

★ ☆ ★ ☆ ★ Personalities in Profile ☆ ★ ☆ ★ ☆ ★ By C. M. Jones ★ ☆ ★ ☆ ★

★ The Deadly Bueno-Bombshell from Brazil ★

ONCE in every decade or so a new, glittering star erupts upon the tennis firmament. Don Budge, Alice Marble, Pancho Gonzales, Maureen Connolly, of the immortals born of Forest Hills or Wimbledon these past twenty one years, they are the few who have combined their supreme skills with an indefinable something which has lifted them above ordinary greatness.

I prophesy that 1958 will live as the year in which possibly the most exciting star of all made her debut in Europe and at Wimbledon... MARIA ESTHER BUENO.

Maria will dominate Wimbledon during the next decade just as surely as Maureen Connolly would have done but for the tragic accident which ended her career.

People may ask why. The reasons are not difficult to find.

Those who travel the international tournament circuit whisper words like "genius." Some less charitable say "lucky to be born with such abundant talent" but in listening to them I recall that truism "genius is 10% inspiration, 90% perspiration." And if anyone disbelieves the perspiration part about Maria let them dwell on the month which preceded her present world tour. In it are to be found most of the reasons why this dynamic, 18½-year-old Brazilian wonder is already one of the top players in the world.

What a Schedule

During that month Maria's daily schedule read: 2 a.m. Rise and study till 5.30 a.m. 5.30—7.15 a.m. Tennis practice at the club across the road. 7.15—9 a.m. Bath, breakfast and to school. 4 p.m. Return home for study, meal, and more study. 11 p.m. Go to bed. Is it any wonder that during that month Maria, who had precious little fat to lose, in fact shed 17½ lbs.?

This programme was not lightly taken. The daughter of a comfortably-off veterinary surgeon who specialises in the preparation of animal foods, Maria has a deep love for her father, her mother, and her brother Pedro, all of whom are addicted to tennis. It was her father's wish that Maria should train as a school teacher and the winter term of 1957 was the climax of her studies and examinations. Her tournament programme had kept Maria from school for two months of the year and she was well behind with her work. In Brazil it is permissible to pass later simply by taking again only those subjects which have been failed. But Maria knew well that once 1958 began she would never again have the chance. So, no matter the cost, the family could not possibly be let down.

Maria passed with honour—throughout her school life she won second prizes each year; "There was one girl there far

cleverer than I" says Maria—and now she is qualified to teach children up to the age of 14 in all subjects. Will she ever? Maria shrugs her shoulders. "I am not particularly fond of children. I qualified because it was my father's wish and I want to please him," she says.

Let those who say Maria is lucky or that they haven't the time for practice read that schedule again. Let them ponder, too, upon the previous year in which the Brazilian Championships coincided with examinations. Then, too, the programme was study, exams. 12 till 3 p.m., an afternoon match; home for more study, back to the club for another match under floodlights, yet more study for the morrow's exam. and finally, too tired to sleep, bed. Pardon me if I lose my temper next time they say "luck."

There is good fortune, and plenty of it, in Maria's life; in her tennis, too. Though they live in a comfortable apartment, the Buenos have little garden space, but they are right opposite the San Paulo tennis club and so from the age of one month Maria began a membership that has been her constant joy ever since. Though she has no memories of those airings in her pram, she does remember the fun she and her brother have had in that club, first as toddlers, then as mischievous kids, later as tennis mad teenagers, and now as the most famous players ever produced by Brazil; Pedro, now 20 years old and a University student in Texas, has already gained his Davis Cup colours and is thrice a former South American junior champion and the current U.S.A. inter-collegiate champion.

A slow warm smile lights up Maria's face when she tells of the friends, the parties, the chatter around the swimming pool and in the club lounges. The surprise invasions of the Buenos' home. Of the motor launch she and Pedro saved to buy and anchor in the river which runs behind the club. There is no greater joy in Maria's life than to pack a sandwich lunch and escape with her dear Pedro for a day of leisurely exploration of the river's highways and byways. Probably the day will include a swim, for Maria won two State championships before the tennis bug bit her. Knowing ones say her aquatic skill yields nothing to her tennis prowess.

If there has been no romance as yet in Maria's life it may well be because she loves her parents and brother so dearly.

Separation Painful

Separation from them, even for a few days, is painful. Not until 1955 were she and Pedro parted. Then he was selected to go to Chile and Maria departed for Mexico to play in the Pan-American Championships. Since then tennis and Pedro's enrolment at Lamar State College have meant longer separations. But most days of the year letters speed between them and Maria wears his ring as a constant reminder of his affections. "We have always done everything together and we have absolutely no secrets from one

another. When I am sad he jokes and is cheerful until I am happy again. When I lose he gives me good advice. When I have to play new people he tells me what to do. Next year we will buy a car together. He already has one in America but that is not the same. We have always owned things together and that is why we shall buy a car" Maria said.

From her beginning at the age of ten, Maria has never had formal coaching. She owes her immaculate style to Pedro and their wonderful friend Rubens Araujo Costa. He it is who drags himself out of bed to practice with Maria at 5.30 a.m., and who has always provided friendship, guidance and encouragement to Maria and Pedro.

"He is our right hand man. Only his money, his guidance, his organisation, his knowledge made this trip possible. He has been wonderful to both of us" says Maria.

Everyone "Wonderful"

But everyone in the San Paulo Club—and in a host of other places, too—has been "wonderful" to this warm hearted, relaxed and friendly phenomenon.

