

Maria Bueno Wants To Come Back. Can She?

By Roy McKelvie

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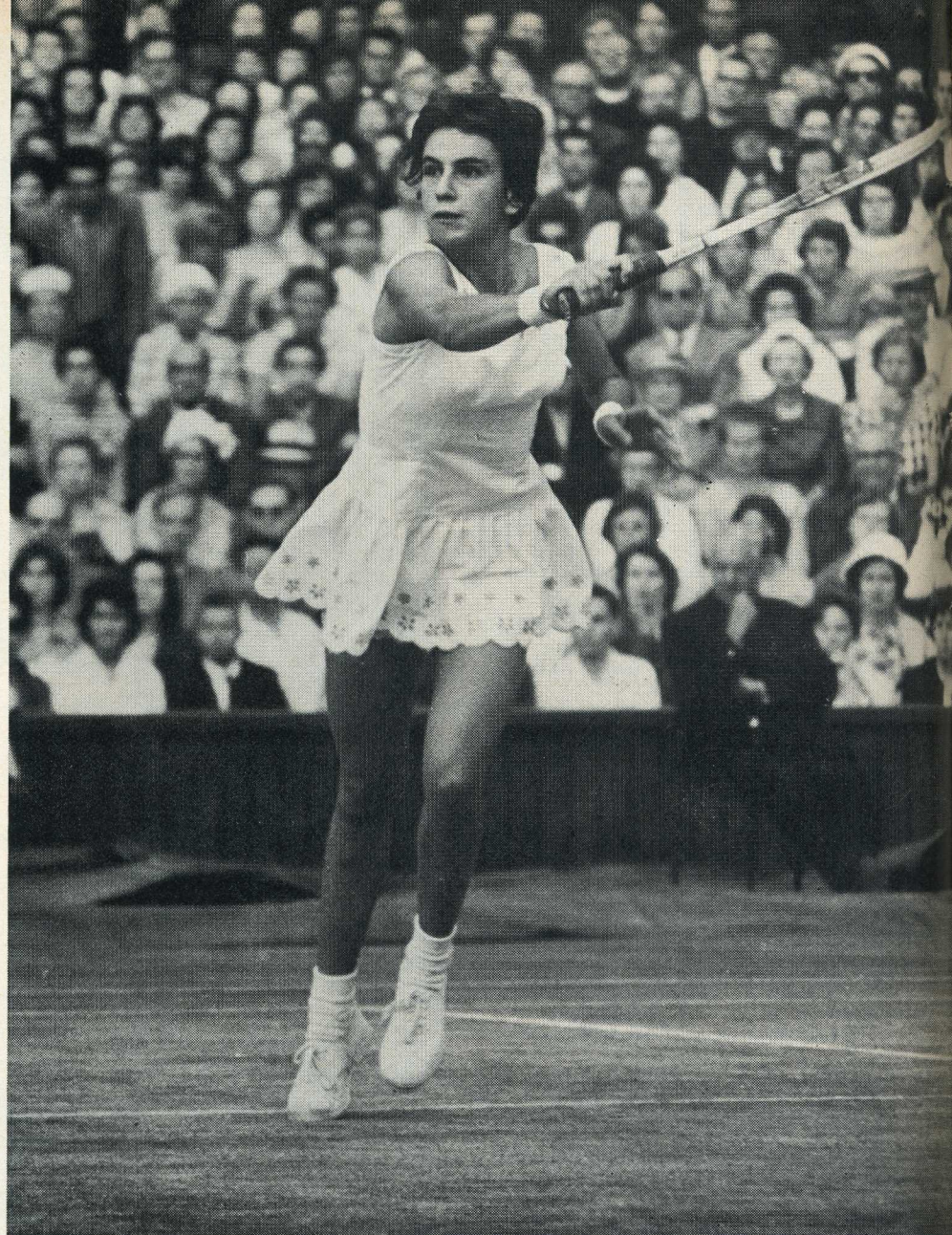
Maria Bueno, three times Wimbledon, four times U.S. champion and now 34, is attempting a comeback.

"I don't expect to win Wimbledon but I enjoy playing. It's been my life and I would like to get back to the game to play at Wimbledon and in Europe, even though I am no longer at the top", said the brown-eyed Brazilian, who thrilled and enthralled the tennis world for 10 years from 1958.

Then, one fateful day at Wimbledon in 1967, Maria's arm gave way. "That day I played 105 games in singles and doubles and was on court for eight hours", said Maria, whose pantherish grace, piercing strokes and queenly haughtiness made her the most exciting player to watch since France's Suzanne Lenglen dominated the scene in the 'twenties.

"Something went in my arm. I could hardly lift it. I had treatment and after Wimbledon tried to carry on playing. But every so often I had to stop.

"Doctors said if I didn't stop I might never use my arm again. Since then, I have had seven operations and now, at last, it seems all right", continued Maria, showing me the scars around her right elbow.



Humid

Maria and I were talking in the clubhouse of the plush Toronto Club during the Rothman's Canadian Open Championships. Outside, the heat was in the mid-eighties, and the humidity in the nineties.

Maria had just lost her match to a lusty young Canadian, Jane O'Hara, but showed neither annoyance or self-recrimination.

That match had been played on the centre court. The stands were full - the older people to see the one-time heroine again, the younger eager to view the player who was just a name to them.

