Arena to be renamed. Within two days of posting, the petition had attracted 3,767 supporters.

The full text can be accessed at <https://www.change.org/p/qantas-remove-margaret-court-s-name-from-stadium-name-for-un-australian-bigotry>

On May 26, 2017, The Sydney Morning Herald published a comment by Peter FitzSimons titled 'Margaret Court's anti-gay rights stance deserves a boycott of its own'

FitzSimons condemns Court's attitude to same sex marriage and supports calls to rename the Margaret Court Arena.

The full text can be found at <http://www.smh.com.au/sport/tennis/margaret-courts-antigay-rights-stance-deserves-a-boycott-of-its-own-20170525-gwda2w.html>

On May 26, 2017, WAToday published a report titled 'Casey Dellacqua responds on Twitter to Margaret Court's anti-gay marriage stance' detailing Dellacqua's reaction to Margaret Court's opposition to same sex marriage.

The full text can be accessed at <http://www.watoday.com.au/sport/tennis/casey-dellacqua-responds-on-twitter-to-margaret-courts-antigay-marriage-stance-20170525-gwdj9d.html>

On May 26, 2017, The Daily Mail published a report titled "'They are now bullying us': Margaret Court claims she is being 'persecuted' by LGBTIQ community for opposing marriage equality' The article presents a range of views including Margaret Court's belief that she is being unfairly treated by the gay community.

The full text can be accessed at <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-4544516/Margaret-Court-claims-persecuted-LBQTI-community.html>

On May 26, 2017, The Herald Sun published a comment by Andrew Bolt titled 'Bigot demands Court Arena be renamed'

The comment argues that Court should be able to express her opinion without penalty.

The full text can be accessed at <http://www.heraldsun.com.au/blogs/andrew-bolt/bigot-demands-court-arena-be-renamed/news-story/b8d1116c00382ded2c3698922b0bf11e>

On May 26, 2017, The Roar published a comment by Matt Cleary titled 'Margaret Court yells at cloud'

Cleary opposes Court's position on gay rights and same sex marriage; however, he argues against a name change for Margaret Court Arena.

The full text can be accessed at <http://www.theroar.com.au/2017/05/26/margaret-court-yells-cloud/>

On May 26, 2017, Beyond the Game published a comment by Mike Lynch titled 'Change the name of Margaret Court Arena' in which he claimed that the real issue was not the name of the Margaret Court Arena but that Australia had so far failed to legalise same sex marriage.

The full text can be accessed at <http://beyondthegame.tv/change-name-margaret-court-arena/>

On May 26, 2017, The Daily Telegraph published a comment by James Morrow titled 'Same-sex marriage row over Margaret Court proves the Left isn't as tolerant as it likes to make out' Morrow argues that the response to Margaret Court's criticism of homosexuality has been intolerant and abusive.

This comment can be accessed at <http://www.news.com.au/national/nsw-act/samesex-marriage-row-over-margaret-court-proves-the-left-isnt-as-tolerant-as-it-likes-to-make-out/news-story/cf1286ae0c12ce40233077224ad70697>

On May 25, 2017, The New Daily published a report titled 'Margaret Court boycotts Qantas because it supports gay marriage'

The report details Court's public letter announcing her boycott and the widespread opposition her action has received.

The full text can be accessed at <http://thenewdaily.com.au/sport/tennis/2017/05/25/margaret-court-boycott-qantas/>

On March 16, 2017, The Australian published a news report titled 'Sparks fly as chiefs tell Turnbull "marriage equality good for business"'

The report details the letter signed by 20 of Australia's major CEO's (including Alan Joyce of Qantas) calling on the Prime Minister, Malcolm Turnbull to put a same sex marriage bill before the federal Parliament'

The full text can be accessed at <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/sparks-fly-as-chiefs-tell-turnbull-marriage-equality-good-for-business/news-story/cc843643440604ee5b794cf5f49c7493>

On January 30, 2017, The New York Times published a background piece titled 'At 74, Margaret Court Remains Outspoken on Her Prowess, and Beliefs' which gives an overview of Court's life and some of her religious views, including her attitude toward homosexuality.

