

Australian Dictionary of Biography

Molesworth, Maud Margaret (Mall) (1894–1985)

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Maud Margaret ('Mall') Molesworth (1894-1985), tennis player, was born on 18 October 1894 at South Brisbane, eldest of three children of Alexander Mutch, a schoolteacher from Scotland, and his Queensland-born wife Margaret Agnes, née Thornton. 'Mall' completed her education in 1911-12 at New England Girls' School, Armidale, New South Wales, where she captained the tennis team. Her father, an inspiration for her tennis career, was her first coach. Frequent practice with male players helped her develop an aggressive style with a strong service. In 1913 she won the Brisbane metropolitan singles and doubles titles, events she was to dominate for twenty-five years.

On 19 June 1918 at St Philip's Church of England, Thompson Estate (Greenslopes), Brisbane, Mall married Bevil Hugh Molesworth, a lecturer in history recently appointed to the University of Tasmania. The couple moved in 1920 from Hobart to Broken Hill, New South Wales. Mrs Molesworth won the New South Wales women's singles title in 1919 and added the Victorian and South Australian titles the following year. Back in Brisbane in 1921, next year she won the Queensland championship. When she defeated Esna Boyd 6-3, 10-8 in the final of the inaugural Australasian women's championship played at Rushcutters Bay, Sydney, in December 1922, she confirmed her status as Australian champion. She overpowered her Victorian opponent with deep commanding drives and a heavily chopped forehand and backhand.

Molesworth successfully defended her title in August 1923; although a finalist in subsequent years she never won the singles event again. Her only child, Hugh (d.1960), was born in 1925. She continued to be a dominant force in Australian women's tennis throughout the rest of the 1920s and 1930s, winning State championships in every State except Western Australia, including eight Queensland women's singles titles in the years 1922 to 1933. Also regularly playing doubles, she won three Australian titles with a fellow Queensland, Emily Westacott (1930, 1933, 1934), and fifteen State doubles and mixed-doubles titles. At the peak of her career she had few opportunities to test her skills against overseas opponents; in a tour of Europe in 1934 her best result was winning the North of England doubles championship with Joy Mowbray-Green. Her last notable success nationally was a victory with Westacott in the Australian doubles the same year.

Mall Molesworth was described as the first woman competitor to hit the ball as hard as a man. Some contemporaries claimed that she had the widest range of shots of any player of her era—male or female. Her talent on the court was matched by her charm, goodwill and popularity with tennis enthusiasts. She retired from championship tennis in 1937 and moved to Sydney. In 1939 she became Australia's first female professional tennis coach; for some years she ran a highly successful tennis, squash and table-tennis coaching business from her home at Lindfield. Widowed in 1971, she died on 9 July 1985 at home and was cremated. The Mall Molesworth perpetual trophy is awarded each year to the winner of the Queensland women's championship.

Select Bibliography

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Related Entries in NCB Sites

- [Molesworth, Bevil Hugh](#) (husband) 

[view family tree](#)

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