

**SO YOU WANT TO WIN
WIMBLEDON?**

HOW TO TURN THE DREAM INTO REALITY

2014 EDITION

MARTIN BALDRIDGE

THE TENNIS GUY

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***For dreamers, tennis players, and their parents,
wherever they may be***

***For Rose, William and Catherine,
without who I would be just another Tennis Guy***

***and in memory of my much-missed parents
Joyce Ellen Baldrige 1928-2008
Robert Baldrige 1927-1995***

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PROLOGUE: EVER HAD A DREAM?

“Imagination is more important than knowledge”

- ALBERT EINSTEIN

So imagine this...

As you walk onto Wimbledon centre court, 15,000 excited tennis fans rise to their feet, chant out your name and cheer your every step as you make your way purposefully towards the umpire’s chair. You feel the July sun beating down on you, and smell the freshly cropped grass and painted lines. Inside your chest your heart is pounding, and though you appear calm on the surface, underneath you are a caged lion ready to strike, a modern day gladiator come to do battle.

This is your destiny, your moment in time. All those years of training and competition have led you to this moment, and now that you’re here you can hardly wait to get started. This is what you’ve dreamed of and worked towards since you were a child. Forget the £1.6 million first prize, the multi-million dollar endorsement contracts and fame that will follow. These don’t concern you now because you are simply here to win.

You join the umpire at the net as he explains the format; tie breaks in all but the final set, not that you expect it to go that far. You are aware of your opponent, the one who stands between you and your place in tennis history, but having beaten six others during the past two weeks, you know you are ready, fully prepared and equipped to be the winner of this, the ultimate tennis challenge.

The umpire has spun the coin, and you’ve made your way to the baseline where a ball boy stands nervously to attention, his right arm held high. You nod knowingly towards him, and he gently throws you a ball, which you catch and squeeze gently. You feel its cold exterior and turn to face your opponent.

Composing yourself, you take breaths of air deep into your lungs. You hit that first ball firmly over the net, the crowd cheering every shot that goes back and forth between you and them. It’s time for you to focus now. You’ve been dreaming of this moment ever since you were a child and first heard about this place. This is what you were born and destined to do.

Some five minutes later the umpire announces, “Play”



***Or, if you’re a parent, imagine this, as you prepare to watch
your child compete in the Wimbledon final...***

You've hurriedly made your way to the centre court players' box, where surrounded by your team, you prepare to witness the fulfilment of what has become your mission and lifetime's journey. This journey started some 15 to 20 years earlier, yet you can still remember those first outings with them on the court down at the local club.

Around that time you heard about a book by some **TENNIS GUY** titled, **SO YOU WANT TO WIN WIMBLEDON?** You got the book and quickly read through it; absorbing its message, learning about the players who had won Wimbledon and became familiar with the roles played by their families in giving them their opportunity. You studied the basics of tennis technique and tactics, and the steps necessary in planning a tennis career. You realised though, that in making their dream a possibility, it had also become your dream.

Remember those first few shots? - they were hardly able to hold the racquet, never mind swing and hit the ball. But you were amazed, and they delighted, when contact was made, even though you did have to go and continually pick up the balls.

It wasn't long before you realised that tennis was going to be part of your life for the foreseeable future. They so enjoyed hitting that ball backwards and forwards across the net with you, and when they had learned to do so, insisted on doing it more and more. You soon had trouble keeping up, so you found yourself the best tennis coach you could, had a few lessons, and became a decent player all before they were 10 years old.

But it hadn't really been work. How could it be? Spending hour after hour hitting balls backwards and forwards with your own flesh and blood as their game gradually improved. If only they had stopped banging those shots against the wall in the back lane, or stopped begging you to take them down to the club to hit even more balls with them? Mind you if they had stopped, then you probably wouldn't be here now.

You hadn't necessarily meant for this to happen. It wasn't until you realised they had such desire and ability, and seemed better than all the other local kids, that you decided to give them the opportunity to go a bit further. You aren't really surprised you've ended up here, after all - you planned it all so well.

For some these are not dreams - they are reality!

[Watch a video from The Tennis Guy](#)

INTRODUCTION

| Year | Men's Champion | Women's Champion |
|-------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| 2013 | Andy Murray | Marion Bartoli |
| 2012 | Roger Federer | Serena Williams |
| 2011 | Novak Djokovic | Petra Kvitova |
| 2010 | Rafael Nadal | Serena Williams |
| 2009 | Roger Federer | Serena Williams |
| 2008 | Rafael Nadal | Venus Williams |
| 2007 | Roger Federer | Venus Williams |
| 2006 | Roger Federer | Amelie Mauresmo |
| 2005 | Roger Federer | Venus Williams |
| 2004 | Roger Federer | Maria Sharapova |
| 2003 | Roger Federer | Serena Williams |
| 2002 | Lleyton Hewitt | Serena Williams |
| 2001 | Goran Ivanisevic | Venus Williams |
| 2000 | Pete Sampras | Venus Williams |
| 1999 | Pete Sampras | Lindsay Davenport |
| 1998 | Pete Sampras | Jana Novotna |
| 1997 | Pete Sampras | Martina Hingis |
| 1996 | Richard Krajicek | Steffi Graf |
| 1995 | Pete Sampras | Steffi Graf |
| 1994 | Pete Sampras | Conchita Martinez |
| 1993 | Pete Sampras | Steffi Graf |
| 1992 | Andre Agassi | Steffi Graf |
| 1991 | Michael Stich | Steffi Graf |
| 1990 | Stefan Edberg | Martina Navratilova |
| 1989 | Boris Becker | Steffi Graf |
| 1988 | Stefan Edberg | Steffi Graf |
| 1987 | Pat Cash | Martina Navratilova |
| 1986 | Boris Becker | Martina Navratilova |
| 1985 | Boris Becker | Martina Navratilova |
| 1984 | John McEnroe | Martina Navratilova |
| 1983 | John McEnroe | Martina Navratilova |
| 1982 | Jimmy Connors | Martina Navratilova |
| 1981 | John McEnroe | Chris Evert/Lloyd |
| 1980 | Bjorn Borg | Evonne Goolagong/Cawley |

THE REALITY BEHIND THE DREAM

Between 1980 and 2013 there were 16 different men's and 14 different women's Wimbledon singles champions. Each year 128 men and 128 women, in a process of continual elimination, must battle through seven rounds in order to win the world's most prestigious sporting title – and collect the winner's cheque of over £1.6 million.

However, to even have the chance of playing at Wimbledon, a player must first have become a successful professional, and usually be ranked inside the world's Top-100, and as you'll discover by reading the mini-biographies of the champions contained within this book, this can not be done without, from a young age, the help, encouragement and guidance of their families and coaches.

THE TENNIS GUY

I'm a Lawn Tennis Association (LTA) Master Performance and Registro Profesional de Tenis (RPT) European Professional tennis coach, with over 30 years coaching experience in Europe and the USA.

As a junior I reached national standard in my native Great Britain, before playing college tennis in the USA, and then competing at the lower levels of the professional game and club tennis in Europe. Today I compete in national and international ITF Senior's tournaments - and much of what I've learned about playing, teaching and coaching tennis over the past 40 years is contained within this book, which is divided into five sets:

The **FIRST SET - *ARE WIMBLEDON CHAMPIONS BORN OR MADE?***, describes the combination of various personal characteristics and support necessary to create a tennis champion.

The **SECOND SET - *INSIDE THE WORLD'S TOP-100***, explains where players with the potential to win Wimbledon are produced, and how the world of tennis has changed since the game went professional.

The **THIRD SET - *SO YOU WANT YOUR KID TO WIN WIMBLEDON?***, provides a do-it-yourself, coaching guide for parents, covering basic technique and tactics for children aged up to 10.

The **FOURTH SET - *THE ROAD TO WIMBLEDON***, continues the journey of a potential Wimbledon champion from ages 11 to 16, discussing where and how much to train, the importance of balancing tennis with education, the role of coaches, and how to find the best one for your child.

The **FIFTH SET - *GAME, SET AND MATCH***, describes the transition from junior into adult, professional tennis, and the differences between the men's and women's game.

***So if you're ready to find out what it takes to win Wimbledon -
then read on...***

FIRST SET

**ARE WIMBLEDON CHAMPIONS
BORN OR MADE?**

1.

NATURE

Ask most experienced tennis coaches what it takes to become a champion and the first thing they'll usually say is *talent*,

“An innate natural ability, which can be developed by training”

John McEnroe once described Roger Federer as, *“The most talented tennis player I’ve ever seen.”* And Jimmy Connors summed up Federer’s unique playing ability, saying of him, *“In an era of specialists, you’re either a clay court specialist, a grass court specialist or a hard court specialist... or you’re Roger Federer!”*

ROGER FEDERER

“The best tennis player in history”

- RAFAEL NADAL

Seven-time Wimbledon champion Roger Federer was born 8 August 1981 near Basel, Switzerland and comes from a family where everyone enjoyed playing tennis. His South African born mother Lynette was a member of the 1995 Swiss Inter-club senior championship team, later became a junior tennis coach, and worked in the office helping organise the ATP Swiss Indoor tournament at Basel. Roger’s father Robert was a recreational player.