The full text can be accessed at https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/30/sports/tennis/margaret-court-serena-williams.html?_r=0

On November 8, 2016, the ABC News ran a report titled 'Margaret Court: I would have won six Wimbledons if I had found God earlier'

The report detailed Court's attitude toward her Christianity and her attitude toward same sex marriage.

The full text can be accessed at <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-11-08/margaret-court-id-have-won-six-wimbledons-if-i-found-god-earlier/8004502>

On September 16, 2016, ABC news published a report titled 'Why is sodomy an offensive word to the gay community?'

The report deals with the removal of the word sodomy from the Queensland Criminal Code and looks at the derivation of the word to explain why it is offensive to homosexuals.

The full text can be accessed at <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-09-16/why-is-the-word-sodomy-offensive/7852736>

On May 29, 2015, Australian Marriage Equality Org issued a media release titled 'Business community throws support behind marriage equality in full page ad'

The media release lists over 50 major Australian corporations, including Qantas, which have expressed their support for same sex marriage.

The full text can be accessed at <https://www.australianmarriageequality.org/2015/05/29/media-release-business-community-throws-support-behind-marriage-equality-in-full-page-ad/>

On January 28, 2014, The New Daily published a comment by David Dunstan and Tom Heenan, lecturers in sports studies at Monash University, titled 'Shattering the Don Bradman myth' which reveals some of the less attractive aspects of Bradman's behaviour.

Supporters of Margaret Court argue that if the Australian public is prepared to honour Don Bradman despite his shortcomings, the same should hold for Margaret Court.

The Bradman article can be accessed at

<http://thenewdaily.com.au/sport/cricket/2014/01/28/shattering-bradman-myth/>

On January 24, 2012, The Australian published a report titled 'Margaret Court a great tennis player, but that does not excuse "hate": author'

The report details author Christos Tsiolkas's objections to some of the comments Margaret Court has made regarding homosexuality.

The full text of the report can be accessed at <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/nation/margaret-court-a-great-tennis-player-but-that-does-not-excuse-hate-author/news-story/a873cf47d35c14d777e6c9322516599b>

On January 13, 2012, The Midland Daily News published a comment by Chris Stevens titled 'Anything goes: Margaret Court's comments generate intense reaction'

The comment implies that the negative reaction to Margaret Court's comments regarding homosexuality have been very extreme.

The full text can be accessed at <http://www.ourmidland.com/faithandvalues/article/Anything-goes-Margaret-Court-s-comments-6964684.php>

On January 12, 2012, The Australian published a report titled 'Gay activist Kerryn Phelps wants Margaret Court's name cut from Melbourne Park'

The report details a bid by gay rights campaigner, Kerryn Phelps, to have the Margaret Court Arena renamed.

The full report can be accessed at <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/nation/gays-wont-drive-me-from-open/news-story/e8da5ed6e3d7d5cdcaaedd6be27a8a3f>

In 2012 the online petition site Change.org carried a petition calling for Margaret Court Arena to be renamed because Margaret Court had 'been using her profile to spread homophobia and hatred'.

The petition, which was forwarded to Tennis Australia, attracted 1,781 supporters.

It can be accessed at <https://www.change.org/p/tennis-australia-change-the-name-of-the-margaret-court-arena>

On January 11, 2012, The Northern Star published a report titled 'Rainbow makeover for Court Arena?'

The report details the plans of gay activists to fly rainbow banners over Margaret Court Arena as a protest at the former tennis champion's comments against same sex marriage.

The full text can be found at <http://www.starobserver.com.au/news/rainbow-makeover-for-court-arena/>

[arena/69220](#)

On December 29, 2011, The Star Observer published a report titled 'Call to rename Arena after Court's serve'

The report details calls from Victorian gay rights activists for the removal of Margaret Court's name from Melbourne Park's main show court following comments opposed to same sex marriage.

