

Arthur Voss, *Tilden and Tennis in the Twenties*. The Whitson Publishing Company, Troy, New York, 1985. Index, Notes and Sources. pp.xiv + 186.

There is often controversy in all sports, including tennis, about the role of a particular person and period in the history of that sport. There is little doubt, however, that both Bill Tilden and the Twenties were particularly important in the history of tennis. Indeed, it is the immensity of this topic which has posed the fundamental problem for Arthur Voss, author of *Tilden and Tennis in the Twenties*. In less than two hundred pages he has attempted to come to terms with Tilden the man and the player; to explore his social background and then to place him in the context of his times and the dynamic international tennis scene of the Twenties. The result is a book which by its very nature remains superficial but which provides some insights into the world of tennis and its controversies.

Voss is certainly aware of the more important issues that faced Tilden and the tennis world of the Twenties. The book includes descriptions of Davis Cup and Wimbledon matches; chapters dealing with the supremacy of Tilden and Lenglen; and a discussion of the abilities of the French players. He also deals with the nature of amateurism, the growth of professionalism and controversies which surrounded Tilden and other players. However, Voss, a tennis enthusiast rather than a historian, has made a number of fundamental errors. Perhaps the most crucial occurs in the very first chapter where Voss perpetuates the myth of 'the simon-pure amateurs' (p-8) of earlier days. He also follows the various stylistic cliches associated with tabloid journalism rather than serious historical interpretation - he writes of 'the Golden Age of Sport' and uses phrases such as 'great player'. His style is at times flowery, repetitive and trite: 'The Wimbledon of 1922 did not have Bill Tilden to grace its Centre Court, but it got along quite well without him from the standpoint of spectator interest' (p.50).

However, if the purpose of this book was solely to describe various tennis events, matches or even individual points as well as to show the more salient features of tennis in the Twenties, within a very broad social framework, Voss has been successful. The free flowing style of the first two chapters and the epilogue, in

particular, certainly inspire the reader, but Voss seems to tire of the work necessary to place Tilden within a more detailed, social and personal context. More importantly, Voss does not seem to have a consistent attitude towards Tilden as a person. He describes him throughout, as 'arrogant, dogmatic and opinionated', but, at the same time, qualifies such adjectives. The result of this has meant that as a personality, Tilden remains static.

The book concludes with a reference to Tilden's homosexuality of which Tilden was tried and convicted in court twice. Regrettably the author ignores the question as to whether Tilden's homosexuality and convictions affected his tennis. This book could have been a major exploration of the relationship - if any - between tennis and prevailing moral standards. Throughout the book there are many instances where it would seem that the hostility towards Tilden sprang from aversion to his homosexuality. The author nowhere faces or indeed explores what is now the most interesting question posed by Bill Tilden's career. It is time in serious writing in sport, as elsewhere, to mention the unmentionable.

Virginia O'Farrell
Sydney