EARLY YEARS

As youngsters Roger and his elder sister Diana would accompany their parents, both of whom worked for Ciba-Geigy Pharmaceuticals, to the company’s private tennis courts at weekends. Lynette said, *“From an early age he was fascinated by balls and would want to play ball for hours on end, even from age one-and-a-half.”*

Roger first played tennis at age three. His father said, *“By age four he could already hit 20 or 30 balls in a row - he was unbelievably coordinated.”*

Possessing boundless energy Roger played many sports, but was most taken by soccer and tennis. He would spend hours hitting tennis balls against the various walls around and inside the family home, frequently driving his parents to despair.

Robert added, *“He was impulsive and ambitious, and not an easy child. Defeats were a total disaster for him, even at board games. In general he was a nice guy but when he didn’t like something he could get pretty aggressive - dice and board-game pieces sometimes flew through the air.”*

Lynette commented, *“Even as a little boy he was sometimes difficult, always did as he pleased and attempted to push limits, whether it involved teachers in school, or his parents at home, or in sports. When forced to do something he didn’t like he reacted strongly. When bored he questioned or ignored it. When his father gave him instruction on the tennis court he would not even look at him.”*

SEPPLI KACOVSKY

Feeling that Roger had outgrown the Ciba club and needed to be amongst better juniors, at age eight, Lynette enrolled him in the elite junior programme of the Old Boys Tennis Club in Basel, where he received his initial tennis instruction from veteran Czech coach Seppli Kacovsky. With more than forty years experience, Kacovsky who claimed to have been one of the few to recognise Roger’s potential said, *“The club and I noticed right away that this guy was a natural talent and had been born with a racquet in his hand... so we began giving him private lessons, which were partly funded by the club. He was a quick learner, when you wanted to teach him something new he was able to pick it up after three or four tries, while others in the group needed weeks.”*

Kacovsky was a fan of the one-handed backhand, and considering that Roger’s idols were Boris Becker, Stefan Edberg and later Pete Sampras, all of who used the one-hander, it’s no surprise that Roger used and stuck with it from an early age.

As a youngster Federer boasted that he would win Wimbledon one day. Kacovsky said, *“People laughed at him, including me. I thought that he would possibly become the best player in Switzerland or maybe Europe, but not the best in the world. But he had it in his head and worked at it.”*

From ages eight to 10 Roger received group and individual training from Kacovsky, but was sometimes ejected from practice sessions for fooling around and throwing what would become his famous tantrums. One of the coaches even nick-named him *“Little Satan”* and Roger later confessed to having been a hot head at a young age, often erupting if he hit a bad shot.

In tournaments he would sometimes scream out *“lucky shot”* when his opponent played a great shot and was once, having lost a match, found crying and had to be coaxed out from beneath the umpire’s chair. Another time, having become bored whilst waiting to play a match, he even climbed a tree and hid in it until people started worrying where he was.

Rarely a day went by when he wouldn’t throw his racquet against the fence, and at tournaments his behaviour would so shock his parents that they sometimes refused to speak to him on the way home. Roger though, couldn’t understand the fuss, and once even told his mother to just relax and go have a glass of wine!

Despite this fragile temperament Roger still impressed Kacovsky, who said that during defeats he never gave up and was willing afterwards to learn from his mistakes.

COACH CARTER

Age 10 Roger began being taught at the club by Australian Peter Carter, a former professional who had reached world No. 173 before injuries forced him to quit the game and take up coaching in Switzerland. Carter had been a pupil of Adelaide-based coach Peter Smith, who coached many outstanding Australian players including Lleyton Hewitt, Darren Cahill and Roger Rasheed.

Building on the work done by Kacovsky, Carter helped perfect Roger's technique, along with teaching him the strategy and psychology required to play the game to a high level. Carter's father Bob said, *"Peter telephoned me one day in Australia and said, 'Oh I have a young boy here who looks promising... he's only about 12 or 13. I think he's going to go places. That boy was Roger Federer.'"*

Bob Carter later commented, *"Obviously Roger has got enormous talent, but I'm sure, and I can see it in his game, what's there Peter would have taught him. The serve and the slice and the variety in his game, that's how Peter played."*

Between ages 10 and 14 Federer spent more time with Carter than with his own family, working on a daily basis on all aspects of his game. Particular attention was paid to Roger's emotional state, getting him to understand how much energy he was wasting during his outbursts, and the importance of learning to control his emotions. Over the next few years these tantrums lessened considerably.

Federer later said of Carter, *"We spent a lot of time together when I was a boy. I saw him everyday. Peter was very calm but he was also funny with a typical Australian sense of humor. I can never thank him enough for everything that he gave to me. Thanks to him I have my entire technique and coolness."*

Age 11 Roger reached the final of the 12-and-under Swiss national junior championships, and succeeded in winning the tournament the next year. By this time he had decided he wanted to become a professional tennis player. An avid soccer player he was forced to miss training sessions and weekend soccer matches due to his hectic tennis schedule. He decided then to stop playing soccer and concentrate solely on tennis, where he felt he had more control over his victories or defeats, rather than relying on the performances of his team mates. He had little interest in studying and struggled to balance education with his tennis commitments.

LEAVING HOME

Age 13 Roger was invited to attend the Swiss National Tennis Academy at Ecublens near Lausanne. There he would have the opportunity to combine three hours tennis training per day and studying. Having said initially that he did not want to attend Ecublens, which is situated in the French speaking part of the country and a two-hour train journey from his hometown, Roger changed his mind and enrolled shortly after his 14th birthday.

The academy was run by Christophe Freyss and Pierre Paganini, who were responsible for the coaching and physical training respectively. Speaking little French and struggling with the whole concept of living away from home, Roger found his first months at Ecublens totally depressing. He felt isolated as the *Swiss German* by many of the students and staff at the academy, experienced some mild bullying, and was often on the verge of packing his bags and returning home. He stuck it out though, and eventually settled into the routine of academy life. When not away competing at tournaments, he would return home at weekends to spend time with his friends and family.

His mother later said that this difficult period in Roger's life helped develop his independent spirit, and allowed him the opportunity of learning to make important decisions by himself.

In January 1997 age 15, Roger won the Swiss national 18-and-under championships, but was at this stage of his career still screaming and throwing his racquet around in his search to play the *perfect game*.

A month after his 16th birthday Roger gained his first world ranking at No. 803 and ended 1997 No. 704.

WORLD JUNIOR CHAMPION

Having reached the semi-finals of the 1998 junior Australian Open Federer turned professional. After three years, he left Ecublens to train at the new Swiss National Training Centre at Biel. There he was reunited with Carter and another coach, Swede Peter Lundgren; who had been appointed National Trainer. Biel is much closer to his hometown of Basel, and Roger felt much more comfortable there.

That year saw Roger win the junior Wimbledon singles and doubles titles, but lose in the final of the junior US Open. He then reached the quarter-finals of the ATP tournament in Toulouse and age 17, finished 1998 ranked world No. 301.

In December, Roger won the 18-and-under Orange Bowl in Florida, to end the year ranked world number one junior, and was named world junior champion.

Still with another year as a junior, Roger then began playing full-time on the men's tour. He chose Peter Lundgren rather than Peter Carter as his travelling coach. This was something of a shock to Carter, but Roger

remained in regular contact with him, and would later help install him as the Swiss Davis Cup captain.

In early 1999 Roger entered the Top-200, and despite losing in the first rounds of both Roland Garros and Wimbledon, having just turned 18, entered the world's Top-100, ending the year No. 65.

At Marseille in February 2000 Federer reached his first ATP tour final, and a month later entered the Top-50. He reached the fourth round of Roland Garros, but lost in the first round of Wimbledon and the third round of the US Open. Age 19, he ended 2000 world No. 29.

Federer won his first ATP title, at Milan, in January 2001 but was still struggling to control his fiery emotions. Four months later, after beating Marat Safin in a third set tie-break at the Rome Masters, he was watching the highlights on television in the locker room, and became embarrassed that the commentators' post-match analysis concerned not his good play, but the different techniques he and Safin had employed to break their racquets!

In Hamburg, after losing in straight sets to Franco Squillari, Federer lost his temper and promptly destroyed his racquet. He then came to the realisation that if he wanted to fulfil his undoubted potential he would have to take control of his emotions.

Having put on a *poker face* he reached the quarter-finals at Roland Garros, and then caused a major upset in beating Pete Sampras in the last 16 of Wimbledon, before promptly losing in the next round to Tim Henman. He reached the fourth round of the US Open and ended 2001 world No. 13.

Age 20, in May 2002 Federer broke into the world's Top-10. He won the Hamburg Masters but then crashed out in the first round of both Roland Garros and Wimbledon. Lundgren commented at that time, *"He has so much talent and so many shots that he sometimes doesn't know how to use them."*

Federer himself commented, *"I was famous for being talented but you never knew where the talent was going to take me."*

DEATH OF A FRIEND AND COACH

Tragedy struck on 1 August 2002 when age 37, Peter Carter was killed in a road accident in South Africa. Roger, who was competing in Toronto at the time, said after hearing the news, *"I was very shocked and very sad when I found out. He was a very close friend. Peter wasn't my first coach, but he was my real coach. I made trips with him. He knew me and my game, and was always thinking of what was good for me."*

Later Roger added, *"He was a very important man in my tennis career, if not the most important. I had been with him from age 10 to 14, and then again from 16 till 20, so I knew him very well."*

He gave me a lot in terms of his personality, in terms of technique and on the court. It was a hard loss. In those weeks after he died, everything went very quickly. I decided that I would compete in the US Open because I guessed that's what Peter would have liked to see me do, not just sit around.

