



Morrison-Davy, Ruia MBE

Te Arawa, Tuwharetoa

- AMTA Life Member 2001

Ruia Mereana Morrison was born in 1936 at Tikitere, a small farming community between Lake Rotoiti and Rotorua. She is the third of nine children - seven girls and two boys - born to Hingawaka (Waki) Morrison and Tanira Kingi.

Ruia's paternal grandfather, James Montgomery Morrison, who hailed from Scotland, married Ngapuia Teriana Te Tupara Tokoaitua of Ohinemutu Pa, Rotorua. Her maternal grandmother, Erenora Whatāiwi of Ngāti Tuwharetoa, married Wiremu



Billy Jean King & Ruia Morrison – Stanley Street.

Atetini Kingi.

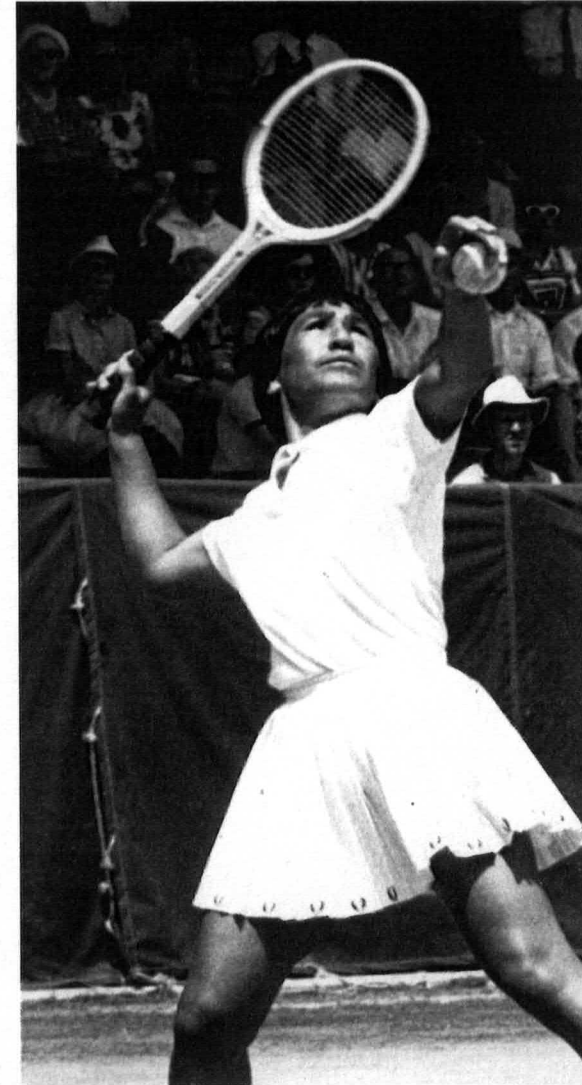
In 1944 the family moved from Tikitere to live in Te Koutu, Rotorua, which is situated across the Utuhina River from Ohinemutu where her grandparents lived.

Ruia received her early education at Rotokawa and Rotorua Primary Schools. She attended Rotorua High School, and for a short time, attended Te Puke High School, before moving to Auckland in 1953 where she enrolled at Queen Victoria School for Māori girls. After completing her secondary education she attended Auckland Teachers' College.

Coinciding with the family move to Rotorua, strong interest was being promoted to revive Māori tennis through marae-based and iwi competitions. Hingawaka Morrison, a keen rugby and tennis player, became actively involved with the Te Koutu community to build two tennis courts.

At first sight of the game, Ruia, at eight years of age, was hooked and became a hōhā to the players. To keep her off the courts, her Dad fashioned a wooden bat so that she could practice on the walls of their weather-board house. Many handy tips and strategies from her Dad were passed on at the time. If set targets were accomplished, she could play on the courts.

Competition tennis for Ruia began in Rotorua with



1960 Ruia Morrison at Wimbledon.

From: Aotearoa Māori Tennis Association Inc. (2006) A History of Māori Tennis – He Hitori o Te Tēnehi Māori. Manukau City: Aotearoa Māori Tennis Association Inc.

inter-marae exchanges around Lake Rotorua. In 1949 Ruia and Joe Paul were included as Juniors in the representative Te Arawa Lawn Tennis Sub-Association team to compete against other iwi at the NZ Māori Lawn Tennis Association Tournament in Gisborne.



1956 Ruia – Fund Raising Social, Auckland Town Hall.

A huge bonus for Ruia and Joe was the special presentation to each of them by Sir Apirana Ngata, of a small silver cup for the "Most Improved Juniors" at the tournament.

For the next two decades Ruia competed in as many Māori Championships as the national and provincial calendars would allow. Christmas tournaments at the Government Gardens in Rotorua and the Bay of Plenty Tennis interclub games also kept Ruia busy, and wherever possible she was encouraged to play in grades above her age group to gain experience.

