

PUIG SUPERFLEX

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Above: The "Puig Superflex Racket."



Above: Eugenio Puig's modernist logo



Above: Frank Donisthorpe holding a double-branched "V" shaped "Ayres Club Improved" model.

The Spanish Art Deco Racket

During the first third of the 20th century the city of Barcelona witnessed an era of artistic and cultural experimentation. Buildings, parks, paintings, jewellery, furniture, decorative objects...they were all enthusiastically conceived and designed with an artistic flair.

The Modernist and Art Decó movements were at their zenith. Therefore it comes as no surprise that fellow Spanish artists Gaudí, Miró, Dalí and others had a massive influence on the craftsman and artisan Eugenio Puig. His new tennis racket, a very simple object at first sight, also embraced this new and popular artistic trend. With its curvacious design, achieved by employing light materials, it lost none of its efficiency or functionality.

Eugenio Puig was clearly inspired by Hazell's "Streamline" British model and other similar European designs.

In 1930, Eugenio Puig had obtained his first patent for the "The refinement of rackets for playing tennis". This patent described his idea of producing classically shaped laminated rackets by layering fibre and aluminium. Compared with traditional rackets made with one wooden strip, this was a big breakthrough and it gave Eugenio Puig the confidence to develop new ideas on further racket designs.

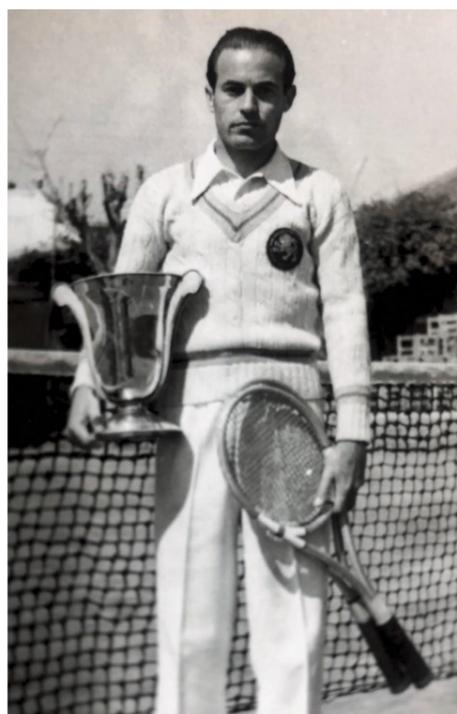
The imaginative and modern "EP" logo, used on his earliest rackets, showed his artistic flair, with his personal initials arranged inside a circle.

The Ayres "Club Improved" Racket

In 1935, Belgian Martial Van Schelle obtained a patent for a pioneering racket with a double branched "V" handle which was promoted by British tennis player Frank Wordsworth Donisthorpe. It was called the Ayres "Club Improved". In 1937, acting as assignor to Hazells Limited, in London, Donisthorpe, now a professional, took out a patent for his invention in the U.S.A. A similar patent had been applied for in Great Britain during 1934/5. He would also later promote the Dunlop Maxply.

A Possible Belgian-Spanish Connection

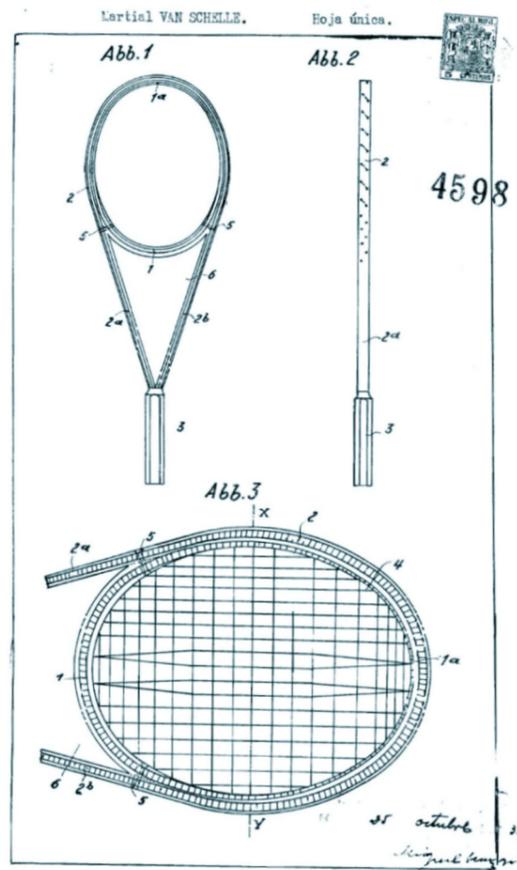
We have discovered that two weeks before the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in July 1936, a racket called the "Puig Superflex" was taken by a Belgian engineer from the company Solvay in Torrelavega to a



Left: Jaime Bartroli proudly holding the VII Faulconbridge Trophy.

