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BIG BILL: Tilden's image at Flushing Meadows, NY.

Bill Tilden's Saga: A Writer's Ordeal

By TOM PENNER

Three summers ago during a TV broadcast of the U.S. Open, John McEnroe said that before he died he'd like to see just one good tennis movie.

Mac couldn't know it, but this particular writer was already trying to make good on that request. The tragic story of the greatest tennis player ever, Big Bill Tilden, was making its way to the silver screen (at least in my mind) via my computer, and inspired largely by the classic tennis biography, *Big Bill Tilden* (1975) written by the venerable sports journalist, Frank Deford.

I wrote to Deford and he answered my letter because, he said, his wife's maiden name was the same as mine.

Generous and blunt, he said he didn't imagine a six-month period had passed since writing the book when someone hadn't contacted him about turning it into a movie. He said many scripts, both for TV and film, had never gotten off the ground, and that at this stage my chances seemed remote. Then he wished me good luck

Continued on Page 2

Two SDSU Tennis Teams Poised for 2004 Season

Aztecs Defending Mountain Crowns

San Diego State's men's and women's tennis teams are setting out to defend their Mountain West Conference championship titles in the 2004 season with a mixture of new faces and returning veterans.

Dita Hauerlandova of the Czech Republic, a transfer from Virginia's Hampton University, is a top new competitor. Her teammates include Aztec veterans Indra Erichsen and Patricia Graf of Germany, Julie Litrich of Newport

2004 Schedules, Page 4

Beach, and Katalina Romero of Mexico. Russian-born Alesya Vidov is a newcomer from New York City.

Led by Peter Mattera, in his tenth season as head coach, and Christy Panter, in her first season as assistant coach, the Aztec women play a rigorous schedule, including matches against UC Berkeley, Washington, Georgia Tech, Tulsa, and Purdue.

The Aztec men face a transition to the style of Interim Head Coach Gene Carswell, who was assistant coach for five years under John Nelson, now at Hawaii. The Aztecs play, among others, UCLA, Yale, Princeton, and South Alabama.

Returning Aztec All American Ryan Redondo of San Diego leads a team of seasoned players, including Armando Carrascosa of Mexico, Mike Coelho of San Diego, and Felix Hardt and Daniel Jung of Germany.

In October, Redondo and Hardt gained the quarterfinals of the All America tour-



Erichsen

Graf

Hauerlandova

Litrich



Romero

Vidov

Panter

Mattera



Carrascosa

Coelho

Groh

Hardt



Jung

Redondo

Stronk

Maiberger

nament in Chattanooga, TN, defeating teams from SMU and Fresno State.

Newcomers Christian Groh and Benedikt Stronk, both of Germany, will work out with the team but sit out the 2004 season to gain NCAA eligibility.



Carswell

All-American Oliver Maiberger of Germany, who has returned for a master's degree in business, will assist the Aztec men's team. He and Redondo won the 2001 National Indoor title and 2003 Pacific Coast Doubles Championship.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

- Madame P's Backhand 2
- 1957: Where Are We Now? 3
- ATR's Unforced Errors 3

NEXT ISSUE:

Fifth Anniversary Edition

William Blake, the English poet, artist, engraver and publisher, saw the universe in a blade of grass. So why can't Russ Cormier see art in a tennis racquet? Or brush a racquet into his art?

Cormier is a New York City tennis pro and painter who lives in an Upper West Side apartment adorned with nearly 300 wooden tennis racquets. Many are antiques in Great Depression-era finery, sturdy clubs with colorful piping and flashy decals.

Across from his mounted racquets is a portrait Cormier painted of Madame de Pompadour, the mistress and long-time friend of France's King Louis XV. A slight smile on her face, she grasps one of those old racquets in her left hand.

By inserting a piece of sports equipment into a work of art, Cormier reminds us that athletes deserve a place in history and art just as much as mistresses and kings.

Scandal is a subject not

Madame de Pompadour's Backhand



ATRPhotos

ARTFUL: Russ Cormier's wall of racquets and his painting.

unknown in monarchies - or universities, for that matter. Big-time college sports is totally corrupt; in the words of columnist Robert Lipsyte, writing in *The New York Times*.

