

SATURDAY SPORT 1

SPORT AROUND THE WORLD

Granny grabs the glory

LUCY DETTMER is the No 2 singles player at a college in Palm Desert, California. Not bad for a 74-year-old grandmother. Dettmer, the American 70-and-over hard-court champion who has returned to her studies, tells *USA Today*: "I wanted to step out and try something different. At my age to play against 19- and 20-year-olds is a terrific challenge. So far it hasn't been much of a challenge. Dettmer has not lost a set in singles or doubles in 12 matches. The college coach says: "She learned to play before topspin and before the big powerful rackets. She shows that it's not necessary to hit the ball hard if you can put it where you want to."

SPANISH newspapers reported Show Franz Beckenbauer and Uli Hoessgen, of Bayern Munich, set up a secret meeting with Tottenham striker Jürgen Klinsmann at a hotel in Zurich. Suddenly the hotel was flooded with journalists, cameramen and two TV crews. A startled Hoessgen immediately hustled the others out of view, shouting: "We've nothing to say to the press."

The journalists looked on amazed. They were opera correspondents attending a press conference by José Carreras.

THE Atlanta Journal-Constitution polled 1,500 people with the aim of checking on American awareness of next year's Olympics. Their findings show that one in three people from the South and about half of all Americans don't know Atlanta will host the 1996 Games.

"We haven't had many opportunities to engage the nation yet," says Dick Yarbrough, Atlanta's communications director. "The fact that half the people know 15 months out is pretty encouraging."

GUIDO ALVARENGA has fond memories of his former coach, Diego Maradona. "With Maradona coaching, we never won a game, but we had great parties," striker Alvarenga tells *Norwich Evening News*. He plays for Deportivo Mandiyú, who dropped to the bottom of the Argentine league when Maradona coached them last year.

"The whole team liked Diego very much. More than once we went home with a terrific hangover. Almost every night we had big barbecues. We really had fun. The only problem was that we never won a match."

A TITTLE fight staged outdoors at Queensland's Gold Coast, was declared a "no decision" on Tuesday because it was too dark for officials and spectators to see what was happening in the ring. Mitch O'Hell retained his heavyweight title when his defence against Colin Wilson was halted by the onset of dusk, which the organisers had apparently forgotten about.

SLOGGING through deep snow and temperatures of minus 27C, a group of Russian football fanatics staged a tournament at the North Pole last Sunday. Tass reports that a businessman flew eight amateur teams to the Pole from a nearby Russian Polar station. They played in 20 inches of snow, on thick ice, and fittingly a team representing a refrigerator factory won.

BRIAN OLIVER

The last Englishman to reach a Wimbledon singles final is now in a nursing home recovering from a fall but he retains forthright views on the state of lawn tennis

Nijinsky of the courts proclaims advantage of enjoyment



THE SUE MOTT INTERVIEW with Bunny Austin

MOTHER Teresa wrote to Bunny Austin the other day. She had heard of his accident. He had fallen down a steep flight of stairs and broken three vertebrae in his neck which, at 88, is of no small consequence. He had been almost completely paralysed.

Nevertheless, she told him in the letter, you can pray for the work of all the churches in the world. "Gives me quite a lot of scope really," said Austin with the same rueful humour that captivated schoolmates, film stars, fellow lawn tennis players, presidents and kings in a long and eventful life.

Austin was struggling against a young and aptly named Measlin, who was conjuring winners from nowhere. But the tide of the Frenchman's brilliance suddenly ebbed. Austin grasped his chance and the flickering black-and-white *Movietone News* would soon report: "Austin and Perry bring lawn tennis glory to Britain." And they kept it there, too, retaining the halloved trophy until 1937.

It began, serenely enough, in 1906. "It was such an idyllic place to live, South Norwood Park," said Austin, nicknamed Bunny after a comic-strip rabbit with whom he shared the name Wilfred. "My father had paid £750 for an eight-bedroom house and we had a nanny, a maid and a groom who acted as a waiter at night."

They also had a dirty grey nursery wall. "I loved tennis. I'd hit a ball against my nursery wall for hours on end. The rocking horse was the net, the wall was a series of Wimbledon champions. Mrs Lambert Chambers was my most deadly rival."

"When I had the chance to join a tennis club and play, I was overcome. I was on court every available moment. The seventh daughter of the local vicar, I remember, was very keen. I always won 6-0 but that didn't seem to upset her happiness."