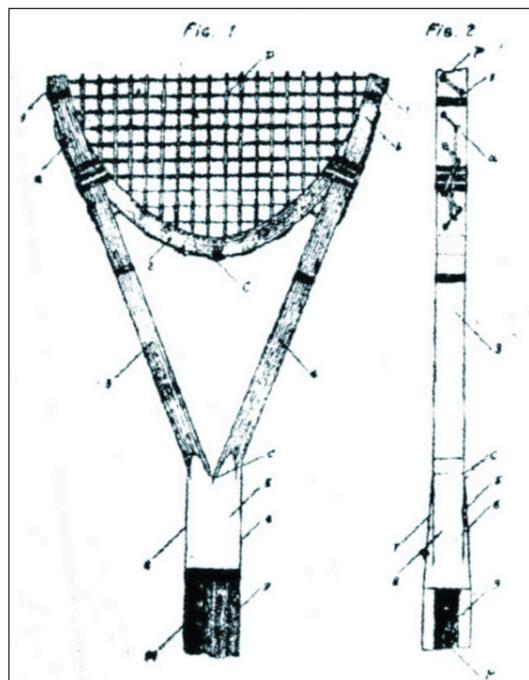
Right: Jaume Bartroli's "Ayres Club Improved" racket which resides in the Catalan Tennis Federation Museum.

Far Right: The Puig tennis racket which was left at the Santander premises.



Patent applications from **Above** Van Schelle (dated 1935) and **Below** for the Puig Superflex (1943).

“Eugenio Puy Puigeber”. A possible reason for this was the drastic political change that Spain suffered during those post-war years. Commercialism encouraged the use of a new brand name which would reflect both *“hispanicization and internationalisation”*. Occasionally the name “Puig” was used in Catalan Spain but this was altered to “Puy” when dealing with mainland Spain or French speaking countries.



Bartrolí has an Ayres Racket but Plays with the Puig Superflex

It has been established that the Spanish champion Jaume Bartrolí (best known for being captain of the Spanish Davis Cup team during the Santana era) acquired the ground-breaking Ayres “Club Improved” racket from the Belgian Van Schelle. The evidence being that after selling his collection to the IOC (International Olympic Committee), some of his rackets, among them the “Club Improved”, were exhibited at the Catalan Tennis Federation Museum in Barcelona.

The Bartrolí - Puig Connection

It is evident that there was a connection between the *racket designer* Eugenio Puig and the *player* Jaume Bartrolí. We assume that Bartrolí eventually ordered a custom Puig racket.

sports shop in Santander for stringing . The racket was very similar to Van Schelle’s Ayres model. But this Puig racket had a “Y” handle and the Ayres had a “V” shaped one. Soon after, however, the Spanish Civil War began and consequently the racket owner never returned to retrieve it.

Van Schelle, who had patented the “Ayres Improved” model in 1935, would eventually die years later in a Nazi concentration camp during the 2nd World War.

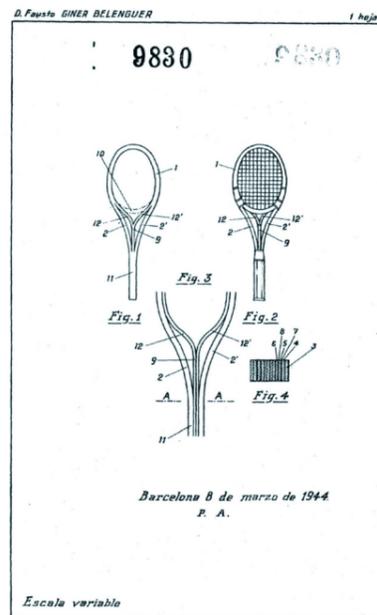
Could there have been a Belgian-Spanish connection?

The Puig Superflex “Y” shaped Racket

The racket left in the shop in Santander was in fact the “Puig Superflex” model “interpreted” or “versioned” by Eugenio Puig. This model was manufactured in 1936 but was not patented until 1943, other variations of the same racket were developed. At this time, Puig designed a version with curved “branches” alongside his modernist or Art Decó version.

