



Henry Wancke meets his tennis idol.

Having suffered a 12 hour flight to Orlando, Florida, tiredness is joined by relief once you clear customs and their infamous immigration to successfully negotiate your entry into the States. With family in full tow the next worry was making contact with the Walt Disney hosts who were to transport us to their own version of America. That's when the unexpected happened—the welcoming party included Maria Esther Bueno, who proceeded to act as a porter with the luggage and then become our driver for the 20 minutes needed to reach our destination!

Surprised, I was—I didn't expect an ex-Wimbledon and US Champion, an acknowledged 'all time great' and my idol of the late fifties and early sixties to be involved in mundane matters of this nature. But, by the end of the week, my idol had grown in stature. I only wish that today's generation of players could emulate, even just a fraction, her attitude to life.

Her story is well known and her name certainly lives on. Many still remember her grace and style on court twenty years ago—it hasn't reached the stage where only those long in the tooth can recount the artistry and flair she possessed and still brings to her clinics and exhibition matches.

I remember her well from those days, but Lance Tingay in his long running series in this magazine, expressed everyone's sentiments, when he concluded his piece on Maria in May last year, 'Maria Bueno in full cry on the court transcended normal sporting values. It was poetry in motion, a web of beauty, even though the web was sometimes fragile.' That fragility was her eventual undoing. She suffered numerous injuries (elbow, knee and shoulder) and though illness was never a problem, the one she did contract proved very bad—hepatitis.

MARIA BUENO



Melinda Phillips

'I never had a proper racquet,' she explained. 'My first racquet was my mother's and then I got my brother's—I was always last on the list! When I started to play properly they gave me my first real racquet, a Wilson, which was probably just a little bit too heavy. But I used my brother's racquet which was heavy with a big handle and I had the strings very tight. So maybe if all that initial equipment hadn't been provided I could have lasted longer. Also I don't think my body was built for the type of game I played. Everybody now goes to a gymnasium to do the proper exercises and if I'd done that it might not have happened—but maybe it would have anyway. My injuries started when I was doing exercises to get stronger!' The fact that she started with the wrong racquet for her physique would seem to have caused the problems. However in trying to get her to confirm that, she continued 'Or that I

played too much! I always liked to play with men in order to build a stronger game. All this was probably too much for my arm and everything else. When I first hurt my arm at Wimbledon, I didn't think too much about it. I just thought I was tired. So I went on and played in Belgium and then, when I was trying to hold a Coke, it fell through my fingers. Then I knew it was serious, but not how serious. I just went to see somebody at the Club and was told 'Well, that's not really too bad—just stop for a week, have a massage and you'll be OK! If I'd had a group with me they would have probably taken me to hospital for proper treatment and it could have been different.'

This is the message she is now expanding to up and coming players. It certainly was one she made forcibly during a seminar to the competitors contesting the Sport Goofy Trophy at Orlando. In many ways she can be categorised as a burn out

case, though not a teenage one. Making use of advice which currently exists was part of her message.

In her day everything was casual. Having been diagnosed she stayed in Europe for four weeks simply receiving massage. She then returned to the States where she tried to play and found it got worse. Next stop was home in Brazil, where everything was tried—'shots' and so on, but everything was just 'trying'.

Maria Bueno at work and play during the Sport Goofy Festival, Orlando.



In many ways it sounded as if she was just being used as an experimental guinea pig. She tried anyone, from faith healers to quacks—anyone who had a doctor tag was approached. In view of her position and status she could have expected more. 'Everybody was trying to help me, but not in a professional way,' she concluded.

Her inevitable retirement was not far off as she was in great pain. 'But pain you get used to,' she said. 'It becomes like a physical impediment. I tried, I came back, I had cortizone shots. I had two shots a week to play Wimbledon. I was playing about 25% of what I could play. If I was lucky I was winning in three sets against people I used to beat 2 and 2. I was basically allowed to play every other day—I was entering tournaments saying I only had 40 minutes to win or lose each match, and hoping that every other day brought rain so I didn't have to play! I was driving me crazy, so I said it wasn't worth it.' Retirement followed and it brought an era to an end.

As far as the outside world was concerned, and her many fans, she became a recluse. She had always been a shy and retiring sort of person, so that conclusion was perhaps unfair. She admitted to being uncomfortable around a lot of people and never really found