Austin's father, a great sportsman nicknamed 'Wolf', might have qualified today as a 'tennis-parent', being so fiercely ambitious for his newborn son that he snatched the babe out of the doctor's arms to check his limbs.

Later, he tried to remove Austin from Repton School a term early to send him out to play tennis, but a housemaster tactfully remonstrated and the grateful boy made 102 not out in his last innings of cricket for the school against Malvern by way of thanks.

Not that school was always a happy experience. The Latin master called him a "miserable coot", the maths master kept a bottle of disinfectant to sprinkle over boys who failed to apply soap vigorously enough in the showers, and the French master had a rather curious *aide de mémoire*. "He shut you up in the grandfather clock at the back of the classroom if your knowledge of the French language failed to come up to standard."

It was, however, in France that Austin was to know his finest tennis hour, when the price of failure would have been even more terrible than incarceration with the inner workings of a clock. It was 1933, the Davis Cup final against France at Roland Garros, under a fierce sun and before a crowd so wildly partisan that fights would break out intermittently.

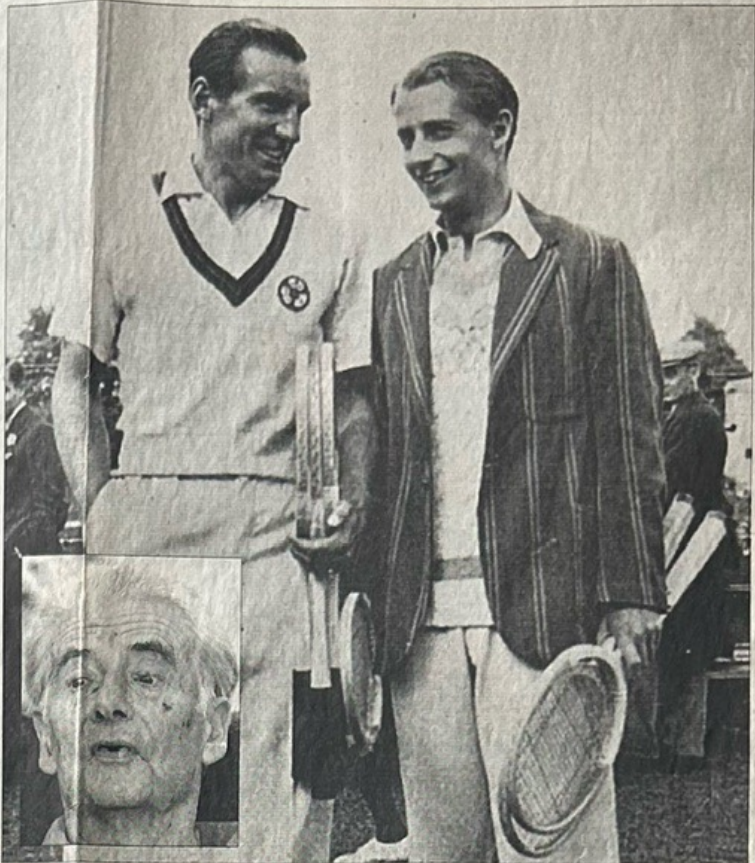
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"You know dear old Fred Perry is being remembered at St Paul's Cathedral just before Wimbledon," said Austin, hauling himself back from the fond memories. "I shall write to the Dean and ask if there is any provision for wheelchairs." It is obviously not in his nature to concede defeat.

"I was brought up in a house where bad sportsmanship was a terrible sin. My younger sister came home from a tennis tournament once and said: 'I played splendidly. Daddy, but I lost.' My father always held this up as an example of how to behave."

The emphasis on winning today is despicable. It's a great pity. The object of sport and sportsmanship is to enjoy yourself. Win or lose, to take it in the same spirit."

Austin certainly lived up to his father's ideals. In the 1932 Wimbledon final he lost to Ellsworth Vines, the 6 ft 4 in power-serving American, and could only marvel that all he saw of the final serve of the match was a ghostly puff of chalk. Six years later, in his second Wimbledon final, he played Don Budge and lost 6-1, 6-0, 6-3. "Gee,



Glory days... Bunny Austin (right) with doubles partner Fred Perry 60 years ago and, inset, as he is today

Bunny," said the American as they shook hands at the net, "what was wrong with your game?"