The full text can be accessed at <http://www.starobserver.com.au/news/call-to-rename-arena-after-court%E2%80%99s-serve/68667>

Arguments in favour of renaming the Margaret Court Arena

1. Margaret Court has an established history of intolerance toward homosexuals

Critics of Margaret Court point to her long record of public pronouncements against homosexuality. The most recent Change-org petition calling for a renaming of the Margaret Court Arena states, 'It is as a nation that we stand up to this sort of bigotry and say enough is enough. We will not have an international venue that gets worldwide attention named after someone who is so narrow minded.' As an instance of Margaret Court's supposed bigotry, critics cite an interview published in Western Australia in 2011 in which Margaret Court stated, 'There is no reason to put forward alternative, unhealthy, unnatural unions as some form of substitute. To dismantle this sole definition of marriage and try to legitimize what God calls abominable sexual practices that include sodomy, reveals our ignorance as to the ills that come when society is forced to accept law that violates their very own God-given nature of what is right and what is wrong.'

Supporters of homosexual rights object to the language Court uses here, referring to homosexuality as 'unhealthy' and 'unnatural' and promoting the belief that from a Christian perspective it is 'abominable'.

The use of the word 'sodomy' is particularly offensive as it derives from a Christian context within which homosexuality was condemned as sinful and often non-consensual.

Brisbane LGBTIQ Action Group convenor Phil Browne has stated, 'The word sodomy promotes stigma, prejudice and discrimination and society has moved on and recognised that all people are worthy of respect, regardless of what they may or may not do legally in the privacy of their own bedroom.'

It's a word that has been demonised, as a weapon to promote intolerance against gay people.'

In 2013 a letter from Margaret Court was published in The Western Australian newspaper in which Court also criticised the family circumstances of Australian tennis player Casey Dellacqua, who lives in a lesbian relationship and had recently announced the birth of a son.

Margaret Court wrote, 'It is with sadness that I see that this baby has seemingly been deprived of his father.'

If we continue to dismantle the traditional family unit as old fashioned, archaic and no longer even necessary or relevant, we will create a fatherless generation...

I simply want to champion the rights of the family over the rights of the individual to engineer social norms and produce children into their relationships.'

Supporters of homosexuality see Margaret Court's remarks as an attack on the legitimacy of homosexual families and the right of same sex couples to rear children.

2. Margaret Court's views have made the arena bearing her name a focus of division

Opponents of the Margaret Court Arena retaining that name point to the divisiveness of the views the former tennis champion has expressed. Margaret Court's criticisms of homosexuality have led to numerous calls for boycotts or demonstrations focused on the arena which bears her name.

In an opinion piece, published in The Music, Maxim Boon noted, 'Several commentators responding to Court's Qantas boycott have suggested a response in kind from pro-marriage equality promoters and artists, by withdrawing from appearances at the Margaret Court Arena until its name is altered.' Boon continued, 'And if Court really is so resolute in her narrow-mindedness, she would surely welcome such sanctions. After all, why would she want associations with a venue tainted by a community she clearly deems sub-human? By refusing to be tacitly complicit in Court's hate, artists can stand with their fans in solidarity in a way that Court, and others like her, cannot ignore.'

By using her celebrity to draw attention to her views, Court's critics argue, the former tennis champion has tainted that celebrity and the venue memorialising it for those who find her views objectionable. Thus Court's publicly declared views make the stadium bearing her name a focus for those who wish to protest against Court's declared beliefs.

On January 11, 2012, The Star Observer reported that a new Facebook group was calling for Australian Open fans to show their pride by covering Margaret Court Arena in rainbow flags. The social media campaign, titled 'Rainbow Flags over Margaret Court Arena', was set up in response to the anti-homosexual comments Margaret Court made in 2011.

Critics of the current name of the arena argue that Margaret Court's public comments have made the arena a cause of division and protest and that the name should therefore be changed.