I don't know if it was good or for bad...It was also a very influential moment in my career. It certainly marked me, and there was a reaction in terms of how I look at life now. It was a hard moment, and I think of him very often still."

Carter's death may inadvertently have been one of the reasons for the improvement Federer then made. Roger said, *"I guess it made me mentally stronger and I started thinking what do I have to do to get to the next level?"*

After reaching the fourth round of the US Open, he showed greater consistency by reaching the semi-finals at Stuttgart, Paris and the end-of-year Tennis Masters Cup. Age 21 he ended 2002 world number six.

The first half of 2003 saw Roger reach the fourth round of the Australian Open, win titles at Marseille, Dubai and Munich, and be finalist at the Rome Masters. Once again though, he then suffered another shock defeat in the first round of the French Open; losing in straight sets to world No. 88 Luis Horna. He said afterwards, *"The entire world keeps reminding me that I'm supposed to win a Grand Slam tournament and be number one in the world. That's not fair because it's not that easy. I don't know how long I'll need to get over this defeat – a day, a week or my entire career!"*

It didn't take Roger that long, as a month later he went to Wimbledon and won his first Grand Slam title; beating Andy Roddick in the semi-finals and Mark Philippoussis in the final. In October Federer won the title at Vienna, then the end-of-year Tennis Masters Cup, and age 22, ended 2003 world number two.

THE GREATEST MALE PLAYER WHO EVER LIVED

In February 2004 Federer reached world number one; a position he maintained for a record 237 consecutive weeks. And, apart from at the French, for over four years he completely dominated the world of men's professional tennis, winning five consecutive Wimbledon titles between 2003 and 2007.

Federer finally relinquished his Wimbledon throne, losing in the 2008 final to Rafael Nadal, 9-7 in the fifth set; a match considered by many, Bjorn Borg and McEnroe included, to have been the greatest of all time. Also in 2008 he won the doubles gold medal for Switzerland at the Beijing Olympics, when partnering Stanislas Wawrinka.

Having lost in the final the previous three years running to Nadal, in 2009 Federer won his first French Open, equalling Pete Sampras' record of 14 Grand Slam singles titles, and in doing so became only the sixth man in tennis history to win each of the Grand Slams.

By winning the 2009 Wimbledon final, once again against Roddick, Federer broke Sampras' record to win his 15th Grand Slam title, and became the most successful male player of all time; regaining his world number one ranking in the process. In August he became the first player in tennis history to earn over \$50 million in on-court career prize money.

2010 saw Federer collect his 16th Grand Slam, beating Andy Murray in the final of the Australian Open. Having in August hired Sampras' former coach Paul Annacone, he finished the year by beating Nadal in the final of the Barclays ATP World Tour Finals to win his fifth end-of-year championship, repeating the feat at the end of 2011 to win a record sixth title.

In a 2011 global study by the Reputational Institute of 50,000 people from 25 countries, Federer was voted the second most like, trusted, respected and admired public personality in the world, behind only the great, late Nelson Mandela.

In beating Murray in the Wimbledon 2012 final he won his 17th Grand Slam, reclaimed his number one ranking, and overtook Pete Sampras' record of 285 weeks as world number one (going on to hold that position for 302 weeks). And a month later he was silver medallist for singles at the London Olympics.

At the time of writing Federer had won 77 career singles titles, including seven Wimbledons, five US Opens, four Australian, and one French, and almost \$79 million in career prize money.

Forbes Magazine stated Federer's earnings for 2012 were \$52.7 million, whilst his on-court earnings were a mere \$7.7 million. Taking advantage of the lucrative endorsement and exhibitions available to him had earned Federer a reputed fortune close to \$350 million - all by age 32.

If in fact there is such a thing, Roger Federer is the greatest tennis player of all time

2.

NURTURE

According to Matthew Syed in his 2010 book ***BOUNCE: THE MYTH OF TALENT AND THE POWER OF PRACTICE***, there's no such thing as talent. Instead he argues that what appears to most people to be '*natural talent*', is

actually the result of the acquisition of skills, (usually from a young age), due to various contributory factors, including opportunity, peer pressure, passion and luck!

THE WILLIAMS SISTERS

“Straight Outta Compton!”

Two of the best women players ever to play the game, due in large part to their unparalleled speed, power and athleticism, 10-time Wimbledon singles champions Venus and Serena Williams grew up and learnt their trade in Compton, Los Angeles, under the watchful eye of their parents Richard and Oracene Williams.

The Compton area of South Central L.A. is not noted for producing tennis champions. Instead, this neighbourhood consists of some of the most economically deprived people of the USA. With a homicide rate eight times the national average, Venus and Serena grew up and learned to play tennis in a modern day war zone, where violent Black and Hispanic gangs carried out drive by shootings, and where drug addiction and prostitution were the norm.

In September 2003 their half-sister Yetunde Price was gunned down and killed in Compton. Both sisters claim to have dodged bullets whilst learning to play tennis with Serena later commenting, *“If you can keep playing tennis when someone is shooting a gun down the street, that’s concentration!”*

THE FORMATION OF A MASTERPLAN

In June 1978 Richard watched on TV as Virginia Ruzici earned \$40,000 for winning the French Open ladies’ championship - more money than he’d made all year. He then allegedly turned to Oracene, who already had three daughters from a previous marriage and said, *“Let’s have more kids and make them tennis players.”*

One thing led to another and 17 June 1980 Venus was born, and 15 months later 26 September 1981, along came Serena.

Williams, who ran his own private security firm, had little tennis coaching or playing experience. He learned about tennis by watching television instruction programmes and videos, and reading tennis instruction books. He then taught himself and Oracene to play, so that they could hit with their five daughters. He claims to have had no idea of how to develop talent, but hoped that involvement in sport would provide his family with a way out of the neighbourhood.

The sisters though, didn’t play tennis with just their father, and in her 2009 autobiography ***MY LIFE: QUEEN OF THE COURT***, Serena stated that at a

young age she spent more time playing tennis with Oracene, a nurse and former schoolteacher, than with Richard.

MAKINGS OF CHAMPIONS

Age four, Venus was given her first tennis racquet and taken by her father to the rundown, cracked, public courts in Compton, where having been given some brief instruction from him, she was able to hit the ball over the net almost every time.

Richard said, *"The first time I knew Venus was going to be a good tennis player was the first time I took her out on her very first day. I was working with some other kids, and had a shopping cart that would hold 550 balls. It took three kids who were teenagers a long time to hit those balls. They wanted to take breaks. Well, while they were taking a break, Venus wanted to hit every ball in that basket. She wouldn't stop. Every time you tried to stop her, she would start crying."*

She was only four years old. That doesn't mean she hit every ball. A lot of them she missed. But she would swing at every ball. When she got to the last ball in the basket, she told me to say, 'Last one,' and I said, 'Okay, last one.' And to this day, I say the same thing to her when she's practising."

When Richard went home that day he told Oracene,

"We have a winner."

"No, you're just a proud father," replied Oracene.

"No, this girl is a winner," said Richard.

"Well, how do you know?" asked Oracene.

"Because Venus demonstrated all four qualities of a champion. No matter what age, all champions are able to demonstrate that they are rough, they are tough, they are strong, and they are mentally sound. You cannot teach that. That is a God-given quality, and Venus demonstrated that on the first day," he replied.

Venus admits that one of the reasons she loved playing tennis so much, was that it gave her some time alone that she could spend with her father; within a year though, they were joined by Serena.

Both girls took to tennis at once and were blessed with exceptional natural physical ability. Age eight Venus could run a mile in less than five-and-a-half minutes. Serena played in her first tournament aged four-and-a-half, and according to her father, won 46 of the 49 tournaments she entered until age 10, in Southern California – the toughest junior section of the USTA.

Venus and Serena both loved watching tennis matches on video with their 'daddy' as they affectionately refer to him. They would study the pros on TV, watch their footwork, and noticed how the best players found their opponent's weaknesses, and kept hitting the ball there, over and over again. For the next few years, both before and after school, and with Richard working night shifts so he could train them, the sisters hit cratefuls of old, dead tennis balls on these poorly lit, broken glass covered courts for hours on end.

PAUL COHEN

When the sisters were age seven and six, Richard telephoned Paul Cohen, who had taught 12 former Top-10 players on the ATP men's tour and 17 USTA national junior boy's champions, to ask if he would consider coaching his daughters. Cohen agreed to take a look at the girls and Richard drove them to Brentwood, California to meet him.

On hitting with the sisters for the first time Cohen was astounded by their phenomenal athletic ability and said, *"I had never seen a six-year-old as strong as Serena and I'd never seen a potential woman champion as athletic and as graceful as Venus."*

Cohen agreed to help Richard coach them saying later, *"I wanted essentially to train two attack dogs who would intimidate every woman that stood on the other side of the net from them, and that they would literally beat the ball and pound their opponents into submission. With Venus and Serena we not only built their game to be perfect, we built them with the purpose of annihilating their opponents."*

A year later John McEnroe and Pete Sampras, who had both been pupils of Cohen, visited Brentwood and watched Venus hitting with him. Venus later got to hit with both pros and told reporters afterwards that she felt she could have beaten McEnroe if the bounces had gone her way!