When Ruia Morrison burst on to the tennis scene as a top junior in the 1950s a much needed breath of fresh air was blown into the women's game. Here was a player with charm, a warm personality, guile and an excellent all-round game, who could give the country's women players long overdue recognition from the sport's hierarchy.

New Zealand tennis was, to a great extent, looked on as a male preserve with little national media



Margaret Smith & Ruia – Fed Cup, Kuyong, Melbourne.

interest, particularly in the women's game. If the men were frustrated by irregular Davis Cup entries and overseas trips, the women were to a large extent ignored. Many would argue that the gross imbalance remains today. However, this situation has improved to a large extent, thanks to Ruia whose career, spanning almost three decades, helped to give women their place in the sun.

While attending Auckland Teachers' College, Ruia played Caro Bowl Interclub for Eden-Epsom and also began a long tennis relationship with Heather Robson. Robson was a great tactician and doubles guide and they formed an excellent combination.

During this time Ruia also represented Auckland in netball.

In 1955, at her first National Senior Championships, she shocked a string of leading established players on her way to the final - Elaine Becroft, Betty Nelson and Pat Nettleton - before Sonia Cox turned the tables with Ruia so close to winning.

Ruia won her first national title the following season, avenging her loss to Cox by beating the Wellington player 6/3, 6/3 in Auckland.

By this time it had become obvious that for Ruia to make any progress in tennis she needed overseas experience.

John Waititi, a teacher with a keen interest in most sports and who was a tennis umpire, had already helped a number of Māori sportsmen and sportswomen. He suggested sending Ruia to Wimbledon.

A "Ruia Morrison Wimbledon Fund Committee" was established. John launched a major fund-raising appeal assisted by Mr and Mrs Lionel Trotman, Phil and Nan Howell, Mr and Mrs Kelly Harris and John Turei to name a few, initially through the Māori tribes, but later, nation-wide, to get Ruia to Britain.

The appeal exceeded all expectations, bringing in £2,000 - more than enough. The excess was kept for a second trip.

Ruia set off overseas in 1957 with her doubles partner, Heather Robson. They were officially attached to the NZ Davis Cup Team.

In Britain, she won several provincial tournaments, gave Althea Gibson, the first black American to



1957 Ruia - First tournament in Britain.

dominate international tennis, a hard match at Surbiton and generally impressed the British critics with her calm determination, wide angle shots and consistent volleying.

As the first Māori to play at Wimbledon, she impressed. She made people aware of New Zealand as a tennis nation by winning a series of tough matches. She beat Billy Woodgate, J.L. Debford and Sheila Armstrong to reach the fourth round where she met her match in Betty Pratt, the number four player and manager of the United States team. Despite that loss, it was a stunningly successful debut in Europe for Ruia.

At the invitation of Betty Pratt, Ruia joined Maria Bueno and Althea Gibson in the Caribbean early in 1958 for the first tournament that marked the beginning of an International Circuit for most international tennis players.

In 1959, she lost to Christine Truman in the quarter-finals of the British Hard-Court Championships, won the Guildford Championships by beating South Africa's Joan Cross, and won the mixed-doubles with Mexican, Gustavo Palafox.

Ruia and Pat Nettleton reached the third round of Wimbledon Doubles in 1959 and Ruia made the fourth round of the mixed-doubles with Brian Woolf from New Zealand. In singles, Ruia reached the round of 16 for the third year in a row, this time losing to the eventual champion, Maria Bueno.

In successive years she won the New Zealand National Singles title twice by beating Anne Smith, but her grip on silver-ware was briefly dislodged in the 1961/62 season when Cantabrian, Judy Davidson won.

There were enough funds in 1961 to send Ruia to Wimbledon once more. However, she decided to forgo the trip. Instead, the money was handed over to the newly formed Māori Education Board. Ruia argued that the Board's work was more important than another trip.

During the 1962 season, Ruia won her fifth National Singles Title, even though she was up against players who had had the benefit of an extensive overseas trip in the winter. This time she beat Judy Davidson 6/2, 3/6, 6/4 and added another doubles title with Heather Robson for good measure.

A few months after winning that title she married Kenneth Alan Davy. The couple was to spend some time living in Christchurch and several times Ruia indicated that it was time she gave tennis away. The 1964/65 Nationals in Christchurch brought Ruia her sixth and last National Title. She beat the leading British player, Rita Bentley 5/7, 6/2, 6/1.

Early in 1965, Ruia and Waikato's Elizabeth Terry comprised the New Zealand team which competed in the Federation Cup competition in Melbourne - the women's long overdue equivalent to the men's Davis Cup. They were selected after

trials in Wellington and did well to beat Argentina 2/1 before losing to Australia 3/0. A few months later, Ruia decided to become actively involved in some aspect of coaching. Rothmans Coaching Clinics provided the perfect springboard.

She had been a regular entry in Auckland's prestigious tournament, the W.D. & H.O. Wills, winning the Women's title in 1959 and 1960. In the first, she beat Australians Betty Holstein and Jan Lehane and in 1960, beat the great Margaret Smith in the final and also won the doubles and mixed-doubles.