3. Margaret Court's attitudes are especially harmful to young homosexuals

It has been claimed that athletes have a special position as role models within Australian society and thus their declared views can have a powerful impact on young Australians who look up to them.

Australian doubles champion Rennae Stubbs, who announced her homosexuality publicly in 2006, has indicated that she finds Margaret Court's homophobic comments particularly hurtful.

Stubbs has stated, 'As a young Australian tennis player, I aspired to be like Margaret Court. This is why it has been very difficult to understand her words of hate directed towards homosexuals. It is unfortunate that someone with her stature has chosen to propagate discrimination...'

In 2009, Margaret Court declared the Martina Navratilova was a poor role model to young people because of her homosexuality. Court's stance met with a great deal of criticism. One opponent posting a comment on Talk Tennis at Tennis Warehouse stated, 'Margaret Court is as homophobic now as she ever was. As a gay person myself I think she is the bad role model, preaching hatred against people who were just born a certain way. Homophobia is still a huge issue in the world, especially in sports, and spiteful attitudes such as hers are the reason why gay athletes (especially men) are petrified of coming out and forced to live a lie.'

A 2012 Change.org petition to have the Margaret Court Arena renamed stated, 'Margaret Court was a fantastic tennis player, however as an evangelical Christian minister she has been using her profile to spread homophobia and hatred. In a country where we know 30% of same-sex attracted teens will attempt suicide and acts of serious self-harm (more than twice the 14.5% of straight teens) we ask that Tennis Australia withdraw their implicit support of Ms Court's media campaign against homosexuals.'

Referring specifically to the effect of Margaret Court's opposition to homosexuality on young people, Christos Tsiolkas, the author of *The Slap*, stated in January 2012, 'I don't know whether she is a mother or a grandmother but she would be an aunt or godmother. Her words could be hurting a niece or a nephew or a godchild who is trying to deal with their sexuality right now.'

Her comments would also be hurting and confusing many young people, especially sportspeople, who want to look up to her as a source of inspiration and pride. That's a mean-spirited betrayal.'

4. A majority of Australians do not endorse Margaret Court's views which are not in accord with the values Australian sport seeks to promote

Opponents of Margaret Court's views in relation to homosexuality argue that it is inappropriate to have a national stadium bearing the name of someone whose attitudes are so out of step with those of the majority of Australians and with those Australian sport seeks to exemplify.

When Margaret Court appeared on Channel Ten's current affairs program, *The Project*, on Friday May 26, host Waleed Aly stated, '62-64 per cent of Australians are in favour of this [same-sex marriage], so you can have your view but you can't change those facts.'

Critics have argued that Margaret Court has set herself in opposition to widespread popular support for sexual tolerance and inclusion. It has further been argued that many of Australia's most prominent sporting competitions, including Tennis Australia, have openly adopted a policy of inclusion, seeking to make players from all backgrounds and sexual orientations feel welcome within their sports.

On May 26, 2017, The Sydney Morning Herald published a comment by Peter FitzSimons in which he stated, 'Tennis is an inclusive game, and ever more inclusive in the 21st century. Does Melbourne Park really want to have an arena named after someone who stands so firmly against such inclusiveness, who is becoming a byword for bigot?'

On May 26, 2017, both Tennis Australia and Margaret Court Arena management issued statements distancing themselves from anti-homosexual comments made by Margaret Court.

The Tennis Australia statement reads, 'As a legend of the sport, we respect Margaret Court's achievements in tennis and her unmatched playing record. Her personal views are her own, and do not align with Tennis Australia's values of equality, inclusion and diversity.'

Management for Margaret Court Arena, named after Court, issued the statement: 'Melbourne and

Olympic Parks does not support Margaret Court's comments and we remain an organisation committed to embracing equality, diversity and inclusion; from our fans to our colleagues who deliver the events that people love to attend.'

The preamble to the most recent Change-org petition calling for the renaming of the Margaret Court Arena states, 'Regardless of personal convictions, Ms Court should not have her name on a venue that is home to people of all races, gender and sexual persuasion if she personally does not share the views of equality that her venue provides for.'