The system of recruitment and servitude gives off a foul odor. Bad grades are ignored, bad records revised, bad lessons learned: Expediency in the service of an alma mater (or a pro-

fessional sports franchise) is okay. It's an ugly sight.

What does this have to do with Madame de Pompadour? True, in 17th Century France or 21st Century America, it's hard to find a satisfying moral to any story of betrayal and mistrust,

The spectacle of Louis XV, moving from one adulterous affair to another, must have given proper French citizens the fits. Who could not have been forgiven for believing that nothing good would come of it?

Yet, Madame P eased the pain. When the affair ended, she remained the King's friend and a patron of the arts, ultimately symbolizing a certain gritty rectitude. Scandalized France survived.

Even so, her backhand looks a trifle weak. Maybe, like most of us, she needed a good tennis coach to keep her on the straight and narrow in the first place.

—John Martin (1957)

'Big Bill': Is Tilden Saga Too Sad for Hollywood?

Continued from Page 1

and tossed in the fragile hope that perhaps I might succeed where countless others have tried and failed.

This, of course, is what a tennis player needs to hear. Tell me it can't be done and I might just throw myself into a quixotic three-and-a-half year quest to create the best script ever written about tennis. After all, said Big Bill, champions are born in the labor of defeat.

Whether Hollywood execs will share that enthusiasm is a wholly different matter. With audience pleasers such as *Finding Nemo* and *Bad Boys II* making the rounds, the movie marketplace probably isn't clamoring for a story about a troubled old gay tennis legend, but perhaps the very human side of Big Bill's story will find its champions. Maybe those who made a hit of another sports legend, *Seabiscuit*, will rediscover Big Bill, too. Whatever.



Bill Tilden

The need to write Tilden's story arose from a much deeper place in my heart, Johnny Mac aside. In my own life there have been two constants -- tennis and film. Big Bill's story was a coalescence, a

natural blending of those two passions.

And it isn't really a tennis movie as much as it is a story of a lonely old lion in his autumn years. The more I learned about this enigmatic superstar of the 1920s -- his sad, crippling youth, the demons which haunted him his entire life, not to mention his unpar-

alleled contributions to the game, and also that he considered himself first and foremost a mentor -- I knew it was something I had to write.

Big Bill said that in tennis the fascination of playing is paramount, the victory a minor consideration. For better or worse, I wrote by this code. He also believed a real tennis player never plays not to lose, but rather plays with no fear and for the fun of the game, or not at all.

One of my biggest challenges was to carve through the vast forest of his life and

whittle the already made-for-movie events and themes down to their simplest form.

But the toughest job of all was making Big Bill someone an audience could find the

Aztec Tom Penner (1981-83) writes screenplays in Long Beach and teaches tennis in Orange County.

Continued on Page 3

Aztec Tennis Reporter

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To subscribe, comment, seek a correction, or request back issues, please write to John Martin, ATR, 1528 Corcoran St., NW, Washington, DC 20009. Or email: aztectennisreporter@yahoo.com

Peter Mattern
 (Women's Coach)
 619-594-6505
 Gene Carswell
 (Interim Men's Coach)
 619-594-5084

Where Are We Now? The Great Search Continues (1922-2003)

