

# Il Codice del Tennis

## Bill Tilden. Arte e scienza del gioco

by **Luca Bottazzi** and **Carlo Rossi**

Sign the petition to pay homage to  
“the champion of all champions”  
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Both science and arts have given us, during time, many exceptional individuals, who made extraordinary discoveries and gave birth to utter masterpieces. It's enough to think about the Renaissance, the most creative moment in the human history, in which the entire humanity tried to improve and lived a deep change, thanks to great minds like Leonardo, Raffaello and Michelangelo. But even sports have generated brilliant figures, who were able to invent and rebuild the sports' scenario of their time. These men had, besides their perfect performances, superior reflection's skills and a great understanding of the most hidden and interesting mechanisms of their sports.

This book is born from the desire of telling a little-known but incredibly fascinating story of one of these men: William Tatem Tilden, a sublime and histrionic tennis champion from the 1920s. When “Big Bill Tilden” was born, the sport of lawn tennis was still making its first steps and it came into its own thanks to his enormous contribution. His innovative approach changed the tennis' face, rebuilding it into an astounding test of both mental and physical ability. At the dawning of professional tennis, Tilden was the main attraction, together with Suzanne Lenglen who was the first tennis star to become a professional tennis player (1926), even before Big Bill (1931).

In the previous time, tennis players competed as amateurs for their entire career and when they were not able to play anymore, they dedicated themselves to other occupations. Tilden was an exception: he was so talented that after a long and glorious career as an amateur, he continued for other ten years in professional tennis, which allowed him to earn money from his passion. Following his example, many others champions decided to leave amateur tennis and go pro when they were much younger.

Tilden is not only the first to mark the beginning of an era as a player; but also the first global tennis' ambassador. As a legendary character, he was able to influence the game's course of history through his work. He was a man of culture, a scholar, a one-of-a-kind



champion who published lots of works on the subject. For these reasons, Tilden's "Compendium" became a sort of manifesto, or better yet, the first authentic "Code" for tennis.

In order to make this work more complete, we read his texts, selected those that were the most complete and innovative, summarized and finally translated them. The majority of this work is based on the first book written by the American champion: "The Art of Lawn Tennis," published in its first edition in 1920, an actual milestone of all the literature on the game. The other books we used in this project are "Match Play and the Spin of the Ball," published in 1925, and "How to Play Better Tennis", Tilden's last work published in 1950. In this volume the author, who had dedicated his entire life to tennis, put his experience as both teacher and coach into a more mature perspective. It is the last piece of the great champion's tennis "Compendium."

Finally, we found especially interesting to consider how much the game has changed through the years. The most difficult step was, as a matter of fact, the interpretation and translation of Tilden's "Compendium." We had to understand the context, highlighting the elements that can either be considered overcome or lacking compared to the present time, or instead are still considered innovative, even at the incredible distance of almost 100 years from their first publication. The theoretical knowledge about tennis proposed by the author (the Pure Reason) was taken into account in their current substance (the Practical Reason). With this organization, the volume becomes also an amazing instruction manual that still remains revolutionary today.

In conclusion, this book addresses a diversified audience, which is composed not only by tennis fans. The reader can find topics ranging from psychology to pedagogy, from education to lifestyle, from teaching to learning. It is a useful guide for game's lovers, players, enthusiastic teachers, and also for those who are interested in the sport's history.

This American champion's spirit, his sense of thought regarding tennis, his mechanisms, and his teachings are still alive today and, in our own opinion, they will be even more in the future. For these reasons, the unforgettable, innovative, and extraordinary genius, the tennis player from Philadelphia William Tatem Tilden, could be remembered as the Leonardo da Vinci of the tennis world.

*As Seneca wisely wrote, "Nullum magnum ingenium sine mixtura dementiae fuit." No great genius has ever existed without some touch of madness.*

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