**For the First Time Ever There is not a Single American on the Marquette Women’s Tennis Team Roster**

Cultural Shock - How does it feel? There is a team at Marquette that shows how learning a new culture results in more than wins on the court. Seven women, not a single American, all at Marquette for one thing tennis.

The most recent available statistics shows that in 2013-14, 32.3 percent of Division I men’s tennis players and 30.4 percent of women’s tennis players were international, at that time those the highest percentages in NCAA Division I athletics.

The universities outside the United States do not offer the opportunity of being a student athlete. The only focus is on academics. Therefore, many international teenagers decide to come to the United States. In many countries abroad tennis is one of the most popular sports, right behind soccer, while in the U.S. sports like football, basketball, baseball and hockey overshadow tennis. With the goal to bring college tennis to the higher level, coaches often decide to recruit foreign students.

That is what happened to Marquette women’s tennis team. For the first time the team includes seven women, none of them from the United States. Out of seven women, five are European, one is Australian and one Canadian. Moreover, women came from different parts of Europe as well: Serbia, Netherlands, France and Bulgaria. One more fun fact is that the assistant coach is also Serbian. However, the head coach of Jody Bronson, who has been a head coach for 35 years already, is one United States representative.

Each team member dealt with the culture shock when coming to United States. For most of the women there was a language barrier, different cultural norms, different lifestyle, mindset and interaction expectations between people. However, dealing with the cultural shock makes them stronger and closer to each other. This is the factor that makes the team united with the great chemistry within. “Coming to a different country is a huge step, and the ladies were brave enough to leave their home, family and friends, and come to United States to play tennis and study. This is was definitely not an easy decision for them.” said coach Bronson. The women agreed to share their experience with *Marquette Wire*. The women were asked various questions about culture shock and their lives when coming to Marquette.

“Everything is so much bigger,” was Alexandrina Chinikova’s first impression when coming to the United States from France. What she found different about people is that, people here are very direct, without taboo topics, along with saying anything that is on their minds. “I Still cannot understand how people can eat peanut butter jelly sandwiches,” She added when being asked about food.

Talking about American food, women all shared the same opinion. It is one thing that represents why is it bad to live in the United States.

“I really miss the healthy food and my mom’s fresh cooked meals back home (Netherlands),” Fleur Eggink said. She is a huge sports fan. Women from the team always go to her when wanting to know stats about other teams or basketball, or just any sport in general. “Americans are really into sport, and that is a good thing when living in the United States,” Eggink says. Her name usually puts her in the awkward position, because people are not able to pronounce it properly. “People ask for my name ten times, or when I say that I am from Netherlands they ask me five times where?” On the question if she finds that offending or annoying, she answered that she do not. “I just say that I am from Europe and they stop asking.”

When asking Elizabeth Desmarais (Canada) about cultural differences, she asked: “Can I talk about relationships?” However, she remembers that this story would be published so at the end she changed her mind. “People are more open and if you see someone on the street that you don’t know they would say hey, and they want to get to know you.” Coming here she did not struggle with the language barrier, but she was having hard time to express her humoristic side. As she says “I was struggling to be funny. I would translate our French expression to English, but when translated it just does not have the same meaning as if I would say it back home in Quebec.”

Natalija Popovic (Serbia) mentioned the same issue as Elizabeth and she added, “Everyone thought that I was rude, when I was just being sarcastic. Back home the way we communicate is different. We like to be mean in some way to our good friends, while here everything is, for me, super cheese.” Besides Natalija there is one more Serbian woman in the team, Milica Novakovic. Popovic explained that everyone would think that the two of them are fighting while talking to each other. However, they were just having a “normal” Serbian conversation. “Not a lot of people knows about Serbia.” Natalija explained that it happened to her various times that people would say Siberia or Syria. “I am used on it. I started being immune to that. “I was struggling with the language at first,” Natalija admits “I would not know what word to use. I would use my arms, legs, everything I can in order to explain myself” she continued while laughing. “However, I am used on people making fun of my accent, and I am totally fine with that. Moreover, I feel that the rough accent that I have represents more an advantage that disadvantage for me.”

On the other side, Lesley Foe from France did not have this issue. “I have been trying to be fluent in English since I was 13, and I tried really hard to accomplish that,” Lesley said. She does not have an accent at all, which is something that she is not really excited about since as she said “No one actually believes me that I am foreign. I have this whole exotic foreign thing, but I cannot even use it in my advantage.” Foe admits. The biggest cultural differences for this young lady was that she felt like the time is money here. “In France people are very low key and take everything slowly, very cool and relaxed. However, here everything is in the speed of light. People do not enjoy in every second.”

Isabella Franks came all the way from Australia. She is a huge coffee lover. Therefore, that was a biggest cultural change for her. “In Australia we have a really good coffee, so coming to America where the first option is Starbucks was a huge cultural shock for me.” She explained that it was hard for her to adapt at the beginning. “Yes, we have Starbucks in Australia, but we go more to boutique coffee shops,” Franks continued. One might think that since the English is first language in Australia, she did not have to deal with the language barrier. Of course, it was easier for her than for other women, but she admits that she still had some words that are typical for Australia, but not for United States. “It sounds silly, but it actually makes a big difference. For example, lift and elevator. I would say lift, and people would not understand me. Sometimes I say words that people have no idea what they mean, or they do not understand me because of my accent.” She explains.

As we all know, custard is something that is not famous outside of Wisconsin. A lot of people would agree that it is the same as ice-cream. Here is the thing. It is not. Women from the team also got confused with this question. “They are probably the same thing, because they have a different name.” Fleur said. However, most of them were unsure if they ever tried it or not. “It is hard to make a difference. I guess that a custard is thicker” Elizabeth added. When coming here, Foe believed that there is no difference and she did not understand why people are making such a big thing about it. After she tried custard, she changed her mind “There is definitely a difference between ice cream and custard.”

Besides all the cultural differences, women adapted quickly and successfully. They all believe that dealing with the same things such as, being away from home cultural difference, managing time and close makes them stronger and more united. “We are always there for each other; we got each other’s back. When we are struggling, when we miss home, we are there” Natalija said. “Having so much diversity in such a small team as ours, can be a big issue, since we are all coming from different countries and different places. However, we did not let that to happen. That is something that makes us stronger and I really consider this team as my second family. It is cool to have friends from all over the world.” she concluded.

As M. Scott Peck said: “The key to community is the acceptance, in fact the celebration of our individual and cultural differences. It is also the key to world peace.” Marquette Women’s Tennis Team is a perfect example of it.

Natalija Popovic