1957 Aztec Men's Tennis Team

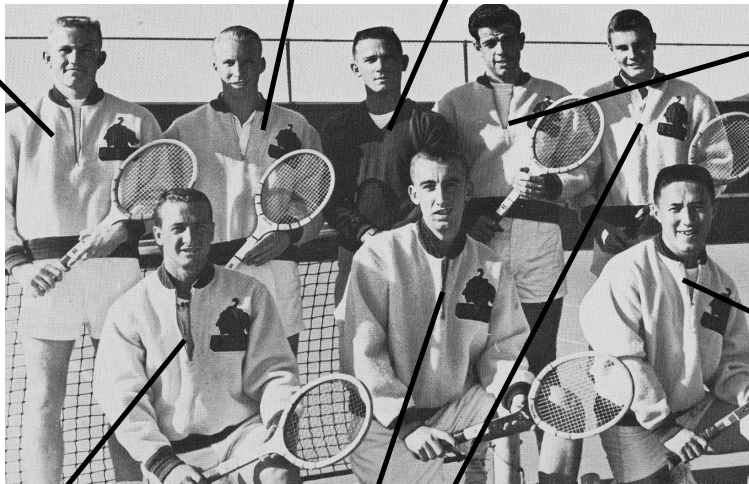
Jerry Shepherd (1957): I've been teaching history (American and world) for 37 years at Helix High School; before that I taught geography and English at Hilltop Junior High in Chula Vista. (I transferred to UC Berkeley after two years at San Diego State and majored in political science). My daughter, Pamela, who has a degree from Harvard, is a psychotherapist in Woodenville, WA. I've played tennis virtually all my life, competing at Hoover High and then at SDSC, then playing at every USTA level I could find (I'm tackling the 65-and-over category this year). I specialize in doubles (thanks to Fred Kinne, the San Diego Union-Tribune editor who coached kids in after-school clinics at Morley Field). Cindy Ursich and I were the number one open mixed doubles team in San Diego County about 1980, and Molly Danielson and I were the senior mixed doubles champs in San Diego and ninth in our USTA section in the 1980s.

Bill Jack (1957-60): I'm a banker (retired), living in La Canada, CA. I worked many years for Bank of America and the Industrial Bank of Japan. My wife, Mary, and I have two sons and a daughter. One son, Mike, played the ATP satellite tour for a year. I've started playing tennis again after many years - dare I say it? - on the golf course.

Jim Hunt (Coach, 1957): I was assigned to coach the tennis team even though track was my sport. (I ran the 880 and mile relay as an undergraduate athlete). My players have lost track of me. Can you help ATR find me?



Hunt



Del Sud 1957, 1952 (Hunt)

D. Graham: My teammates have lost sight of me. Can you help?

J. Whitfield: ATR can't find me. Can you help?

John Martin (1957): I'm a journalist teaching at Columbia University in New York City. I worked as a reporter and editor (*The San Diego Union*, *Augusta, GA Chronicle*, and *The New York Times*) and as a correspondent (KCRA News, Sacramento; ABC News, New York and Washington). Bill Jack (above), Tom Mullen (1959-60), and I started playing tennis on the same day in 1952 (yes, I'm still looking for my first USTA gold ball). I have two daughters, Sophie and Claire. My wife, Katherine Fitzhugh, and I live in Washington, D.C., where I started publishing *Aztec Tennis Reporter* in 1999 to support the men's and women's teams. Writing it has helped me reconnect with lots of teammates and caused me to marvel at the remarkable 81-year history of Aztec tennis.

Bill Reeves: I coached tennis and basketball at La Jolla High and Mesa College and basketball at UC San Diego. In 1999, I was inducted into the High School Coaching Legends of San Diego County. I'm retired but still teaching at Mesa. My wife, Mary (a retired nurse) and I have been married 50 years. Our son, Bill, coaches cross country at Azusa Pacific University; our daughter, Sharon, teaches math. (I have a Ph.D. in human behavior from USIU). I still hit regularly at the La Jolla Community Center, where I learned to play tennis in 1945.

Bill Ereneta (1956-57): After graduation, I became a Marine Corps jet fighter pilot (1960-64), worked on the engineering effort to build an American supersonic transport, then became Deputy Director of the San Jose, CA International Airport for 10 years. I'm retired, living in Los Gatos, CA, singing professionally in musical theater (14-plus productions) and rehearsing with the San Jose Opera. I discovered I could sing when I took lessons to perform at a son's wedding in 1996 (I wanted to express myself with more than just a dinner speech). I have two sons and a grandson. I played tennis for many years, especially in the Marines, and still follow it closely. I once taped an Agassi-Sampras match so I could watch it after I got home - at 2:30 a.m.!

Photos, SDSU Library, Special Collections

UNFORCED ERRORS

Due to an editing error, the 2003 San Diego State women's tennis team win-loss record was misstated in Vol. 5, No. 3. The Aztec women were 22-6, not 26-2. (They finished the year ranked 27th in the nation).