Opponents of the stadium retaining Margaret Court's name argue that anyone so out of touch with popular sentiment that the management of the stadium bearing her name has to disassociate the venue from her opinions is not a suitable person to commemorate in this way.

5. There are more appropriate people for whom to name the stadium

Opponents of the Margaret Court Arena retaining this name argue there are other notable Australian women tennis players whose names could be given to the stadium.

The name most commonly put forward is that of Evonne Cawley.

Evonne Goolagong Cawley AO, MBE is an Australian former World No. 1 female tennis player. She was one of the world's leading players in the 1970s and early 1980s, during which she won 14 Grand Slam titles: seven in singles (four at the Australian Open, two at Wimbledon and one at the French Open), six in women's doubles, and one in mixed doubles.

Goolagong Cawley is 12th on the list of all-time singles grand slam winners level with Venus Williams and ended her career with 82 singles titles.

One of the features of Cawley's success that makes her attractive to many Australians is that she is the only Indigenous tennis player to have succeeded in international tennis. In April 2016 Goolagong Cawley was awarded an honorary doctorate from the University of South Australia in recognition of her distinguished service to the community.

Sydney Morning Herald sports commentator Peter Fitzsimons has stated, 'I know of no finer person, no more generous and inclusive than Evonne Goolagong-Cawley. I run into her about once a year in airports around Australia and she is always on her way to do something to help someone. How 'bout the Evonne Goolagong Arena, as a name that tennis can be proud to put up in lights?'

On March 26, 2017, Mike Lynch commenting on Beyond the Game similarly remarked, 'Evonne Goolagong-Cawley has done phenomenal things for tennis and for our nation as a whole. It would be a great tribute to have a stadium named after her.'

International women's tennis champion, Martina Navratilova, has also stated, 'Evonne Goolagong Cawley Arena is a mouthful, but it gets my vote - for all the right reasons.'

Arguments against renaming the Margaret Court Arena

1. The arena was named to acknowledge Margaret Court's tennis achievements

Supporters of the Margaret Court Arena retaining its current name argue that Margaret Court's personal views on any social issue are irrelevant to the naming of the stadium. According to this line of argument the arena, an area where tennis is played, was named in recognition of Court's sporting achievements. Her attitudes and beliefs have no bearing on her skill and record as a tennis player. This opinion has been put by Australia's Prime Minister, Malcolm Turnbull who stated during a 3AW interview on May 26, 2017, 'Whatever people may think about Margaret Court's views about gay marriage... she is one of the all time greats and the Margaret Court Arena celebrates Margaret Court the tennis player.'

Turnbull further stated, 'She's one of the greatest greats of tennis and that's why the arena is named after her.'

The same view has been expressed by former Victorian Premier, John Cain, who has stated, 'Leave the place alone, she [Court] is there because of her merits as a tennis player...

This is about the home of tennis. We have arguably the best facility in the world and it should be celebrated by the names of the great players who made Australian tennis what it is. Margaret Court should be there, forget about this other rubbish.'

Former Victorian Liberal Premier, Jeff Kennett, has also said of Margaret Court, 'She's recognised because of her performance.'

The same position has been argued by US women's tennis champion, Billie Jean King, who is both a contemporary of Margaret Court's and a prominent gay spokesperson.

When calls were made to change the arena's name in 2012, King stated, 'She [Court] won more majors than any other woman or man, and she won the grand slam...'

When asked how she felt about Court's anti-homosexual comments, King replied, 'Get rid of her for that? Just because you don't agree with someone? Please. She deserves it. She's a great player.' Australian women's Olympic swimming champion Dawn Fraser has also stressed that the stadium has been named in honour of Court's sporting achievements and should not be renamed. Fraser has stated, 'She [Margaret Court] has been a great sportswoman and I don't think they should rename just because of what she has said.'

