

# THE LITERARY DIGEST

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## A TEMPERAMENTAL JEANNE D'ARC OF THE TENNIS-COURTS



### "THE WILL TO WIN."

That is the greatest factor in tennis championships, says Mlle. Lenglen, now here to play in champion and exhibition tournaments, and incidentally to add to the fund for devastated France.

"**SHE IS THE ATHLETIC JEANNE D'ARC** of our time," said a Paris newspaper correspondent, one of the several French correspondents who accompanied Suzanne Lenglen to this country; and an admiring American correspondent, one of the "thousand or more," as he says, who met her in New York Harbor, writes that there is in her manner "some of the same spirit that caused an American crowd to cheer for Carpentier at Jersey City on July 2." Paris reports indicate, we are told, that there is "probably more interest taken in her visit here than was shown in Carpentier's invasion." The romance-loving spirit of France has gone out to this twenty-two-year-old girl, a tennis champion never defeated, before her present American visit, in any important match. If it is pointed out that the two French notables with whom she is commonly compared, Carpentier and Joan of Arc, both came to grief, defenders of the young French "queen of tennis" may reply, in the words of Grantland Rice, that, "in the way of infinite grace and matchless artistry," at least, Mlle. Lenglen "tops the field." Winner or loser, "for those who dare to study form and style, apart from results," he considers the French girl "better worth watching than any one we know." Tris Speaker, Walter Johnson, and "Babe" Ruth, he says, are "all top-liners who intermingle grace and winning results. But the most spectacularly graceful entry of the entire cluster—the most vivid—is the French queen of tennis."

"In the being and manner of Mlle. Suzanne Lenglen is the sparkle that is France," writes a New York *Times* reporter who met her at the pier. As do many other of the American correspondents, he speaks of her "big red hat, her red-heeled

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pumps, her buoyant bearing, and her smile." Her self-confidence, which came out in a remark about the ease with which she had defeated the American champion, Mrs. Molla Bjurstedt Mallory, on English courts, starts the writer on this account of her general personality:

The statement is characteristic of the French girl, and yet coming from her it did not sound boastful, rather she told it as a fact and her hearers somehow accepted it as just that. In many persons such impetuosity and confidence are distasteful. In Mlle. Lenglen they appeared not only natural, but even contagious. Like her fellow countryman, Carpentier, you liked her instantly when you saw her, and the more she talked and gestured and acted the more you liked her. Rather than a great athlete, possibly the outstanding woman athlete of to-day, she appeared to be a little girl, full of enthusiasm, of life, and of the joy of living.

She is not particularly small, however, especially for a Frenchwoman, standing something over 5 feet and 10 inches and weighing, on a guess, 130 pounds. When she is quiet there is no suggestion of the athlete at all, but when she moves you note it in her alert attitude and the spring of her walk. Those who know her best say that she is not only a great tennis-player, but a great all-around athlete as well—that she swims, runs, rides, and drives with the best of them.

She is more than an athlete, too. She is a graduate of the College of Compiègne in her native town in northern France. She took up her studies and her tennis at the age of six. The story is told that her father wouldn't give her any jam on her bread in those days unless her practise had pleased him. Asked about her game, she credited the bulk of her success to her father, who was her teacher, and to constant practise. When she was very small, she said, she practised against a wall, aiming at squares, as directed by her father, for hours at a time. In this she gained both ability and confidence. Once a master of the art everything depends, Mlle. Lenglen believes, in keeping in condition and in the player's attitude toward the game. On the courts, she says, she feels tennis, and that by being so wholly in the game every instant she can somehow outguess and out-general her opponents.

She described her game as having more pep than that of any woman player she had ever met and counted that its strongest asset. Asked to describe her in one word that would be the simplest and most inclusive way of doing it. She has pep.

Mlle. Lenglen was accompanied by her mother. She speaks English correctly with an accent acquired at Nice, in the south of France, and the various places she has played matches in England.

When pressed as to whether she liked a tonic, or say just a little wine, before her matches, Mlle. Lenglen admitted that she did and that she had been promised that it would be obtained for her in the United States. Despite the fact that she is in an arid land Suzanne praised the effect of this stimulant on her game.

"Nothing," she said, "is so fine for the nerve, for the strength, for the morale. A little wine tones up the system just right. One can not always be serious. There must be some sparkle, too."

