

de Luze, Albert. *A History of the Royal Game of Tennis*. Translated by Sir Richard Hamilton. Kineton: Roundwood Press for The Tennis & Rackets As-

sociation and The United States Court Tennis Association, 1979. Pp. xviii, 395. 14 pl. illustrations, bibliography, index. Edition limited to 500 numbered copies, signed by the translator. \$60.00.

It should be understood that the game here discussed is NOT lawn tennis. Originally played with the hand, this game was, and still is, in France, called *jeu de paume*. In England and the United States it is identified as “real tennis.” The major interest of M. de Luze was at first to locate tennis courts in France, trace its spread to other countries, and finally to discover its origins.

A real tennis court resembles the place where it started, the courtyard of a medieval monastery, where monks could walk in inclement weather in the low-roofed ambulatory. A “grill” at one corner is where monks could talk to anyone outside, or through which they handed food to the needy. This is the origin of the modern grill.

Spectators are seated behind the “dedans,” a long opening in the wall of the service side. (The ball is served only from one side.) This does not permit more than twenty spectators. Hence, real tennis can never be a spectator sport. Players are strictly amateurs. But professionals (*paumiers*) are allowed to compete in international championships. (Amateurs frequently win them.) Devotees like to refer to the game as “The Royal Game of Tennis,” since primarily it was the sport of kings, and a few wealthy men who could afford the expensive courts, and professional players. Only they knew how to instruct in the game, and to make the bats and solid balls used. Because of the solid balls, bats had to be, and were, much heavier and stronger than a lawn tennis racquet.

About the year 1925 this reviewer and M. de Luze discovered a mutual interest in our research into the origins of tennis, and frequently exchanged notes as we found new material. He made gracious acknowledgement of this in his book. After his death shortly after publication, we, after further research, traced the origin of the game to an ancient folk-fertility rite observed in Egypt at the time of the pyramids. (See: Henderson, R. W., *Ball Bat & Bishop: The Origin of Ball Games*. Reprinted by the Gale Research Co., Detroit, Mich. 1974.) As recorded by de Luze, real tennis is now played in half a dozen courts in the United States, one in Canada, twenty-nine in England, three in France, and one in Tasmania.

The origin of the word “tennis” has long puzzled etymologists. The author quotes many sources, but fails to arrive at any definite origin of the word or the game. M. de Luze refers to the popularity of ball games, including *longue palme*, all predecessors of lawn tennis. He then claims that “later the game came to be played within four walls.” There were many forms of ball games

since Biblical days, but the games mentioned by de Luze were later offshoots of the games played first in courtyards of monasteries.

As early as 1287 tennis was played with some formality. This was mentioned by the Canon of St. Cyr at Nevers who approved of "a little volleying of a tennis ball after the lenten penitences." The name of the game, *jeu de palme* indicates that in the beginning the ball was struck by the hand.

Later, de Luze records how during the reign of Henri IV, the game "reached its zenith." In Paris alone there were by 1596 two hundred and fifty well equipped tennis courts. Evidently people in general took up the game. Professional tennis players (*maitres de paume*) "marked," i.e., called the score, and acted as referee. Occasionally de Luze mentions fees paid for those services, as well as the cost of the many balls used. Some kings, such as Henri IV, "who was constantly to be found in the tennis court," attracted lady spectators. It was in the tennis court at Versailles where the famous tennis court oath was taken, and the Revolution started.

After the Revolution, with no royalty to support it, the number of courts in France gradually diminished, until today few courts remain, patronized or owned by men who can afford a fascinating but very expensive pastime. It is of interest to observe the names of these French courts, each of which had its own shield, similar to those of English inns. For instance: The Golden Horse, The Golden Sun, The Beau Regard, The Battling Rats and The Iron Door.

The number of tennis courts in the Provinces is estimated by de Luze at five hundred, but he could locate only three hundred. He concluded "many more courts disappeared without trace." Why? Because of strict regulation by the city councils. During the evenings the courts were used not for sport, but for forbidden games: Gradually the courts were converted to other uses.

M. de Luze attempts to list courts in the Provinces. As he does, he occasionally mentions noted players. Again he mentions Henri IV at Angers. He notes that in one chateau "above the wine cellar was a tennis court." At Saintes, capital of Saintonge, a Jesuit college was the owner of a tennis court, and collected fees for its use.