2. Margaret Court is entitled to express her views on same-sex marriage

Among those who argue that Margaret Court Arena should retain that name are those who argue that Court is entitled to express her opinions irrespective of whether they are widely accepted. Many of her supporters, while not endorsing her point of view, are concerned to defend Court's freedom of expression.

This point was made in a Herald Sun editorial published on May 27, 2017. The editorial states, 'Regardless of where people stand on the issue of same-sex marriage, respectful freedom of speech must be valued and protected.'

The editorial further states, 'Whether you agree with Court or not, she has a right to her opinion - and to express it. Those who support marriage equality have the same rights to expression - but it must be respectful.'

In an opinion piece published in the Northern Star on May 27, 2017, Mark Furler states, 'At a time when the marriage equality movement is pushing tolerance, those who dare to offer a counterview are ridiculed for the crime of having an opinion.'

Margaret Court's view may not be that of the majority of Australians, based on the polls, but she's entitled to have it. To suggest an arena bearing her name should be renamed is absurd.

Australia is a country that has freedom of speech. It's a freedom that was fought for at great cost by men and women during a series of conflicts.

It's a freedom that allows the gay community to fight for what they see as a fundamental human right. Yet Court's treatment...was demeaning and completely unfair.'

Former Liberal Premier of Victoria, Jeff Kennett, has suggested that renaming the Margaret Court Arena would represent a threat to the freedom of speech of all Australians. Kennett has stated, 'If anyone in a position of power gives in to those demands, God help the rest of us - it's a non-negotiable.'

Margaret Court has also stressed the importance of Australians being able to express their opinions freely. She has stated, 'I have my views and I can express my views just like gay people expressing their views. I think it's important we do have that freedom of speech.'

3. Margaret Court has not made personal attacks

Those who argue that the Margaret Court Arena should not be renamed also tend to note that Margaret Court, in making her remarks regarding homosexuality and same sex marriage, was not intending to give personal offence to homosexuals.

In 2012 Margaret Court claimed, 'I have always said I have nothing against homosexual people.'

Court has indicated that she does not accept same sex marriage and does not support same couples rearing children but claims that she thinks kindly of those who are homosexual.

As part of the discussion that surrounded her views in 2012, Court stated, 'When I stood for marriage, things came back from tennis players who probably didn't read what I wrote. It had nothing to do with people personally or tennis players. I remember speaking to Navratilova 10 years ago on something she brought up with me and I said "Martina, I love you, God loves you, but don't touch marriage between a man and a woman."'

In 2012 Court repeated that her object was to defend heterosexual marriage and that she bore no animosity toward homosexual people. She stated, 'You've only got to go the Bible and look at Genesis 1 and 2, and read it and what it says about marriage and family. It's important to me because I've got nothing against homosexual people.'

When in 2013, Margaret Court used the occasion of the birth of Casey Dellacqua's son to regret the fact that children born into lesbian families were often deprived of contact with their fathers she stressed that this was not a personal attack.

Court stated, 'Personally, I have nothing against Casey Dellacqua or her "partner". I simply want to champion the rights of the family over the rights of the individual to engineer social norms and produce children into their relationships.'

During her May 26, 2017 interview on Channel 10's The Project, Margaret Court claimed that her

current intention is to defend the heterosexual definition of marriage, not to attack gay people. Court stated, 'I have nothing against homosexual people, they can lead their life, but don't touch marriage, and it's permanent and precious.'

4. Other sporting celebrities whose behaviour has been in some way questionable have not been stripped of sporting honours

It has been claimed that the focus on Margaret Court's beliefs is unjust as other sporting heroes who have had stadiums named in their honour have not been treated similarly.

In an opinion piece published in *The Roar* on May 26, 2017, Matt Cleary stated, 'Are we going to rename the Bradman Stand because The Don didn't go much on Catholics?

Or the Lillee-Marsh Stand because the boys had a bet on England in a Test against Australia they were playing in?'

Research has raised questions about Don Bradman's opposition to apartheid, indicating that Bradman and the Australian Board of Control lobbied Australian politicians and diplomats in an attempt to keep white South African cricket in the international arena.