On 3 July 1990 the New York Times ran an article on Venus who was the only undefeated 10-and-under player in Southern California, and an African-American girl at that. Nine months later the same paper ran a front-page story on the sisters, and spoke of the tremendous potential of Venus but dismissed the chances of younger sister Serena.

Age 10, Venus was told by her parents that she needed to concentrate on just one sport. Venus, who also played softball, soccer and did gymnastics, chose tennis, because she believed she could become the best of all time. Despite her vigorous training routine, she still maintained an A+ average at school and Richard even cut back on her tennis when her grades dropped. Venus said, *"Tennis is just tennis, but when your grades start to drop - that's a problem."*

When the sisters reached ages 11 and 10 Richard decided that they would play in no more junior competitions. This was due to the racial undertones he claimed to have experienced at junior events, and because he didn't want his

girls exposed to the type of competitive pressures some tennis parents were subjecting their children to.

The sisters by this time had attracted national attention. Richard was offered cars, a bigger house and money from agents, including one who offered \$87 million for a part in their future earnings. However, he turned them all down and wouldn't even allow his girls to get professional coaching, as he believed he taught them well enough.

RICHARD WILLIAMS – GENIUS OR MADMAN?

Some observers considered, and still do, Richard Williams to be an arrogant madman. In a conversation with French coach Patrick Mouratoglou in 2007, Richard told him, *“When Venus turned six I wondered what I would do with her and her sister because any child is comfortable in a familiar environment. But it is an entirely different situation in real life, and you must come out of your cocoon in order to perceive your power.*

So when Venus turned seven I did the unthinkable. I do not know if you know what the ghetto is really like; people who live on the street and do and deal drugs... Me I took my daughters to the ghetto!

One day we found ourselves in the street next to a drunken woman who screamed insanities and was hitting herself. She looked at Venus and Serena and said, “Look at the pretty little girls. Mine were like that once and look what they’ve become!” Her daughters looked crazy with dishevelled hair, completely scruffy. Bull’s eye! - they learned everything I had tried to teach them from this woman. As of that moment Venus made ambitious life projects and Serena started to comb her hair; she who never wanted to touch a comb before... That was all that needed to be said.”

Richard's training methods included getting locals to come by and shout abuse at the girls as they played, in an attempt to try to break their concentration. Whether by accident or design, his comments made him an outspoken, sometimes unpopular, but well known tennis figure. He once said of himself, *“I’m more of a personality than most of the players. The only players who are more of a celebrity than me are Venus and Serena!”*

Having become the sisters' manager as well as coach, he was instrumental in securing the major sponsorship deals, which would provide the family with financial security for life. Initially, he said that he had only wanted to help his daughters have a better life and escape the ghetto, but he subsequently stated, *“I only got into tennis to make a million dollars. I didn't really have the right motives in the beginning at all. Back then I was just like any other tennis parent.”*

He claimed that one of the reasons he took the family to Compton was to show them that this is what happens, as had happened to him, when you don't get an education, and insisted that all his daughters got the best

possible. Throughout their youth, when not enrolled in regular school, Oracene took on the responsibility of home-schooling the sisters.

Early on in their professional careers, Richard caused indignation by suggesting it would not be long before his girls competed against each other in all the Grand Slam singles finals and would also dominate in doubles - a suggestion that was later proven to be true. As they grew up he attended almost all of their training sessions and throughout their careers missed hardly any matches they played.

Whether you like him or loathe him, he helped raise six well-rounded, educated, happy, successful daughters, two of who happen to be tennis players, and all of who love and respect him. He has been described as a master psychologist and is a justifiably proud father of his two incredibly successful daughters.

He said though, *"I always talk stupid. I prefer people to think that I'm stupid."*

Well Mr Williams – you can fool some of the people some of the time, but not all of the people all of the time!

LEAVING THE GHETTO

In September 1991, Richard decided to move the entire family three thousand miles eastwards, to the Rick Macci Tennis Academy, at the luxurious Grenelefe Tennis and Golf Resort, in Haines City, Central Florida.

Rick Macci had previously coached child prodigy and world number one Jennifer Capriati. In May that year he had travelled to Los Angeles at Richard's request, to cast his eye over the sisters, whose reputation had reached him in Florida.

Initially, having hit with and watched the sisters play, Macci was not overly impressed. It was not until Venus requested a comfort break, to which she walked partly on her hands and then did backward cartwheels, that he recognised her incredible athletic potential. He said to Richard,

"Mr Williams, it looks like you've got the next Michael Jordan on your hands."

To which Richard then put his arm round Macci, looked towards Serena and replied,

"No Mr Macci, we've got the next two Michael Jordans!"

Macci believed he could help the sisters become the Top-two ranked players in the world. He offered them free scholarships and accommodation for the entire family in return for a percentage of their future earnings, Macci also provided the Williams family with an \$80,000 Winnebago motorhome,

furniture, food, and a place on the payroll for Richard at his academy - all of which Macci paid for himself.

Despite offers from other Florida academies, Richard accepted Macci's offer and for the next three-and-a-half years Rick coached the sisters free of charge, six hours a day, six days a week, with Richard looking on and learning. Extra training included boxing, taekwondo, ballet and gymnastics, but there was time for fun too though, with Macci throwing in tickets to Disney World and a golf membership for Richard.

Macci saw the sisters as a challenge. He coached Venus for an hour a day on her volley and net game alone, believing this was where she would become successful later on as a professional. He realised though, that this type of game took longer to develop.

Long hours were also spent perfecting Venus' serve. Macci stated, *"I wanted her to have the greatest serve in the history of the women's game; there wasn't a day went by when Venus wouldn't hit two hundred serves."* Not surprising then that in 1998 age 18, Venus hit the then fastest ever serve by a woman of 128 mph.

JUNIOR CAREERS – NOT!

Although Macci believed Venus would get a better feel for the game by playing competitive tournaments, Richard disagreed saying, *"Our goal is not junior tennis - Venus has nothing to gain by playing junior tennis."* And adding that he wasn't concerned about her being a good junior player, but about her becoming a good professional.

At the academy the sisters spent a lot of time hitting and playing against much older male players, including Dave Rineberg, who could hit the ball harder than most of the women players on the tour.

THE RICK MACCI TENNIS ACADEMY

In June 2009 the Rick Macci Tennis Academy moved to the 20-court, Boca Lago Country Club in Boca Raton, Florida. Unlike some Florida tennis academies, Macci's prides itself on the quality not just quantity of its players and no more than 40 players train there at any one time.

Along with the Williams sisters, Macci's former pupils include Maria Sharapova, Andy Roddick, Jennifer Capriati, Mary Pierce, Anastasia Myskina and many other top ranked professionals. You can find out more about Rick and his academy at www.rickmacci.com

THE RISE OF VENUS

In October 1994, 14-year-old Venus, the *'Ghetto Cinderella'* as her father referred to her, played her first professional tournament at Oakland,

California. In her first match, with Macci and Richard looking on, she beat world No. 58 Shaun Stafford, 6-3, 6-4. This was despite not having played a tournament match for over three years. In the next round she played world number two Arantxa Sanchez-Vicario. She lost the match in three sets having led 6-2, 3-1. Afterwards she was asked how this defeat compared to others she had suffered, to which she replied, *"I don't know I've never lost before!"*

Then in May 1995 age just 14, and having played in just one professional event, Venus signed a five-year, \$12 million contract with Reebok - thus virtually guaranteeing the family's financial security for life. The contract though, effectively ended the coaching relationship between Macci and the Williamses.

Although Richard wanted Macci to continue coaching the sisters, Macci wanted financial compensation for the \$1 million worth of work and time he claimed to have invested in the family during their four years at his academy. Neither would budge and soon after Richard bought a 40-acre compound near Palm Beach Gardens, Florida, on which he built three courts. There, he trained the sisters himself, with the help of hitting-coach Dave Rineberg; whilst Macci continued working full-time at his Academy.

In October 1995 age 15, Venus gained her first world ranking of No. 321, and ended the year No. 217. During 1996 she rose to No. 148, and in April 1997 age just 16, entered the Top-100.

VENUS AT WIMBLEDON

In her first appearance at Wimbledon, though performing well, she lost in the first round. But that September, ranked No. 66 and unseeded; she reached the US Open final, losing in straight sets to Martina Hingis and finished 1997 ranked No. 21.

She entered the Top-10 in March 1998 and finished the year world number five. By the end of 1999 age 19, she had risen to number three.

Age 20, Venus beat Lindsay Davenport in the 2000 final, to win her first Wimbledon title. She again beat Davenport in the final to win her first US Open, and later that month won the gold medal for singles at the Sydney Olympics. Also that year, with Serena, she won the doubles titles at the US Open, Wimbledon and the gold medal at the Olympics.

In 2001 Venus won her second Wimbledon, beating Justine Henin in the final, defeated Serena in the final to win her second US Open, and ended 2001 ranked world number three.