In the same issue, a proof-reading error led to the loss of

the last word in Peter Mattern's comments about his role in Aztec tennis since his days as an assistant coach for the 1992 women's team (Where Are We Now?+).

The line should have read: I'm now the head coach at SDSU, in my tenth season, still surfing, still running, and still enjoying a great job.+

Tilden: Test of Compassion, Writing

Continued from Page 2

compassion to root for.

Deford told me he felt Tilden's story hadn't been made into a movie because he was so thoroughly dislikable, and even if I could possibly make him sympathetic, his story was too much of a downer. Natu-

rally, that just stoked my fires.

Big Bill was no saint, but neither was he the devil. Somewhere between these extremes we find a simple human being who is in need of love, understanding and friendship. Tragically, in the autumn of Big Bill's years, these qualities were in short supply.

2004 San Diego State Tennis Team Schedules

Women

Jan 31 Long Beach State at SDSU Noon
 Feb 06 St Mary's at SDSU 2 pm
 Feb 07 Cal Poly (SLO) at SDSU Noon
 Feb 12 Pepperdine at SDSU 2 pm
 Feb 12 Cal Berkeley at Berkeley 1:30 pm
 Feb 21 UC Irvine at SDSU Noon
 Feb 29 Georgia Tech at SDSU Noon
 Mar 05 Washington St at Washington 11 am
 Mar 06 Washington at Washington 3 pm
 Mar 15 Princeton at SDSU Noon
 Mar 17 Purdue at SDSU 2 pm
 Mar 26 Brigham Young (at UNLV) 10 am
 Mar 27 Utah (at UNLV) 10 am
 Apr 03 Oregon at SDSU Noon
 Apr 04 Tulsa at SDSU 10 am
 Apr 08 UNLV at SDSU 2 pm
 Apr 09 Colorado State at SDSU 2 pm
 Apr 10 Wyoming at SDSU 10 am
 Apr 16 Air Force at Colo Springs, CO 2 pm
 Apr 17 New Mexico at Colo Springs 10 am
 Apr 20 Univ of San Diego at SDSU 2 pm
 Apr 29-May 1 Mountain West
 Championships at SDSU All Day
 May 7-9 NCAA Regional Championships
 (site to be determined)
 May 13-16 NCAA Team Finals
 at University of Georgia, Athens
 May 17-20 NCAA Individual Championships
 at University of Georgia, Athens

Men

Jan 13 William & Mary at SDSU 1:30 pm
 Jan 16-19 Sherwood Invitational
 in Los Angeles (USC, UCLA,
 UC Berkeley, Pepperdine, SDSU)
 Feb 5-8 USTA-ITA National Indoor
 Team Championships at
 U of Washington, Seattle
 Feb 11 SDSU at Pepperdine 1 pm
 Feb 27 SDSU at Univ of San Diego 12:30
 Mar 5-7 Pacific Coast Doubles
 Championship at
 La Jolla Beach & Tennis Club
 Mar 13 Univ of Pacific at SDSU 1:30 pm
 Mar 15 Princeton at SDSU 1:30 pm
 Mar 16 SDSU at UCLA 1:30 pm
 Mar 20 Yale at SDSU 1:30 pm
 Mar 23 Middle Tennessee at SDSU 1:30 pm
 Mar 27 Santa Clara at SDSU 1:30 pm
 Apr 02 Utah at UNLV tba
 Apr 03 BYU at UNLV tba
 Apr 04 UNLV at UNLV tba
 Apr 08 South Alabama at SDSU 1:30 pm
 Apr 10 Air Force at Albuquerque tba
 Apr 11 New Mexico at Albuquerque tba
 Apr 28-May 01 Mountain West
 Conference Championships at
 San Diego all day
 May 15-16 NCAA Regional Playoffs
 May 22-31 NCAA Finals at Univ of Tulsa



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Tennis Coaches
 San Diego State University
 San Diego, CA 92182

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Founder-Editor: John Martin