For a set and a half Maria was on top. Then the vision faded. Every so often people said "What lovely strokes", and they were right. The urge to move forward all the time,

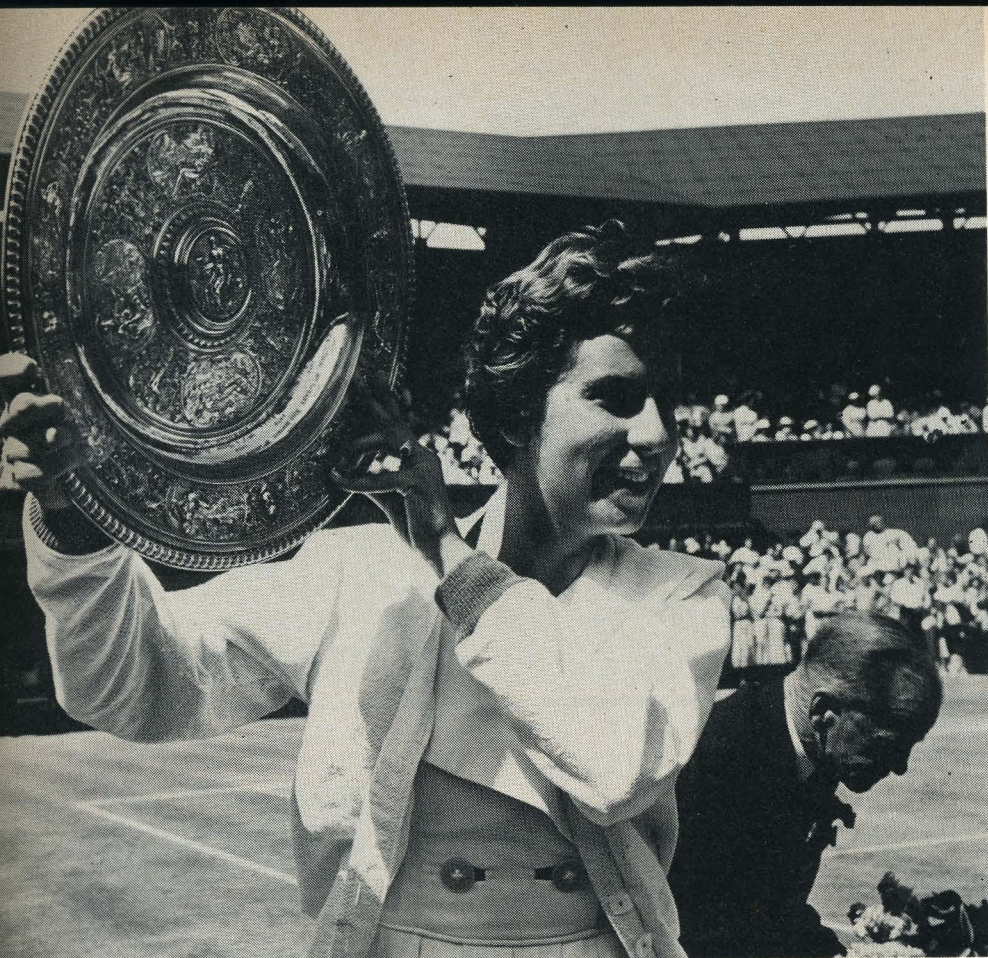
to take the ball on the rise with that short swing like throwing a dart, was there.

But, as always, Maria gave herself little or no margin of error and on slow, hard courts that can be costly. On fast grass at Wimbledon it could be different.

Slow

"The trouble is that I have been practising with men on fast courts", said Maria. "This court was very slow, and you know how I like to attack. I have never enjoyed long rallies and Jane got a lot of balls back."

Maria reflected: "It was nice of them to put that match on the centre court. Just like old times. Everywhere I've been, people seem happy



Above: Jubilant Maria takes her first Wimbledon Title in 1959 – Referee, the late Col. John Legg, assists with the bouquets.



Right: The Queen and her couturier, Teddy Tinling.

Left: Maria on the way to her second Wimbledon Title in 1960.

to see me. Even the young players who know me only by name came up and said they wanted to see me play. I hope I didn't disappoint them too much."

Then Maria, smiling puckishly, added: "Do you know this is the first time in my life I've lost in the first round and this was also the first championship match I've played for six years. I had to start somewhere, sometime, even if it's at the bottom. Anyone must expect – be prepared – to lose when making a comeback. I'm not upset or ashamed."

She continued: "Now I must play a few matches to get the feel of competition again. All the games I've been playing have been practice or coaching or exhibitions, mostly in Brazil. That's not the same as playing matches. I feel confident and, if my arm stands up, then I see no reason why I shouldn't play as well as before. I am very fit and, looking at some of the players, I don't see anything fantastic."

No cash

Ironically, Maria has never seen Chris Evert. The current Wimbledon champion arrived here just as Maria left for New York.

On the question of the big money now to be won in tennis, Maria said "I must say you can't help feeling frustrated. I remember one year when I won Wimbledon, Forest Hills and Rome and played 32 tournaments. I made only 5,000 dollars.

"That was before Open tennis and nowadays the girls make that in a week – and more. Someone once worked out that at present day rates I would have made a million dollars."

Today's game lacks the colourful personalities among the women. They are machines, and, Miss Bueno was never like that. "The fact that I'm playing again is a big victory for me. If I can continue then it will be a bigger one", said the woman who has lost none of her charm or bloom and whose figure is as athletically trim as ever.