Age 21, Venus reached world number one in April 2002. When asked if she was surprised that she had attained this ranking she replied, *"I've known I could be number one since I was six years old. I heard my parents telling me so many times that I would become the world's best one day, and that I would*

write my name in every Grand Slam's records book, that I ended up believing it. When I was younger I even thought I could beat John McEnroe!"

People have sometimes been taken aback by Venus' honesty, even accusing her of arrogance. She replies though, *"Some people say I have an attitude, but I think you have to. You have to believe in yourself when no-one else does, that's what makes you a winner right there."*

Having won the first of her five Wimbledon titles, Venus then suffered a variety of injuries, which curtailed her dominance at the top of the game. By the end of 2013 Venus had won 44 career singles titles, including seven Grand Slams, and earned almost \$29 million in on-court prize money; the second highest of a woman player.

Outside of tennis, in December 2007, she graduated with an associate degree in Fashion Design from the Art Institute of Fort Lauderdale and set up her own interior design company – *V Starr Interiors*.

TOWARDS THE SERENA SLAM

In September 1995 age 14, Serena played her first professional tournament in Quebec City. Claiming she froze on the day, she lost in the first round 6-1, 6-1 to world No. 149 Anne Miller in less than an hour.

She spent all of 1996 working on her game at home with Richard and Dave Rineberg, entered no professional events, but due to her training improved dramatically.

Serena gained her first world ranking of No. 448 in October 1997 age 16. The following month in Chicago she defeated fourth seed Monica Seles and seventh seed Mary Pierce on her way to the semi-finals, where she lost to Lindsay Davenport. These results catapulted her into the world's Top-100 age 16. She ended the year ranked No. 96.

Like Venus before, Serena then signed a five-year \$12 million contract, but this time with Puma.

In June 1998, just eight months after achieving her first world ranking, Serena entered the Top-20 and age 17, ended the year world No. 22.

Serena entered the Top-10 in May 1999, and seeded seven, unexpectedly became the first of the sisters to win a Grand Slam; beating Martina Hingis in the US Open final. She rose to and ended the year, age 18, ranked world number four.

2000 saw Serena lose to Venus in semi-finals of Wimbledon and end the year world number six; a position she repeated in 2001.

WIMBLEDON VICTORY

2002 was Serena's breakthrough year. Age 20, and without losing a set in the entire tournament, she beat Venus in the final to win the French Open. She then defeated Venus in the final to win her first Wimbledon and became world number one. In September she once again beat Venus in the final to win her second US Open.

In early 2003 Serena won the first of her five Australian Opens thus completing her *Serena Slam*, in which she held all four Grand Slam singles titles at the same time. Incredibly, in all these finals, and that of Wimbledon 2003, she played and beat Venus, who remained world number two.

THE REALISATION OF A DREAM

16 years after it had all begun on those worn out, run down, public courts in Compton, Richard Williams' dream that his daughters would compete in the finals of all the Grand Slam tournaments, had become a reality.

Between 2000 and 2003, in both singles and doubles, the Williams sisters dominated the world of women's professional tennis, playing each other in four consecutive Grand Slam singles finals, from the 2002 French Open onwards, and with Serena winning six of the eight Grand Slam singles finals they have played overall.

Despite struggling with injuries, Serena won the 2005 Australian Open but for the next few years, much like Venus, spent much of her time out of the game injured. She used this time to develop her interest in acting, obtained a degree in fashion, and set up her own clothing line, *Aneres* - Serena spelt backwards.

At the 2006 Wimbledon Championships, which she missed through injury, I asked Richard Williams if Serena was coming back. He replied, "*Yeah for sure she'll be back, just as soon as she's finished making movies, she be making movies now.*"

My how the mighty have fallen I thought!

Serena did of course come back, winning the 2007 and 2009 Australian Opens, and in 2009 beating Venus for the fourth time in the Wimbledon final to win her third title.

However, shortly after capturing her fourth Wimbledon in 2010, with a straight sets final win over Vera Zvonareva, Serena suffered a freak accident, cutting her foot by stepping on a broken glass, when exiting a restaurant in Germany. The injury required surgery, which kept her from playing at the US Open and in October she announced she would not be competing again that year.

In November she withdrew from the forthcoming Australian Open, explaining that she had had a second surgery to repair her damaged foot. Following this surgery her foot was in a plaster for the next 20 weeks. Perhaps as a result of general inactivity as she recovered, in March 2011 she was admitted to hospital for more surgery, this time to remove a series of blood clots, which

had gathered on both her lungs, and brought her, in her own words, “*Close to death.*”

Meanwhile Venus, who was also suffering from various injuries, took time out to be with her younger sister as she recovered; competing only at the Australian Open. Thankfully the sisters were able to compete at Wimbledon 2011, where despite having played hardly any competitive tennis for almost an entire year, both made it to the fourth round.

At the US Open Venus was forced to withdraw from her second round match, having announced she was suffering from the debilitating disease *Sjogren's Syndrome*, which causes fatigue and joint pain. She was unable to compete for the rest of the year, fell out of the world's Top-50 for the first time since 1997; dropping as low as No. 105.

Meanwhile Serena won titles at Stanford and Toronto, lost in the final of the US Open to Sam Stosur, and ended the year world No. 12.

2012 started inauspiciously for Serena whose only tournament victory in the first half of the year came over Victoria Azarenka in the final at Madrid. Having lost in the first round of the French Open she sought help from coach Patrick Mouratoglou who invited her to train at his academy near Paris.

The relationship with Mouratoglou works. With him in her box, she won the singles at both Wimbledon and the Olympics, and with Venus, their fifth Wimbledon and third Olympic doubles titles.

Between Wimbledon and London 2012 Serena also won the title at Stanford, then went on to win the US Open and WTA end-of-year championships at Istanbul.

Venus, having learned to manage her illness, ended the year world No. 24, her sister number three.

Serena regained her number one ranking in February 2013; going on to win the titles at Roland Garros, the US Open and end-of year WTA championships.

2013 saw Serena win 11 singles titles, almost \$12.4 million in prize money, and in December named ITF world champion.

At the time of writing she had won 57 WTA singles titles, and earned over \$54 million in career prize money – the highest ever of a woman professional tennis player. Her 17 Grand Slams consist of five Wimbledons, five US Opens, five Australian and two French.

Still only 32 years old, Serena Williams has the potential to go on and become the greatest women's tennis player of all time.

THE WILLIAMS SISTERS

One of the reasons why the Williams sisters have been so successful is that they share an intense personal rivalry. As a youngster it was Venus who received the majority of media attention. This made Serena all the more eager to keep up with her big sister. After seeing Serena win the first of their Grand Slam titles at the 1999 US Open, Venus said *"Sitting there watching almost killed me."* No surprise then that this spurred Venus on to win her first Grand Slams at Wimbledon and then the US Open the following year.

In 2003 it was Serena's turn to dominate as she completed the 'Serena Slam'. Not wanting to be over-shadowed Venus then improved again and won more titles. Venus once said of Serena, *"It's difficult to say how I would have achieved many of my greatest accomplishments without Serena in my life."*

And Serena said shortly before beating Venus in the 2003 Wimbledon final, *"It's not easy for me to play someone I care so much about,"*

By the end of 2013 the Williams sisters had played each other 24 times as professionals, with Serena holding the edge 14 to 10. In Grand Slam singles titles Serena also holds the edge, having won 17 compared to Venus' seven.

Despite this, the two remain incredibly close, always supporting each other and declaring that when one finally retires then the other will do so too. Since 1998 they have shared a house together in Palm Beach Gardens, Florida.

Along with their 24 Grand Slam singles titles, in doubles they've also won 13 Grand Slams, three Olympic Gold medals, and four Grand Slam mixed titles too. They stick together through the good times and the bad. *"It's always been Serena and me. We just prefer each other's company above any other. We get tired of other people pretty quick,"* said Venus.

One observer remarked about them, *"They come from a different place, play a different type of game and have a different type of attitude to virtually anything the game of tennis has seen before."*

Both are well educated, intelligent, have interests outside of tennis and are a credit to the parents who gave them their opportunities.

At the time of writing the Williams sisters' combined on-court career earnings were approaching \$85 million, a figure, which could probably be quadrupled when including their endorsements, exhibitions, and interests in the worlds of acting, fashion and interior design.

Now you can't live on \$350 million - but it's a start, and not bad for two girls, "Straight Outta Compton!"

3.

HARD WORK, FUN AND PASSION

“If only people knew how hard I work to make it look so easy”

- PETE SAMPRAS

I once sat down for a cup of tea in London with former world number five and current TV commentator Jo Durie, and asked her, “So Jo - how did you get to be so good?” “Bloody hard work!” she replied.

Ask any top tennis player what it takes to become a great player and the answer is always the same - hard work. But what sort of hard work produces the types of results you’re hoping for?

A MINIMUM OF 10,000 HOURS OF DELIBERATE PRACTICE

Research carried out in the early 1990s by Florida State University psychologist K. Anders Ericsson on violinists at the elite Berlin Academy of Music, concluded that it takes a minimum of 10,000 hours of deliberate practice to become world class at anything. According to Ericsson, the best violinists at the Academy became the best, because they each had put in more than 10,000 hours of deliberate practice, consisting of more than 10 years of a minimum of 1,000 hours per year.