Courts in the Basque Country are listed, but here they were called "trinquets," and the games played in simplified courts were somewhat different. The author meticulously attempts to list courts in other countries. In Germany, Austria and Hungary tennis was played in a Ballhaus, which was also used as a dance hall. As in France, they gradually became theatres, restaurants, museums and even places of worship. Again, they were patronized by the nobility and wealthy.

In Spain, one of the earliest sources of the game was a school language textbook by Juan Luis Vives, entitled *Linguae latinae exercitatio*, Paris, 1539. Later this item was translated by F. Watson, called *Tudor School-Boy Life in the Dialogue*, London, 1908. A game of tennis is called as played. This type of book, with conversation in two languages, is one of the most valuable sources of information on how early games were actually played and the terms in use.

In England de Luze lists twenty-nine courts now in use, all of them privately owned, or in clubs. All were built since 1866, the latest in 1924. Some existed in Scotland about the year 1260, built by Alexander III of Scotland, probably introduced by French knights who accompanied the Queen from France.

Of course English kings played at *le paume*. The Ironmongers Company made the balls. No one knows why. There are many accounts of games played. English literature from Henry VIII, especially Shakespeare, has many references to real tennis, not lawn tennis. At first tennis courts were attached to palaces, and kings' sons learned the game early. Gradually other courts were built, later to be converted to other uses. One court is recorded in Russia and one in Sweden, both for kings. One other small court is listed.

A technical section describes the construction and various sizes of courts. Only recently were they standardized. They approximate the size of a lawn tennis court, but with walls. In England and the United States walls are finished with a patent Bickley cement, which prevents the walls from sweating in humid weather.

The method of scoring real tennis is quite complicated, but it ends up as in lawn tennis. In play the ball may be bounced off walls, and on the roofs of the penthouse and dedans. Service is always from the service (dedans) side. If the receiver of a serve fails to return it, he "lays down a chase," the distance from the rear wall to where the ball falls. The "marker" (referee) calls out the distance, say, "a yard and a half." The players then change ends. If the new server makes a missed ball bounce closer to the rear wall, the "chase is off." No score is made. The most popular method of scoring is to drive the ball into the grill, the dedans or the "winning gallery," the last section of the open penthouse. These strokes each count 15. To attempt to further explain rules is much too complicated.

A set of rules is provided, full of terms foreign to a lawn tennis player. Only a player of real tennis, after some experience, could appreciate the unique qualities of the game. An illustration shows the development of the bat from a leather glove, through various forms of racquets, to the modern heavy racquet sturdy enough to take a solid ball.

Professional tennis players, *paumiers*, formed guilds, granted by kings, in the fifteenth century. By 1457 there were two such guilds. The *paumiers* had the sole right to make racquets and balls, and to operate their tennis courts. Some of these professionals became famous, especially those patronized by kings. They are duly recorded by de Luze.

Real tennis was the first game to establish world championships. A list from 1750 is given. They are still played. In one section M. de Luze relates fifty years of his own play. The book ends with tables of results of major competitions. Of special interest to those interested in the history of the drama, is an important thoroughly documented, long chapter on the use of tennis courts by actors as theatres. It gives considerable evidence that, at the beginning of the 17th century, through the early 18th, the steady decline in the use of tennis courts was compensated for by the increasing conversion to theatres. Special licenses had to be obtained from the local police. This arrangement seems to be reasonable since tennis could not be played after dark, when illumination was very meager.

Moliere was one of the first to benefit by this arrangement; indeed, such a comparatively easy way to provide a theatre gave considerable impulse to the development of the theatre in France. The change was made easily. Trestles, especially wine casks, were brought in, boards supplied to make a stage, and spectators brought their own stools or chairs. But problems arose. Sometimes penurious actors "borrowed" tennis players' clothes, which were kept at the court and cleaned by the professionals who cared for them. "Respectable women and Jews were not permitted." Occasionally actors would not vacate the next morning, promptly, and quarrels resulted. Eventually all the tennis courts disappeared, except a few in private clubs. Students of the theatre will find this chapter well worthwhile.

Naturally de Luze added a chapter on his own career. He competed successfully in many tournaments. In 1905 he defeated Charles E. Sands, the United States champion. Although there is much reliable information in his book, it is not well organized, fragmented as he became interested from time to time in various aspects of court tennis. Nevertheless, as one of the sources of information on court tennis in France, it stands alone.

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