Puig and Puy

In the description of this latest patent, his name was slightly modified, instead of simply “Puig”, it was printed



1936

1942

1943

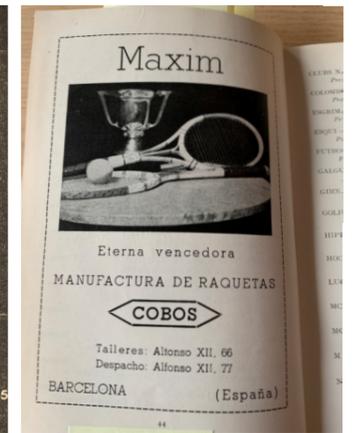
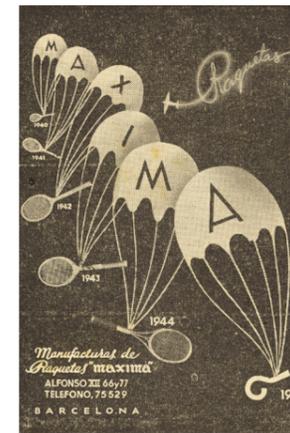
1944

Above: The lawn tennis rackets with which Jaume Bartrioli played during his tennis career.



Right: An advertisement for MAXIMA lawn tennis rackets dated 1945.

Far Right: An advertisement for the COBOS Maxim lawn tennis racket



During the 1940s following the Spanish war, it is likely that Jaime Bartrolí would promote “Puig Superflex” rackets in exchange for an agreed fee. The same arrangement probably applied to another player from the Spanish team who played with that same racket - Fernando Olózaga.

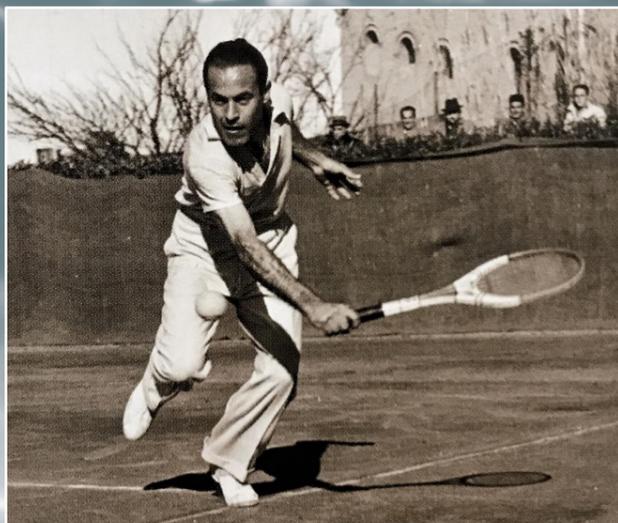
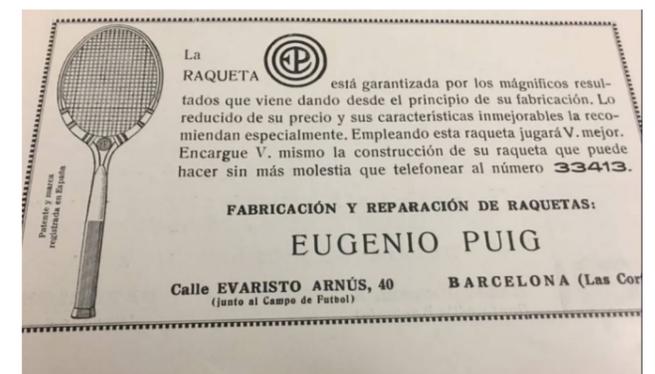
There is photographic evidence which clearly shows the first “Y” shape model during 1941 and 1942. Bartrolí also played with the racket at the Faulconbridge Cup at the Valencia Tennis Club (Spain) in 1943.

The Máxima/Gico Variant

In 1944, Bartrolí used the triple branched model only. However, it was under the MÁXIMA GC or MAXIM GICO brand name, patented that year by Augusto Giner Belenguer, it had no association with the Italian brand name. Later on the brand name was altered to GICO (Giner and Cobos). The second model (with curved branches) was often referred to by the press as “The Bartrolina”.

The Puig Superflex, a Museum Racket

On the whole these rackets have remained comparatively unknown by the public at large, experts and collectors. We think that although they were inspired and influenced by other racket designs, they remain a unique and original design.



Above: March 20, 1943 Valencia, Spain. Jaime Bartrolí receives the VII Faulconbridge Cup from the President of CTV Miguel Monllor after beating Fernando Olózaga from San Sebastian. Other photographs show Bartrolí in action. Note the racket known as the “Bartrolina”.