Deliberate practice can be defined as individuals engaging in a practice activity, (usually designed by teachers) with full concentration on improving some aspect of their performance. This concentrated practice is designed to explicitly improve performance, implementing the little adjustments, which make a big difference. It also means working on technique, seeking constant critical feedback and focusing ruthlessly on improving weaknesses.

Neuroscientist, writer and musician Daniel J. Levitin wrote in ***THIS IS YOUR BRAIN ON MUSIC (2006)***, “In study after study, of composers, basketball players, fiction writers, ice skaters, concert pianists, chess players and master criminals, this number comes up again and again. 10,000 hours is equivalent to roughly three hours a day, or 20 hours a week of practice over 10 years. No one has yet found a case in which true world-class expertise was accomplished in less time. It seems to take the brain this long to assimilate all that it needs to know to achieve true mastery.”

Daniel Coyle in ***THE TALENT CODE (2009)*** stated that, “Greatness isn’t something you’re born with - it’s grown.” In the book Coyle describes the nerve-insulating substance *Myelin*, which is produced in the brain each time an activity is performed. In order to make the development of motor-memory skills permanent, activities need to be repeated over and over again. Each time an activity is repeated, Myelin wraps itself around the associated nerve fibres and as a result brain nerve signals travel much faster, smoothly and accurately. The ability to grow new and stronger motor-skill connections diminishes with age, and in the development of skills such as playing tennis, practice at an early age is crucial.

Malcolm Gladwell in ***OUTLIERS - THE STORY OF SUCCESS (2008)*** wrote that, “Practice isn’t the thing you do once you’re good - it’s the thing that makes you good, and that it is not possible for a child to put in this enormous amount of time, without the help of parents, until their child is involved in some kind of special programme designed to help them achieve their goal.”

Gladwell added that, *“If someone wants to work hard, they have to have the place to work hard, and that people at the top don’t just work harder, or even much harder than anyone else - they work much, much harder!”*

QUESTION: So how many hours do you think the Williams sisters or Roger Federer spent practising, firstly at home and then at their academies, before turning professional and going on to win their first Wimbledon titles?

Let’s start with Venus and Serena who began playing tennis around age four.

| Age | Time playing | | | Total hours (approximate) |
|--------------|---------------|----------------|----------------|---------------------------|
| | Hours per day | Times per week | Weeks per year | |
| 4 | 1 | 5 | 35 | 175 |
| 5 | 1 | 5 | 35 | 175 |
| 6 | 1.5 | 5 | 35 | 250 |
| 7 | 1.5 | 5 | 35 | 250 |
| 8 | 3 | 5 | 40 | 600 |
| 9 | 3 | 5 | 40 | 600 |
| 10 | 3 | 6 | 45 | 800 |
| 11 | 4 | 6 | 45 | 1100 |
| 12 | 6 | 6 | 45 | 1600 |
| 13 | 6 | 6 | 45 | 1600 |
| 14 | 6 | 6 | 45 | 1600 |
| 15 | 6 | 6 | 45 | 1600 |
| 16 | 6 | 6 | 45 | 1600 |
| TOTAL | NUMBER | OF | HOURS | 12,000 |

This is of course just an estimate and maybe they played a little more, maybe they played a little less in the 13 years it took them to reach the world’s Top-100.

And what about Federer who first picked up a racquet age three, and at six was playing three times a week?

| Age | Time playing | | | Total hours (approximate) |
|-----|---------------|----------------|----------------|---------------------------|
| | Hours per day | Times per week | Weeks per year | |
| 4 | 0.5 | 2 | 25 | 25 |
| 5 | 0.75 | 2 | 30 | 45 |
| 6 | 1 | 3 | 30 | 90 |
| 7 | 1 | 3 | 35 | 100 |
| 8 | 1.5 | 3 | 35 | 160 |
| 9 | 1.5 | 3 | 35 | 160 |

| | | | | |
|--------------|---------------|-----------|--------------|-------------|
| 10 | 2 | 4 | 40 | 320 |
| 11 | 2 | 5 | 40 | 400 |
| 12 | 2 | 5 | 45 | 450 |
| 13 | 2 | 5 | 45 | 450 |
| 14 | 2 | 5 | 45 | 450 |
| 15 | 2 | 5 | 45 | 450 |
| 16 | 4 | 6 | 45 | 1100 |
| 17 | 5 | 6 | 45 | 1350 |
| 18 | 5 | 6 | 45 | 1350 |
| TOTAL | NUMBER | OF | HOURS | 7000 |

Once again, maybe he played a little more or maybe he played a little less, but in my estimation Roger Federer probably spent around 7000 hours playing and competing at tennis in the 14 years it took him to break into the Top-100 age 18.

Having established themselves in the Top-100, it then took Federer and the Williams sisters another three and four years respectively to actually win Wimbledon and become truly world class. In those years they probably played up to four hours per day, five or six days per week for about 45 weeks of the year – around 1000 hours per year. Therefore Federer probably spent around 10,000 and the Williams sisters about 16,000 hours tennis, before they won Wimbledon.

To me however, the idea that becoming a world class tennis player simply requires practising, training and competing hard for a minimum of 1000 hours per year, for more than 10 years, just doesn't add up. If that were the case then anyone who put that amount of concentrated effort into reaching the world's Top-100 would reach their goal – and there simply aren't enough spaces in the Top-100 for the thousands of players around the globe putting in this amount of effort, for that to happen.

And what's more, with the average age of players breaking into the Top-100 having risen dramatically in the past few years, the number of hours spent training, practising and competing at tennis, probably now means a minimum of 10 to 15 years of those same 1,000 hours per year in order to reach the Top-100.

That's a minimum of 10,000 – 15,000 hours just to reach the Top-100!

PASSION

“An intense desire or enthusiasm for something”

My point is this, and these numbers of hours are only estimates - how many kids or young people can put this much time and effort into doing something they don't really enjoy, with people they don't like, in places they hate and don't really want to be?

I'm fairly sure, that most youngsters prefer having a good time, hanging out with their friends, and doing something they enjoy in places they like and want to be.

I can't imagine many adolescents willingly wanting to dedicate upwards of 10,000 hours per year for upwards of 10 to 15 years of their youth to something they don't truly love.

My advice therefore, to parents (and coaches) of a potential Wimbledon champion, is that particularly at a young age, you ensure, that within reason, they have as much fun and enjoyment as possible during their time trying to become successful professional tennis players.

In fact, in my experience, if kids don't have fun and enjoy themselves when they're learning the game, then as soon as other options or possibilities become available to them, e.g. having a social life - then many of them simply stop playing tennis.

Of course the word fun means different things to different people, but enjoying a sporting activity, with people you like, travelling to new and different places, experiencing and overcoming challenges in the pursuit of a dream, to most successful modern day professional tennis players constitutes having fun!

As Daniel Coyle stated in ***THE TALENT CODE***,

“QUESTION: Why are passion and persistence key ingredients of talent?”

ANSWER: Because if you don't love it, you'll never work hard enough to be great!”

And Toni Colom, former travelling coach to Rafael Nadal, who now runs the Mallorcan-based tennis coaching service, the ***PASSION TALENT GROUP***, which provides coaching to many up-and-coming Spanish professionals once told me,

“With less talent, but with passion and hard work, success is almost guaranteed.”

4.

DEDICATED TENNIS PARENTS

There is usually no way any child is going to be able to reach the levels required to play or win Wimbledon without the extraordinary help, dedication, financial resources and encouragement of their parents. Parental support is essential until the child is of an age and standard to be supported by either their national governing body, management company, or good enough to able to go it alone.

In recent times though, tennis parents have often received as much attention and publicity as their outstanding tennis playing offspring. As Richard Williams said, *"I'm more of a personality than most of the players!"*

Many parents however, struggle to find a healthy balance between being helpful and supportive, and instead developing an unhealthy obsession.

The media, bless them, are always keen to publicise the negative aspects of pushy, driven and sadly in some cases, abusive tennis parents. It readily publicises the stand up arguments with other parent's players as they cheer on their offspring in much the same way that many people get behind their favourite sports team. And it's always on hand to chronicle the stories of some tennis parents rolling around drunk, attacking photographers, and physically and emotionally abusing their tennis playing kids. Bad news sells better than good!

But look at it from the player's perspectives. Serena Williams said in her autobiography, *"This book is dedicated to my daddy. Your vision and undying dedication made everything I do possible. I love you."*

Maria Sharapova said of her father Yuri, *"Why would you say that my dad is too involved with my tennis, he has done everything for me in my life. He hasn't missed one day of my practice. I believe in him and love him so much and my mom too."*

Both Roger Federer and Pete Sampras learned to play tennis alongside their parents. At a certain age they then received additional coaching, but the initial interest simply came from being involved in a family activity. The Nadal's kept it in the family, having Rafa taught from age four by his uncle Toni.

