

THROWBACK THURSDAY: MARIA BUENO WINS HER THIRD WIMBLEDON

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By Leigh Walsh



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Our Throwback Thursday series continues as Maria Bueno wins her third and final Wimbledon title , the only South American woman to win The Championships. *Wimbledon.com* goes back in time...

“If you like graceful women and good tennis, you can watch Maria Bueno all day,” wrote Sports Illustrated’s Herbert Warren Wind in 1960.

The Brazilian youngster, at 20, had just won back-to-back singles titles at Wimbledon and her talent was sending a wave of interest across the sporting world. Like Suzanne Lenglen before her and Evonne Goolagong Cawley after her, Bueno’s ability to wield a racket like a magician would a wand separated her from her peers.

The right-hander was born to a tennis-loving couple who thrust a racket into their daughter’s hands at a young age. Along with her parents and brother Pedro, the Buenos spent much of their time hitting tennis balls back and forth at Clube de Regatas Tiete in São Paulo on the doorstep of their family home.

It was some 6,000 miles away, however, on the lawns of the All England Club where Bueno made a lasting mark on the game. And by the time the “Sao Paulo Swallow” arrived in South West London in 1964 bidding for a hat-trick of Wimbledon titles, she was a household name with her all-court game, fluid movement and elegant strokes endearing her to fans.

The top four seeds all advanced to the semi-final stage that year. Margaret Smith, Billie Jean Moffitt and Lesley Turner – or as we know them today Margaret Court, Billie Jean King and Lesley Bowrey – all joined Bueno in the final four.

Bueno, the No. 2 seed, had dropped just 12 games in her opening four matches before overcoming the unyielding baseliner Turner, who was a two-time French Open champion, 3-6, 6-4, 6-4 in the semi-final.

Her opponent in the final was a familiar foe, Margaret Smith. The top seeded Australian, who was the defending champion, had defeated Bueno in the French Open final one month previously and the Brazilian was seeking revenge.

Bueno pressurised Court from the off, imposing herself on the defending champion with her array of shots and a serve which was modelled from a picture of the great American player Bill Tilden.

Court fought back to take the second set 9-7 after Bueno had bagged the first 6-4. But the Brazilian continued to chip away at Court and her aggressive game, eventually wearing the Aussie down to win 6-3 in the deciding set.

In the final point of the match (see from 4:30 in the accompanying clip) Bueno showcased the many characteristics that made her a great champion: speed, movement, quick hands, delicate touch and the ability to turn defence into attack with ease. It was a remarkable half-volleyed dropshot from a Court smash that sealed the win before an exuberant Bueno launched her racket into the air, leaping up and down in her dainty Ted Tinling creation.

While talent can sometimes be a curse – no Grand Slam champions were ever crowned on elegance alone – Bueno had substance to match the style, and it was her ability to turn performances into results that cemented her place in history.

Exactly fifty years on from her Centre Court heroics, Bueno remains the only South American female to emerge victorious at Wimbledon. Of the 120 Ladies’ Singles titles won, 117 belong to Europe, the United States and Australia. The remaining three are in the hands of Brazil and their national heroine, Maria Bueno.

When the final ball was struck, she finished her career with seven Grand Slam singles titles – winning an additional four at Forest Hills – and 11 major doubles crowns.

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