In an opinion piece published in *The New Daily* on January 28, 2014, David Dunstan and Tom Heenan, lecturers in sports studies at Monash University, noted, 'One of his [Bradman's] great regrets was buckling under to Australian government policy which supported a boycott.'

Bradman has also been accused of not doing sufficient as an administrator to ensure that cricketers were adequately paid. In a comment published in *The Tribune* on March 3, 2001, shortly after Bradman's death, Scyld Berry stated, 'Although he had done what he could to cash in when a player, Bradman watched as an administrator while the players of the 1970s earned so little they fell easy prey to Kerry Packer when he set up World Series Cricket.'

Supporters of Margaret Court Arena retaining its current name have used the unquestioned sporting status of Don Bradman (whatever his personal failings may have been) to argue that Court's sporting achievements should be treated with the same respect.

In an opinion piece published in *The Herald Sun* on May 26, 2017, commentator Andrew Bolt posed the rhetorical question, 'Should we now check what Sir Donald Bradman thought on gay marriage? We might have to rename the Bradman Oval.'

5. Margaret Court is being bullied

Those who oppose the renaming of Margaret Court Arenas argue that such tactics are an attempt to use force and intimidation to silence an opponent, rather than rational argument.

This point was made by James Morrow in an opinion piece published in *The Daily Telegraph* on May 26, 2017. Morrow stated, 'Abusive condemnation and hounding from polite society are not the actions of those who want to spread their cause by arguing in good faith. Instead, they are warnings not to step out of line...'

The same point as made in an editorial published in *The Herald Sun* on May 27, 2017. The editorial stated, 'The barrage of derision levelled at Margaret Court over her stance against same-sex marriage is an appalling example of intimidation aimed at shutting down alternate views.'

Margaret Court has also stated that she considers that she and others who oppose homosexuality and same sex marriage have been bullied. Court has stated, 'People have their views. And I think, right across the nation, any Christian or anyone who is standing up about the values of marriage or anything is getting slammed in this country.'

I think we're getting bullied, and I think it's been a bit too one-way, and we haven't been able to say why we believe marriage is between a man and a woman. At the moment it's like nobody can say anything. We're getting persecuted. We're getting bullied because we do free speech.'

Margaret Court has stressed that she sees moves to rename Margaret Court Arena as bullying. She has stated, 'It's very sad that they are bringing my tennis into it. This is why I say it's become ... bullying.'

I don't think they should, and I don't think most of the public of Australia think they should. I don't think you should bring my tennis into it... I think it's very sad that they're bringing my tennis into it. This is why I say it's becoming a bullying from the homosexual gay side of people, they are now bullying us.'

Court has further stated, 'It's like nobody can say anything. We are getting persecuted; we are getting bullied because we do have free speech also. It's very, very much one-way.'

Further implications

The public furore surrounding Margaret Court's comments on same-sex marriage raises the question of the extent to which public figures, especially sporting champions, enjoy freedom of expression. Margaret Court has indicated that she believes it is inappropriate for those who criticise her opinions on homosexuality and same sex marriage to draw her tennis prowess into the argument. Referring to calls for the Margaret Court Arena to be renamed, Court has stated, 'It's very sad that they think like that ... I think it's just a way of thinking they may be able to hurt me, but they can't.'

The difficulty is that Margaret Court's opinions have only attracted attention because of her sporting prowess. If she were the relatively unknown pastor of an obscure Christian denomination in Western Australia her threat to boycott Qantas in response to its CEO's public support for same sex marriage would not have attracted media attention. Her celebrity is what has made Court's views newsworthy. Sporting champions are a select group within Australia. The country's high level of interest in sport and the extent to which sporting figures are expected to be exemplars of certain types of behaviour effectively limits their freedom of expression. Both the AFL and Cricket Australia have assumed a prominent role in promoting the acceptance of different racial groups, different genders and all sexual orientations.