Ruia made a point of making another come-back to play in the first New Zealand tournament in the "open era" - the Benson and Hedges in 1969.

Two years later, Ruia used all her considerable experience as captain to assist the New Zealand team of Marilyn Pryde and Robyn Legg in the Federation Cup in Perth.

In all, Ruia Morrison won thirteen National Titles, six North Island and two South Island Titles, with many more at provincial level. It was not only the results which saw Ruia make such a permanent imprint on the game, it was her sparkling personality and impish grin that set her apart from the crowd. She was the best thing to happen to women's tennis in many years.

As with the men, the development of the women's game at this time was hampered by a lack of



1986 Fred Perry & Ruia - Whakarewarewa Village.

coaches. There were no women coaching until Ruia and one or two others began devoting time to it. Some would watch and copy the strokes of visiting overseas players such as Darlene Hard, Angela Mortimer, Margaret Smith, Lesley Turner and Jan Lehane.

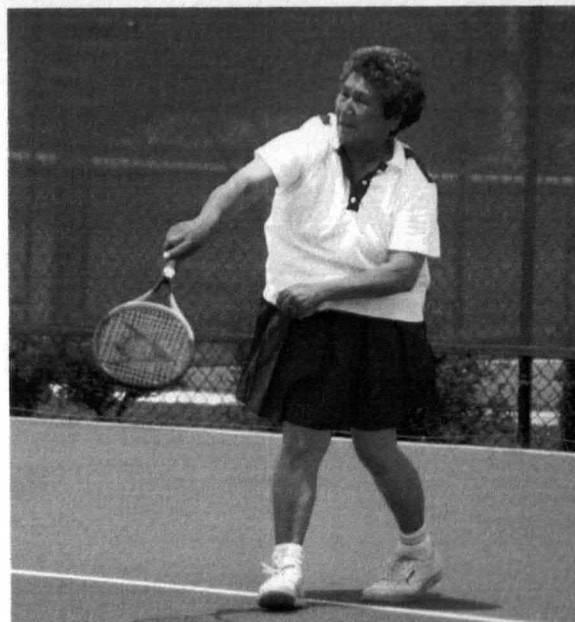
Ruia had spurred some changes to the understanding and recognition of the game. Her services to the sport were recognised in 1960 when the Governor General, Lord Cobham, presented her with the MBE for services to the Māori people and New Zealand tennis.

One of Ruia's most memorable occasions was her first scheduled match on centre court at Wimbledon. She was to play the British number one Junior who she had beaten in New Zealand.

Her good friend Colonel Legg, the Tournament Referee, who used to call her "Guide Rangī," said the crowd would be all for the English girl, but he said to her, 'You can beat her!'

'I was nervous and freaking out when we walked on to the centre court. As I crossed the court, it rained. They postponed the match until the next day. Lucky for me they rescheduled the match for court two, where I was less nervous and won the match.

Another memorable occasion was meeting the Queen at a garden party which was organized by



2001 Ruia - Serving Opening Ball, 75th Tournament.

Sir Charles and Lady Bennett.

A highlight of Māori tennis was competing in the NZ Māori Women's Team which played Australia in 1953 in Rotorua. Taini Jamison, Pat Davis, Lilian Adsett, Ann Malcolm, Mary Anne Dewes and I, were the members of our team.

In the semi-finals of the Australian Open in Kuyong, Australia, I played Margaret Court. Although I lost, it was probably the best I ever played in my life!

In 2001, Ruia was awarded Life Membership of the Aotearoa Māori Tennis Association. As a guest, she still attends our Māori Championships. She can also be seen gracing the stands at the annual ASB Women's Classic in Auckland.

Ruia will be a guest of honour at the 80th Māori Championships in Hamilton in December 2006.

NZ Junior Titles

U/18 Singles	1954
U/18 Doubles	1954

NZ Senior Titles

Open Singles	1956, 58, 59, 60, 62, 64
Open Doubles	1955, 56, 58, 59, 61, 62, 64
Open Mixed	1959

Māori Tennis Titles

Junior Singles	1950
Open Singles	1952, 58, 65, 70

Open Doubles	1958, 65, 70
Open Mixed	1952, 65, 70

Regional Titles

North Island Titles	6
South Island Titles	2
WD & HO Wills - Auckland	1959, 60

International Titles

Guildford (England)	
Singles	1959
Doubles	1959
Mixed-Doubles	1959

Representative Teams

- 1958 NZ Māori Womens Team versus Australia
- 1965 Federation Cup Team - Player & Captain
- 1972 Federation Cup Team - Captain

Grand Slam Tournaments

- Australian Open
- French Open
- Wimbledon
- US Open

International Events

- 1958 London Grass Court Championships
- 1959 Toured Singapore, Ceylon, Kuwait and Bahrain with the famous Maria Bueno

Auckland Netball Team

Juniors	1954
Seniors	1955