1993 Wimbledon runner-up Mark Philippoussis said of his father, *"If he hadn't pushed me I'd probably be putting food on supermarket shelves now. So I'm pretty grateful to him."*

John McEnroe said, *"Look at almost all the great players. Would they have succeeded if they had not been pushed by their parents? Would Agassi have been a great champion if he hadn't been pushed by his father? It's difficult to say. I seriously doubt I would've been the player I became if I hadn't been forced into it in some way."*

1998 Wimbledon champion Jana Novotna said, *"My parents influenced me the most. They never played tennis themselves but they were always there and determined, and at times when I wanted to do other stuff they were there to keep me focused and convince me that if I keep working hard one day it would pay off, and it obviously did."*

Meanwhile, the parents of Martina Hingis, the Williams sisters, Andre Agassi and Jimmy Connors had decided that their children were going to become tennis players before they were even born!

None of these champions would have made it without their parents help.



MARIA SHARAPOVA

In 2004 and aged just 17, Maria Sharapova pulled off one of the most unexpected Wimbledon upsets, when beating Serena Williams in the final.

YURI SHARAPOV

Maria's father Yuri is not your average tennis parent. Legendary tennis coach Nick Bollettieri once described him as the most difficult tennis parent he had ever had to deal with. However, Yuri's and his wife Yelena's dedication and commitment to help their only child Maria succeed though, are probably unparalleled.

Maria was conceived in Gomel, Belarus in the shadow of the 1986 nuclear disaster of Chernobyl. Whilst still in her mother's womb, her parents decided to move from the region to prevent their unborn child being exposed to the cancers and radiation linked illnesses associated with nuclear fallout. The only option available to them was to move to the frozen oilfields of western Siberia. There, in the bleak industrial town of Nyagan 19 April 1987 Maria was born.

Yuri worked in the nearby Tyumen oil fields, in the most brutal of conditions, where temperatures plummeted to minus 40 degrees Celsius and clouds of toxic smoke hung overhead. He earned extra money, as the conditions were so harsh.

Yuri seldom does interviews, preferring instead to keep the spotlight on his daughter. Maria once said, *"I'm a tough girl."* And Bollettieri commented, *"She's so tough she could bend a steel nail."*

I wonder where she gets it from – the Tyumen oil fields perhaps?

Despite guidance from Bollettieri and his coaching staff, Rick Macci, Robert Lansdorp, Michael Joyce, Thomas Hogstedt, Jimmy Connors and more recently Sven Groeneweld, Bollettieri maintains, *"There is only one coach and that is Yuri Sharapov - make no mistake about that."*

YURI YUDKIN

After four years working in this brutal environment Yuri had managed to save enough money to escape once again, and the family moved south to the Black Sea resort of Sochi.

A recreational tennis player, Yuri was playing one day when the then four-year-old Maria, become bored with having to watch him. She suddenly picked up a racquet by the side of the court and started hitting a ball around. Local veteran tennis coach, the late Yuri Yudkin (1936-2009), saw her doing this, and was so impressed by her precocity and natural hand-eye co-ordination that he offered to coach her.

Due to shortages in the former Soviet Union at this time, Maria learned to play with a racquet with a sawn-off handle. Eventually, Eugeny Kafelnikov, the father of world number one Yevgeny, who was a friend of Maria's father, gave her one of his son's racquets.

Yudkin said of *Maria*, *"I was amazed that aged four-and-a-half Maria was already intellectually mature. She absorbed everything I told or showed her, and was an exceptionally quick learner. She was a very smart girl, I never had to repeat instructions twice to her and she could do a spin serve age seven. In the three years I worked with her she never once told me she was tired."*

By age six Maria was showing signs of extraordinary talent and was seen by Yudkin as a champion in the making. She went with her father and coach to take part in an exhibition in Moscow, which involved Martina Navratilova. Martina spotted Maria hitting with older stronger girls, and told Yuri that his daughter was very talented, and that he should take her to the Bollettieri Tennis Academy in the United States, where she would receive the best training and coaching available.

Yuri did not have the money to take her, and was forced the next year, to borrow \$1000 from Maria's grandparents in order to make the trip, an amount of money that would take him many years to repay.

GOING TO AMERICA

Having arrived unannounced at Bollettieri's, seven-year-old Maria and her father were told that she was too young to be offered a scholarship, and that they should come back when she was older.

Refusing to be deterred and despite speaking little English, Yuri found himself various jobs including dishwashing and working on construction sites to pay for Maria's tennis. During these times Maria hardly saw her father, as he often worked double shifts and would walk for over an hour to meet her at the academy at weekends. Yuri refers to this time as, *"A time of survival."*

Due to financial and visa restrictions, it was two years before Maria was able to see her mother again, in a country far from home, and in which she could not even speak the language properly. She said of this time, *“When I arrived in America I was young, but I already knew what I wanted. I think that when you start from nothing, when you come from nothing, it makes you hungry.”*

Maria added, *“My mother and father taught me not to cry. Coming from an area devastated by a nuclear disaster, I was brought up with the word perspective drummed into me. If I ever complained to my father he would just tell me to get some perspective!”*

LIFE AT THE BOLLETTIERI ACADEMY

Despite these incredibly difficult times, Maria continued to train and improve her tennis, and by the time she reached age nine, the International Management Group (IMG) who now owned the academy, were so impressed with her ability and potential, that they awarded her a full-scholarship. The family were finally reunited soon afterwards.

Again, even though she was now on a scholarship, life was still far from easy for Maria. She was put in a dormitory with girls much older than herself, experienced being bullied and due to language problems, struggled to make friends. She later commented, *“I never had the experience of being around other kids every day, I was never in a normal school, but it’s hard to miss something when you’ve never really had it.”*

Playing tennis against and beating these older girls though, proved no such problem. By age 10 Maria was winning 14-and-under tournaments. She said, *“I’ve been playing against older and stronger competition my whole life. It has made me a better tennis player, and I’m able to play and win against this kind of level despite their strength and experience.”*

THE BEST OF BOTH WORLDS

Maria struggled throughout her junior career with her forehand, and age 10, due to the lack of attention Yuri believed Bollettieri was paying her, the Sharapovas began making weekly trips to see Rick Macci. This created a clash of interests with IMG as Macci’s is an independently run academy. Macci suggested Yuri contact veteran coach Robert Lansdorp who was based in California.

Around that time Yuri had heard former world number one Tracy Austin, commenting on TV about the exceptional groundshots of Lindsay Davenport. Austin, Davenport and Pete Sampras had all been taught in Los Angeles by Lansdorp, who is known for his work ethic, and disciplined approach. Sampras later said of him, *“If any of my kids want to learn tennis, then Robert is the man I would send them to for groundshots – without question.”*

Yuri decided he wanted Lansdorp to take a look at Maria. A two-hour session was arranged and the Sharapovas flew to Los Angeles to meet him. Lansdorp recalled of Maria and their first lesson together, *“Her eyes nearly popped out of her head when she saw the number of balls I had in my basket.”*

After the session Yuri asked Lansdorp what he thought of his daughter. Lansdorp replied, *“She hits the ball pretty well but her concentration sucks,”* - they stayed for two weeks!

Between ages 11 and 18 Maria split her time whilst not playing tournaments, either training with Lansdorp in California or at Bollettieri's. One of the problems Lansdorp and Yuri had with Maria and her game, was that up until age 12, they didn't know whether she should play left or right-handed, as she could play equally well with either. Lansdorp recommended she played right-handed, because he thought she had a more natural right-handed serve. Not usually known for his praise of pupils, Lansdorp said of Maria, *“She is a special player and a special person.”*

Lansdorp said that unlike Bollettieri, he never had a problem with Maria's father, and that during her lessons Yuri would simply run around picking up balls.

AVE MARIA

Maria first gained international recognition when in November 2000 age 13, she won the 16-and-under Eddie Herr championships in Florida. Age 14 years and nine months, in January 2002 she became the youngest girl ever to reach the final of the junior Australian Open. In March 2002 she achieved her first world ranking of No. 535, and later that year was runner-up at junior Wimbledon. Age 15, she ended 2002 ranked world No. 183.

In 2003 she began playing full-time on the WTA tour. In June age 16, she entered the world's Top-100, reached the fourth round of Wimbledon and ended the year ranked No. 32.

WIMBLEDON

By May 2004 age 17, she had entered the world's Top-20. Then in July, 10 years after setting off from her home, leaving behind family and friends, she stunned the tennis world, when as the 13th seed she beat Serena Williams to win Wimbledon and climbed to world number four.

The final piece in Maria's tennis development had been when Bollettieri employed a special trainer to work on her physical fitness for one hour every day. This, according to Maria, resulted in the improvement she made leading up to her Wimbledon victory and gave her the ability to compete physically, with the likes of the Williams sisters.

Bollettieri an ex-paratrooper himself said of her, *“She is extremely strict, disciplined and a perfectionist. She plays tennis like she's preparing for an*

attack, a battle. Every shot has a purpose. She runs for every single ball, there's no monkey business, she will smile but it's a bloody damn business."

After winning Wimbledon her rise continued and she became world number one in August 2005; a goal she had had since a young girl. She said, *"Why would you want to be number 20, and then when you get to number 20 it's like you don't want to be number one, you know? It's like shoot for the moon, if you miss, you'll still be amongst the stars, so why not want to become number one?"*

At the time of writing Sharapova had won 29 career singles titles. Along with Wimbledon, she claimed the 2006 US, 2008 Australian, and 2012 French Open titles, and at the 2012 London Olympics the silver medal for singles for her native Russia.

