

Aztec Tennis Reporter

VOL 21 NO 2

SERVING THE SAN DIEGO STATE TENNIS COMMUNITY SINCE 1999

MARCH 2020

Collegiate Halt Stalls a Promising Aztec Tennis Revival

San Diego State joined the national cancellation of college sports in the middle of a promising effort to revive its men's and women's tennis fortunes.

Aztecs Rafael Gonzalez Almazan and Ignacio Martinez won four matches and gained the quarterfinals of the prestigious Pacific Coast Men's Doubles Championships.

Gonzalez Almazan won Mountain West Conference Player of the Week (March 2-8). David Hough (Jan. 22) and Ignacio Martinez (Feb. 5) won the honor earlier in the season.

At season's end, the Aztec women stood at 6-5 and had scored victories over UC Riverside, UC San Diego, Cal State Fullerton, Cal Poly, Grand Canyon, and Youngstown State.

A 4-3 loss to the No 22 USC Trojans suggested rising fortunes for the Aztec women.

Against the Trojans, the Aztecs won the doubles point with victories by Tamara Arnold and Julia Jordan (6-1) and Abbie Mulbarger and Nnena Nadozie (6-4). In singles, Aztec Arnold defeated Eryn Cayetano at 2nd singles, 6-7, 6-4, 6-1. And Aztec Cecile Morin defeated Constance Branstine at 5th singles, 6-4, 6-3.

In the deciding match, Aztec Agustina Rimoldi Godoy fought deep into a third set before falling 6-4, 4-6, 6-3.

"It's unprecedented," said



Aztec Tennis Reporter/John Martin

PLAYER OF THE WEEK: Aztec Rafael Gonzalez Almazan

women's coach Peter Matterna of the interrupted season. "There are a lot of questions."

"It's been surreal and a bit disappointing," said men's coach Gene Carswell.

The Aztec men earned a

5-5 won-loss record, defeating UC San Diego, UC Irvine, Boise State, UC Davis, and San Diego Christian.

Ranked 10th in January, UCLA defeated the Aztec men, 4-1. At season's abrupt end, the Bruins ranked 3rd in the nation.

John McEnroe's 'Realm of Perfection'

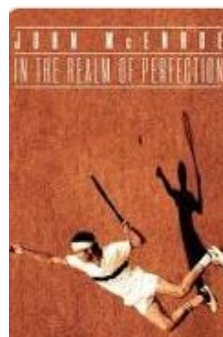
BY TOM PENNER

An elderly French tennis player and filmmaker's secret vault of 16MM film footage of John McEnroe in action at Roland Garros provides the gritty, punkish visual backdrop to what is, unabashedly, a French art film documentary.

Offered up on Amazon Prime, this 2018 tennis lover's gem begins with a quote by French New

Wave filmmaker Jean-Luc Godard ("Cinema lies, sports don't,") then seeks to unearth the mystery of athletic genius no less, of perfection, equating tennis to cinema, and to dramatic theatre -- and McEnroe the supreme actor and practitioner of this grand sports art.

And it's mostly McEnroe we see through the blinkered courtside lens of the filmmaker, Gil De Kermaedec, who had less interest



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A French Filmmaker's View of John McEnroe's 'Realm of Perfection'

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in the matches as a whole than keeping his camera on the players and their unique artistic and athletic gifts. Kermadec sought to push the boundaries of tennis education and was obsessed with slow motion cinema, or to capture "what the human eye could not see," thus preserving a few honest truths about our great game for future generations.

What we get then is a kind of edgy poetry in motion – the performance art of John McEnroe – close-ups and lazy, luxurious medium shots of America's very own enfant terrible at the height of his powers, gliding over the red Parisian clay with buttery footwork, graceful as Federer, clever as a fox, ever mercurial, ever watchable.

Thematically complimenting these images are bits and pieces of Hollywood cinema lore -- a snatch of dialogue from Scorsese's *Raging Bull* -- dashes of imagery from the late great Milos Forman's Oscar-winning film, "Amadeus" with its hilarious portrayal of the infantile Mozart by actor Thomas Hulce (see *Animal House*), whose inspiration for Mozart's character came from watching McEnroe play.

So films do lie, but sports don't.

That is, the camera will convey whatever a filmmaker wants us to see, and to feel. But on the tennis court, arguably the grandest stage of all, tennis artists live and die by spontaneous choice, the flux of their temperament, their emotional grace or folly.

For McEnroe, playing in the legendary 1984 Roland Garros men's final, it proved devastating, life altering. For two flawless sets he gave the grim and grimmer Ivan Lendl the shellacking of a lifetime, soaring blithely through the realm of perfection until (spoiler alert) he wasn't.

In his self-penned 2017 autobiography, "But

Seriously," here lives that perilous afternoon in the very first chapter, how "everything suddenly became a distraction," and how each spring upon return to the French Open to commentate he suffers the same nightmare about that match at least once or twice, waking up in a pool of sweat.

Cinema lies, but sports can kill!

Still, it was the great "Big Bill" Tilden, the greatest tennis artist of all (whom the French loved to hate!) that believed a crowd always deserved a good show and was known, much like McEnroe, in a kind of theatre of the absurd, to appear desperate and utterly backed against a wall, then proceed to make a dramatic comeback and win.

Big Bill thrived on the negative energy a crowd can give, and as the film suggests McEnroe was also at his best when turned against, as French crowds are apt (perhaps programmed) to do.

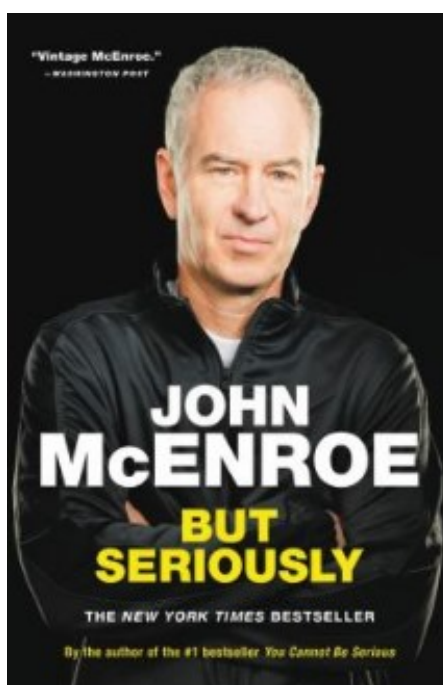
It is all "acting technique," Kermadec informs us, the transference of "hostility into greatness."

Except that day at Roland Garros, for those astonishing two sets, McEnroe didn't seem to need his audience. He was hard-

ly even aware of them! His win over the Czech giant Lendl was coming too easily. Something needed to go wrong, n'est pas?

Or maybe the tennis artist in him just felt the crowd deserved a good show a' la Big Bill Tilden. Suddenly the cameras and photographers started to get to him; now he was hating on the numbskull linesmen -- and the rude French crowds -- Mon dieu! Then again, the great McEnroe might possibly toss me out a window for even suggesting as much. Let the viewer of this great, oddball tennis lover's movie decide for themselves.

Cinema lies, but it can also be a lot of fun!



Tom Penner played Aztec tennis in 1981-82. A writer, he coaches and teaches tennis, and lives in LaMirada.