Tennis critics, American critics at least, are somewhat at variance as to the reason for her defeat, after losing one set to Mrs. Mallory in her first contest in the American Women's National Championship series. She had arrived only two days before, after a trying ocean voyage, she had previously postponed her trip twice on account of illness, and she was out of practise, say her defenders. No one minimizes, however, the splendid play of Mrs. Mallory, the American champion. As A. Wallis Myers, tennis editor of the *London Field*, explained, the day after her defeat, writing in the *New York Herald*:

First, I would say, definitely, that on yesterday's relative form Mrs. Mallory deserved to win and would have won in two sets if the French girl had not retired. Mrs. Mallory is a fighter to the last ditch. She goes on smilingly to the end. She played heroically in the Paris match against Suzanne, in which I took a line, and really deserved more than the five games she won. But in temperament she is quite different from the champion whom she defeated yesterday. She is Norwegian, with Norse persistency, cold-bloodedness, activity, and shrewdness.

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Suzanne is a bundle of nervous sprightliness—volatile, excitable, essentially French, yet imbued with the spirit of modern sport, which France has sought to cultivate. Suzanne was not brought out with sporting girls as American and English girls were. Bombed out of her home near Lille when the Germans invaded and ransacked her country, she has lived for the last six years in southern Nice—a place far removed in tone and temper from New York. Suzanne has been the child wonder of French tennis; flattered without precedent, she has not yet been spoiled; tended almost every hour of her life by two fond parents, she has yet displayed an independence that has given her a mind and an expression of her own.

Suzanne's father did not want her to come to America just yet. He felt, for one thing, that she was not physically strong enough this year for an exacting tour in a new country under strange conditions. But it was felt by the French Association that as Tilden had come to Paris under some physical difficulty so Suzanne ought to go to New York. Suzanne shared this view and was the more pleased to undertake the mission when she knew that her own devastated area would benefit from it. But she knew as soon as she landed that she would not be in form at once. How could she be? No tournament match for six weeks, the longest sea voyage of her life, and a bronchial trouble that reasserted itself under the strain of yesterday's ordeal.

As I sat by her bedside last evening in the hotel at Forest Hills I realized that she was physically and mentally done in; that she was genuinely *hors de combat*. Why did she play at all? Here is her answer:

"I thought the American sporting public would be distressed if I did not turn out. I had promised to play. I thought I could stay the course—but I just couldn't. My chest felt like nothing on earth; I could scarcely breathe; I wonder I went on for nine games. In France my parents would not have allowed me to play at all. At Nice last year I wanted to defend my cup for the third year, but they vetoed my appearance."

She gave every credit to Mrs. Mallory. She admitted frankly that the present holder was better than she had anticipated; she had nothing but gratitude for the reception by the crowd, and was ever so disappointed she had to give up.

Just one thing more. Suzanne is reported to have said on arrival that she played Mrs. Mallory in Paris and beat her easily, tho she (Suzanne) had blistered feet.

"I think," she explained to me, "my meaning was misunderstood: I have always had the greatest respect for the American champion, especially for her pertinacity and her activity. I said that, tho I was handicapped in Paris, I won in two sets, but the match was closer than the score indicates. Perhaps before I leave America I shall meet Mrs. Mallory again, and then it will be after I've got more acclimatized."

The French champion, "The Great Mademoiselle," as the *New York World* calls her, does not really "train" for her games, she told Fernand Bardaini, a sports writer for the *New York Herald*. She considers her training merely "a healthy pleasure, a relaxation from work." Quite as important, we gather from an article by herself in the *New York Times*, she considers an athlete's mental attitude. "A great many persons," she writes, "have thought that my confidence reflected egotism in its worst form." She explains:

The spirit of confidence is one of the greatest factors in victory. Some day soon I am going into this matter in great detail, for I feel it bears such a close relationship with my own fortunes. It is the soul of sport—a most absorbing topic for any one, whether he is interested or not in sport.

I wish I had kept count of the number of times I have been asked the question, "Now, tell me, what is the real secret of your success?" For lack of time I have usually answered this with, "Oh, there isn't any real secret," or "practise," or some of the other similar reasons that do underlie success. But really deep in my mind—back of all the other essentials like practise and natural aptitude, I think there is another reason, an almost fundamental one.

*The Will to Win.*

Do not misunderstand me—I do not mean that with confidence you can perform miracles, but surely without confidence, without the will to win that allows of no doubts, you can not expect to be a consistent winner. Nor can the will to win, alone, make you a success. Practise, practise, practise—tennis is just like everything else.

The ball is coming to you like a bolt. Somehow you instantly sense what it will do. Your mind seems to decide, almost without your knowing it, that you must return it deep to the side-line. It must hit right there—not an inch farther. Then comes your stroke. Everything in the world is blank to you except that exact spot where that ball must go. It must go there. Do you think if at that second a doubt flashed through your mind that your stroke would be unwavering? That is what I mean by confidence, the will to win. Meanwhile I can only say: "*Que le meilleur joueur gagne!*" Or back to the speech of your tongue: "May the best man win."