Though Tennis Australia does not have a declared position on tolerance of different sexual orientations, its membership protocols advise all clubs to open 'your club doors to anyone regardless of age, gender, marital status, culture, ability. Creating an environment that is warm, friendly, open minded and welcoming for all members and public.'

Court's public statements on homosexuality would appear to be out of step with the inclusivity that Tennis Australia promotes.

Both Tennis Australia and Margaret Court Arena management have issued statements distancing themselves from anti-homosexual comments made by Margaret Court.

The Tennis Australia statement reads, 'As a legend of the sport, we respect Margaret Court's achievements in tennis and her unmatched playing record. Her personal views are her own, and do not align with Tennis Australia's values of equality, inclusion and diversity.'

Management for Margaret Court Arena, named after Court, issued the statement: 'Melbourne and Olympic Parks do not support Margaret Court's comments and we remain an organisation committed to embracing equality, diversity and inclusion...'

The question then becomes whether it is possible to separate Court's unfashionable and, for some, offensive views from the sporting achievements which made her famous and led to her having a sporting stadium named in her honour. For some the answer would appear to be 'no'.

What has contributed an additional dimension to the debate is that current Australian grand slam champion, Samantha Stosur, has indicated that Court's recent remarks could prompt some players to boycott the Margaret Court Arena while it bears Court's name. This creates a major dilemma for Tennis Australia. They have either to call for the stadium to be renamed or be prepared to take disciplinary action against players who boycott the Margaret Court Arena.

The current number one men's tennis player, Andy Murray, has called on Tennis Australia to clarify the situation before the Australian Open. Murray has stated, 'I think if something was going to be happening... that should be decided before the event - before the event starts.'

The issue revolves around symbolism. The arena was originally named to act as a symbol of the highest level of achievement in tennis. Now Court's name has come to be associated with bigotry and division. There are those who argue that they should not be made uncomfortable by having to play or be a spectator within a stadium bearing the name of someone whose views they reject.

Were the stadium to be renamed, however, there will be many who will be regretful. Some will be outraged, seeing such an action as an assault on free speech.

If the stadium is renamed then perhaps there should also be a debate on the appropriateness of CEOs declaring their position on controversial issues. If Margaret Court's iconic status is undermined by her expression of divisive views, then is it appropriate for people such as Qantas' chief executive officer, Alan Joyce, publicly to state his opinion on controversial issues? As Court's letter to the West Australian newspaper indicated, she was made uncomfortable at the prospect of flying with an airline that promotes views she rejects.

Another alternative would be for both Court and her opponents to accept that their views differ and leave each others' positions unchallenged or engage in rational debate around the issue, rather than grandstanding.

Items from the Echo news sources index used in the compilation of this issue outline

ABC News, June 2, 2017 comment by Robyn J Whitaker, *Note to Margaret Court: the Bible isn't*

meant to be read that literally [↗](#) - see also **ABC News, June 1, 2017** comment by Keith Mascord, *What Lies Beneath: The Reasons for Christian Opposition to Marriage Equality* [↗](#)

The Guardian, June 3, 2017 news item, *Margaret Court says she is being bullied for her views by US-led 'conspiracy'* [↗](#)

The Australian, June 3, 2017 background by Paige Taylor, *Margaret Court takes defiant stance in the court of public opinion* [↗](#)

The Guardian, June 3, 2017 background by Russell Jackson, *Margaret Court: astounding champion who found God and lost the respect of a nation* [↗](#)

The Guardian, May 25, 2017, news item, *Margaret Court vows to stop flying Qantas over marriage equality stance* [↗](#)

ABC News, May 25, 2017, news item, *Margaret Court Arena name change called for after star's Qantas boycott over gay marriage support* [↗](#)

The Huffington Post, May 25, 2017, news item / background by Anna Calvert, *'Love All': Aussies Respond To Margaret Court's Qantas Boycott* [↗](#) - see also **Qnews**, background, *Read The Marriage Equality Letter Aussie CEOs Wrote To The PM* [↗](#)