"Actually, there was nothing wrong with it," said Austin, laughing. 57 years later "I'd just been beaten by somebody infinitely better than me. I was only upset I'd let the crowd down because many had slept out all night to get tickets."

There was only one event at Wimbledon that required Austin genuine heartache. "When I came back from America in 1961 I found that my membership had been taken away. I went to see the chairman of the club, an old friend of mine, Herman David. He said it was because I hadn't paid my subscription during the war. He suggested I write and apologise and ask to be reinstated."

"Well, some considerable period of time passed and then they wrote and said they'd put me on the waiting list, which I thought was very generous to somebody who'd represented his country with some skill and who had played with some success in 14 Championships."

Austin's 'fault' had been to work for the religious movement Moral Rearmament during the war. He had obtained permission from the British Government, he had enlisted in the American air force, he was even investigated and found harmless by the FBI, but still suspicions lingered that he was a closet Nazi, Red or draft-dodger. "It was a combination of malice and ignorance," he says now.

He asked a man he had known since childhood, a future Wimbledon chair-man, to second his re-election bid to the club. He received a letter of polite equivocation. "He wrote that I was a controversial character, that some did not approve of my war record... and that he felt he could not risk the club's

business goodwill by supporting me unless I was prepared to state that my desire to rejoin the club was an entirely personal and individual matter not connected with my work."

Austin's reply was straightforward. He wrote: "If any club I belonged to tried to extract conditions from Catholics, Anglicans or Jews, or to limit their liberty of speech before joining, I would instantly resign. It would smack to me of Hitler." Austin was readmitted to the club in 1984. He was 77.

It is difficult to imagine now, from this remove of 60 years and with only sepia tints to guide us, how fine and elegant a player H.W. Austin was. He won his matches more by stealth and accuracy than power — and once because his opponent mistook his court-side gin for water and drank it with his brandy.

"My serve was pretty bad," he admitted. "I never served an ace in my life. It was just a way of starting a game. I relied on my groundstrokes and return of service. If I had anything, I did have grace. They called me the Nijinsky of the courts."

That balletic prowess, and perhaps the darkly handsome looks, even reached the ears of Suzanne Lenglen, the charismatic diva of tennis in the Flapper era. Austin was invited to play doubles with the great lady. "She had an absolutely hypnotic personality. You couldn't take your eyes off her when she was playing. You didn't watch the game, you just watched Suzanne. Marvellous, but quite ugly. Oh Lord, I wasn't attracted to her at all but I was smitten by the way she played the game."

In one sense they were soul mates. Both nurtured a subversive desire to be rid of the formal clothing that lawn tennis traditionally required. Lenglen dispensed with corsets to the scandalised huff of the Establishment, and Austin was the first man at Wimble-

don to dare to wear shorts instead of trousers. No doubt, colonels turned pinker than that at the time but the trend continued unmoled until it reached its apotheosis of the multi-hued guise of Andre Agassi.

"I can't bear the mess he makes of himself," said Austin. "I know he's had a haircut but he's got a funny hat. Actually, I rather liked the long hair. I didn't mind that at all. It's just the clothes. Still, I fancy him to win Wimbledon this year. I can't think of anyone but Sampras who can beat him. And Agassi is an enchanting personality. You can't help liking him."

The same could be said for this "controversial character" sucking tea quite happily through a straw. His world is now restricted to one room where nurses plump pillows and a Mrs Otterburn pops her head round the door to discuss the merits of "that chap Hicks" in the snooker.

IT IS in stark contrast to the globe-trotting life he once led, meeting President Roosevelt at the White House, exchanging pleasantries with Queen Mary and enthralled then-Senator Jack Kennedy, a schoolboy fan, with tales of Wimbledon's past. He was a friend of Ronald Coleman, Daphne du Maurier, and still calls the King of Romania 'Michael'.

"When I had this accident I rather hoped I might die," he said matter-of-factly. "I didn't see much hope for myself as I was totally incapacitated. But I'm marvellously free of bitterness and that letter from Mother Teresa helped. It made me feel I could still be of use. I was just a damn fool to trip down those steps and took the consequences of being one."

Sport does indeed have its foibles, and damned fools at that. But Bunny Austin, the last Englishman to reach a Wimbledon singles final, can never be classed as one of them.

PROFILE / Drive and dedication of England's pack leader and agent provocateur have been thorn in side of opponents and officials