

World Renown Champion Amazon: Jaguarina

LYNNE EMERY

California State Polytechnic University, Pomona

Billed as the “Champion Amazon of the World,” the “Queen of the Sword,” and the “Ideal Amazon of the Age,” Jaguarina lived up to her publicity as she had countless contests of arms throughout the United States from 1884 to 1900. Her fame preceded her arrival in California and from 1886 to 1889, she enhanced her reputation and became one of the foremost athletes in the state.

Trained in the arts of the sword, Jaguarina was equally adept with a knife, rapier, foil, saber, and broad sword. During her sojourn to the west coast, she had many fights on foot with rapiers but it was her prowess in mounted broad sword combat which attracted the greatest audiences. While her original trip west was to challenge the noted swordsman Duncan C. Ross, he refused to meet her and her first mounted combat was against Captain J. H. Marshall on July 4, 1886, in San Francisco. Victorious against Marshall, she was again scheduled to meet him but in their second contest she was beaten, 11 to 9 attacks.

Besides Marshall, Jaguarina met and defeated Sergeant Owen Davis, Captain E. N. Jennings, Xavier Orlofsky, Fred Engelhardt, and Turn Verein instructor Conrad Wiedemann, among others. Many of these men she fought more than once. Her first victory over Wiedemann, for example, was on foot with rapiers in Napa in 1887. In 1888, in San Diego, she defeated him in a mounted combat before the largest crowd in San Diego’s history and a week later defeated him again on foot.

Multi-talented, when public interest in sword fighting waned, Jaguarina sang, acted and posed for “classical art tableaux” which were living representations of great works of art. Described as beautiful, graceful and an example of perfect womanhood, countless articles were written describing her physical appearance, attire and femininity. One newspaper noted that she was the most conspicuous woman in the world of athletics since she had won 134 of her 135 career combats against men.

Born Ella Hattan in 1864, at a young age Jaguarina or Ella joined a touring stock company as an actress. Adding fencing to her repertoire, her first public fight was in Chicago in 1884. Since the mounted broad sword fencers appeared to be a closed group, the legitimacy of some of her 134 victories must be questioned. One thing which cannot be questioned however, was her treatment by the media. Then as now, much was written about a female athlete’s appearance, behavior, and femininity. Despite these questions, Jaguarina was a professional athlete and if one professional sportswoman existed in the 1800’s, so must others.



Edmund Welsh John Lucas Jim Coates