Maybe it is the very nature of the girl that gives her such magnificent movements. Walking back, perhaps to receive service, she has a relaxed, sinuous, cat-like relaxation that in itself is exciting in its promise



To the very tips of her fingers and toes Maria, here seen playing a backhand low volley, is an artist with the racket

of the supple, explosive, and utterly graceful strokes and leaps that are to follow.

As if the racket is part of her body, Maria caresses and coaxes the ball like a kitten playing with a ball. But with a

THEY CAN'T BEAR TO BE PARTED

Maria and her brother Pedro whose affection for each other is so deep, that separation becomes painful. At the moment, he is the only boy in her life—and she wears his ring to prove it.



difference. Despite their caressing appearance, her strokes carry deadly penetration.

A one-grip stroke maker, Maria's backhand is a poem of sweeping grace and her volleys the brushings of a master artist. Send her a lob and she pounces with the menacing swiftness of a panther to bury the ball with a frightening finality; hers is a smash no man would scorn. If there is a weakness it lies in her forehand. At its best it is unplayable but just as Fred Perry took many years to tame his forehand until it became the greatest of all time, so Maria now suffers spells when the net seems two feet too high and the backstop ten yards too near.

Shattering Mixture

This seldom happens in a crisis. Like Connolly, when the chips are down Maria rises like some Phoenix from the ashes of despair to hit with a bravery and decision which hammers hopelessness into her helpless opponents.

At present she sometimes loses. If her shattering mixtures of pace, angles, drop shots, aces, volleys and smashes are clicking Maria wins, if they are not, she loses. There is nothing that anyone except, perhaps, Althea Gibson can do but stand and take it.

It is difficult to remember that Maria is only eighteen, for already her tactical knowledge is superior to that of all but a handful of her contemporaries. This is in part a tribute to the help she has been given by Armando Viera since they played together in the 1955 Pan American Games. It is also the result of her own persistence in watching all the tennis she can. Not

for fun but to learn, digest, and dissect the methods of the stars.

Maria has been criticised at times for her behaviour on court, and that ugly word "Gamesmanship" has been whispered. Ten minutes in her company without one mention of "tennis" dispels any notions of the latter. "Gamesmanship" is the child of sophistication, not of the complete naturalness of Maria. It is, indeed, her naturalness which leads to the occasional tiffs with which her matches have come to be associated. Maria does not play her matches, she lives them. If she makes a good shot she is pleased. A bad one angers her. So does a wrong line call. Then Maria will show her feelings with the uninhibited freedom of her nature, perhaps in a glare, the slashing of a loose ball, or even in the dropping of her racket. In a moment the outburst is over, the sun reappears in her game, and Maria at least has forgotten all about it. Poor sportsmanship? Ask her about the girls who beat her. You will never hear a whine or an excuse for a defeat. Probe deeper and you will find a generous appreciation of her rivals' strong points and a cruelly accurate appraisal of their weaknesses. Sure, she hates to lose and she lies awake at nights when she does, but not to curse her conqueror.

Maria, A Court

What are the ambitions of this girl whose tennis career has already been perpetuated through the gift to her by the San Paulo club of a court which carries a commemorative plaque. They gave her brother a court at the same time, for

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FRANK? NO FEAR

FRANZ STAMPFL'S infallibility as a trainer suffered a severe debunking by Lorraine Coghlan, Australia's top ranking woman star, during the French Championships.

"He tried to train me like his athletes instead of as a tennis player. As soon as he left I cut down everything to half and then when the last Australian tennis season began I packed up training altogether. I used to enjoy the running and skipping I did on my own but he made it so boring I've lost all interest. All I do now is play tennis," Lorraine told B.L.T. & S. in an exclusive interview.

Though Lorraine was grateful for his interest, she cannot honestly attribute any of her improvement to Stampfl. Instead, she believes Frank Sedgman is responsible. Lorraine said, "My boss (Bob Mitchell) hired Sedgman to train Bob Mark and me. I practised with Sedgman three times a week for six weeks. He really pushed me around and it did me a tremendous amount of good." In another exclusive interview Mark repeated the praises for Sedgman and said how enormously he, too, had benefited from Sedgman's watchful advice and the tough practice. "Boy, he doesn't give a thing away. His concentration is phenomenal. Any point you get from Sedg. you really work for," Mark told B.L.T. & S.

The greatest handicaps to Lorraine's progress have been the scarcity of tournaments in which she could play and the relative weakness of the opposition. "For the last two years I've been able to beat the other girls back home. Angela Mortimer's visit last year did me a world of good, and now this trip is giving me more Tournament play than I have ever had," said Lorraine.

Thanks to the enthusiasm of Mitchell—a pharmaceutical wizard and, reputedly, a millionaire—who has given Lorraine a job, security, a wonderful coach and all the time off she wishes. When she is not playing tennis she works as a typist—and finds it the perfect relaxation from tennis. Now her ambition is to win Wimbledon—and, charmingly modest as she is, Lorraine has no overwhelming fears about Maria Bueno or Althea Gibson. "Althea's service is more difficult to take, but she doesn't put her volleys away. Maria is more decisive but she makes an enormous number of mistakes," was her analysis of their relative merits. Time will tell how accurate they are.

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between them, Maria and Pedro had won ten of the twenty events at the State Championships. Now the club holds a gala dinner whenever Maria departs or returns to San Paulo.

Ambitions? I remember asking Maureen Connolly that question many times during the days she spent with my family during her first visit to England. Always she gave the same, unhesitating answer. "To perfect my game. Then I will be able to beat everybody." I have asked hundreds of stars and near stars that same question since. Many and varied have been their answers.

To me it is more than coincidence that Maria replied "To perfect my game. Then I will be able to win the things I want to win." Twelve months will see her do it.