

The Missing Stroke in Tennis

An Account of How a Good Player May Overcome His Lack of Versatility

By FRED HAWTHORNE



EDWIN LEVICK

MOLLA BJURSTEDT MALLORY

A photograph showing the tremendous forehand drive which, together with her more recently acquired backhand stroke, has enabled Mrs. Mallory to win the national singles title five times

The Invincible Mrs. Mallory

WHEN Mrs. Molla Bjurstedt Mallory, the women's national champion, first came to the United States from Norway, toward the end of the year 1914, she literally stepped off the boat and on to the indoor courts of the Seventh Regiment Armory, and proceeded to win the national indoor title from Miss Marie Wagner, the holder. It was not until she had been playing for two days, that it was discovered the Norse girl was a feminine S. H. Smith, that is, she was armed almost solely with a forehand drive. This same drive happened to be the greatest stroke of its kind ever wielded by a woman, and still maintains that distinction. Yet it was practically all that Miss Bjurstedt then had, in the way of real tennis strokes, although a wonderful speed of foot, an unerring eye, and unlimited endurance played no small part in the fair visitor's clean sweep of American courts in 1915 and the succeeding year.

Like the champion she is, Mrs. Mallory was not content to rest under such a handicap, once her attention had been drawn to her lack of strokes. In writing of her matches, I often had occasion at that time to comment on the utter weakness of the Norse girl's backhand. She accepted these criticisms with the utmost good nature, and quietly, deliberately, started to acquire the much needed backhand stroke.

Gradually she mastered the difficulty until she began to score winning shots when the ball came to her on the left side, and almost invariably on such occasions, she would turn to where I was sitting near the court and remark: "There, did you see that one?", accompanied by a smile of genuine delight at her success.

To-day Mrs. Mallory's backhand shots are on a par with her famous forehand drive, and her all-round play has improved tremendously. She is a splendid volleyer, too, though not in our typical American style. Mrs. Mallory has won the national singles title five times and last August defeated Mlle. Suzanne Lenglen, of France, probably the most finished woman player in the world.