Austin, who knows Maria and her father very well, said of her, *"Some kids have it easy, you have to ask where the drive is coming from. But Maria's background has definitely contributed to her determination on court. Talk about having a will and drive to win!"*

LIVING THE DREAM

The result of years of nearly constant travel, and the exclusion of anything close to a normal childhood, had by the end of 2013 helped 26-year-old Maria earn on-court prize money of almost \$27 million. However, due in large part to her stunning good looks, she is the most marketed sports woman in the world, regularly earning over \$25 million a year – an amount which she once cheekily described as, *"Not enough to live on!"*

Not only is she beautiful but she backs it up with an unquestioned desire to win and improve. *"Tennis is what has made me what I am, but what am I supposed to do?"* she said, *"it's not my fault that I'm beautiful, beauty sells and I'm not going to make myself deliberately ugly am I?"*

Maria, who now owns her own brand of premier candy called *Sugarpova*, enjoys fashion, movies, dancing and music, and once admitted to having interests in sociology and stamp collecting - well nobody's perfect!

Although on the other hand?



WHEN TENNIS PARENTS GO BAD

Some other tennis protégés however, do not have not such positive comments to make about the fathers who helped make them tennis millionaires. As was well publicised at the time, former women's Top-10 players Jelena Dokic and Mary Pierce both ended up taking out court orders barring their fathers from attending events in which they were competing.

Pierce's father, Jim Pierce's response to this was to say, *"I built the Ferrari, now I want the keys back,"* having been told that he had been banned from attending women's tournaments at the request of his daughter, who had also taken out a restraining order against him citing years of abuse and threats against her life.

Jim though, defended his approach saying, *"People say I put pressure on Mary. Do you think pressure is coming out here in the sunshine with a little yellow ball going backwards and forwards across the net, and running around and hitting it and getting paid tens and thousands and millions of dollars to hit that ball? Do you think that's pressure?"*

Former Top-10 woman player Mirjana Lucic, said in 1999 of her father Marinko, *"I never went to sleep without a prayer, never even in my whole life. And I never woke up without a prayer. And my prayer was always just to get rid of my father, just for him to leave us alone."*

Present day Anglican Dominican nun, Sister Andrea Jaegar, child prodigy, former world number two and 1983 Wimbledon ladies' finalist said of her father, *"God, I hope no one has to go through what I did. From age 13 on he wasn't really my father, just my coach."*

There is no doubt that many tennis parents have, are and will continue to cross the line from being helpful, supportive and encouraging, to becoming obsessive, unhealthy, overly aggressive, physically and emotionally abusive to their tennis playing children, as they attempt to achieve and live out their dreams through their children. And in the process of course, destroying the relationships with those they should hold the most dear, their children, not forgetting everyone else around them including their spouses, families and friends.

However, what's equally true, is that almost certainly their children would not have become the household names, and achieved the same degree of financial success and security without the efforts of those same parents.

It's probably no coincidence that it's usually only girls who become victims of this type of abuse. Nick Bollettieri stated that when Andre Agassi arrived at his academy age 14, he was at the stage of almost wanting to kill his father. Talk about being harsh - guess what Mike Agassi allegedly said to Andre in their first conversation following his 1992 five-set Wimbledon final victory against Goran Ivanisevic. Not, *"Well done Andre, I'm so proud of what you've achieved,"* but, *"how on earth did you lose that fourth set!"*

Nasty stuff - don't you think?

The fact is that boys are more likely, at a certain age, to return this type of physical aggression with some of their own - girls usually cannot.



ANDRE AGASSI

Born 29 April 1970, in Las Vegas, Nevada, Andre Agassi was trained exclusively from a young age by his father Emmanuel *Mike* Agassi. A former Iranian Olympic boxer, Mike had left the extreme poverty of his home country and family in 1952, and emigrated to America; arriving firstly in Chicago then moving on to work in the Casinos of Las Vegas.

Having watched tennis being played by American G.I.'s in his homeland, Mike had fallen in love with the game, and had the dream of creating a tennis champion who would win all the Grand Slam tournaments.

In 1959, eleven years before Andre was born, and before he'd even met his wife, Mike went up to American Davis Cup player Barry McKay and said, *"Someday my son is going to play on Davis Cup and someday my son is going to win all four Grand Slams."*

Obsessed with tennis, but without any coaching experience whatsoever, Mike learned tennis by reading tennis instruction books and watching the professionals who played in Las Vegas. He then got a job as a tennis pro at one of the Las Vegas hotels.

EARLY DAYS

Having met and married Andre's mother Elizabeth, Mike then set about training his four children, of whom Andre was the youngest. To hone his son's hand eye coordination when Andre was a baby, he would tie tennis balls above his cot and, later, when in his high chair, give him paddles and balloons to play with. Andre later said, *"My dad was convinced if my eyes were going to move around as a little baby, I might as well be looking at a tennis ball."*

By age four Andre's groundstrokes were already well formed, and he could even serve and get the ball over the net from the baseline. By age six he was hitting with some of the world's best players in Las Vegas as they passed through playing exhibitions or tournaments.

Andre's father built a tennis court and training camp in his back yard, and put together a battery of tennis ball machines, which would bombard down thousands of balls at speeds of up to 100 miles per hour - one after the other of course.

No wonder Andre developed such a great return of serve!

Mike allegedly had 60 garbage cans full of up to 300 balls each, and Andre would routinely hit up to 2500 balls per day. Mike, who didn't think that any one tennis coach knew any more about the game than himself, said that in his

opinion most coaches only knew a dozen or so things of any real value. Agassi said in his 2009 autobiography **OPEN**, that his father's philosophy was that if Andre hit 2500 balls a day, that would make 17,500 balls per week and one million balls a year and that a child who hit that number of balls a year would be unbeatable.

Having tried unsuccessfully to teach his other children, Mike realised that Andre, who he thought more talented and willing to apply himself than the others, was the *'real deal'*. Mike refers to his other children as having been *'Guinea Pigs'*- his relationship with his children, and in particular Andre, hasn't always been perfect!

Perry Rogers, long-time friend and manager of Andre said of them, *"They played tennis all day every day; weekends, afternoons and holidays, they practiced, it was just what they did."*

By age 10 Andre and his family were travelling through the night to play tournaments in Utah and Southern California, against long-time future opponents Pete Sampras, Jim Courier and Michael Chang.

Mike soon gained a reputation as an overly aggressive tennis parent. He would bang on the fence with a hammer when Andre lost a point, shout at the officials and was frequently warned about his behaviour.

BRADENTON BOUND

By the time he reached 13, Andre was close to giving up the sport because of his relationship with his overbearing father. In 1983 Mike, realising that Andre wasn't listening him to him anymore and was on the verge of quitting, took him to the Bollettieri Academy for a three-month trial. Mike had seen a TV programme about Bollettieri's and was impressed by its strict, disciplined approach. He paid \$3000 for the initial trial but was afraid he wouldn't be able to pay the then, \$12,000 a year, academy fees. However, when Bollettieri saw Andre play he was so impressed that he telephoned Mike, told him he was tearing up his cheque, and that Andre could train there for free.

This move probably saved Agassi's career. He said, *"If I didn't leave Las Vegas, either my dad was going to kill me or I was going to kill him, and either way I was probably going to quit tennis."*

TURNING PRO

Having been installed at the academy, Andre had problems with its strict military- style routine. He rebelled by getting drunk, dyed his hair, grew a Mohawk haircut, played in cut-off jeans, wore make-up and in one tournament even wore a skirt!

In July 1985 age 15, Agassi gained his first world ranking at No. 636; finishing the year No. 618. By mid-April 1986, and still before his 16th birthday, he had risen to No. 403. At this time though, due to his outrageous behaviour, he was

on the verge of being kicked out of the academy. Exasperated, Bollettieri asked him what he wanted to do. Andre replied that he wanted to leave the academy and turn professional – which he then did. By October he had entered the Top-100 and age 16 he ended 1986 world No. 91.

1987 saw Andre win his first professional title at Itaparica, and end the year ranked No. 25. In June 1988 age 18, Agassi entered the world's Top-10; having reached the semi-finals at both the French and US Opens, and ended the year, number three. Age 19, he ended 1989 ranked number seven, in 1990 reached the finals of the French, Italian and US Opens and age 20, ended the year number four.

From 1988 to 1990 Agassi refused to play at Wimbledon. He felt that grass didn't suit his game, and didn't like the tradition of having to wear all white at the championships. However, in 1991 he overcame his fears and managed to reach the quarter-finals.

Then in 1992 age 22, Agassi astounded the tennis world, and himself, by reaching the Wimbledon final and beating Goran Ivanisevic in five sets. Sinking to his knees having won his first Grand Slam title, he looked up to the players' box and there, with tears rolling down his cheeks, was his coach, mentor and friend of the past eight years - Nick Bollettieri.

The Wimbledon win was something both Agassi and Bollettieri needed. Agassi finished the year ranked world number nine and the then 61-year-old Bollettieri became the most famous tennis coach in the world.

BRAD GILBERT AND DARREN CAHILL

Following an acrimonious and well-publicised split from Bollettieri, Agassi was coached from 1994 to 2002 by former world number four American Brad Gilbert.

He won the 1994 US Open, the 1995 Australian Open, and in April 1995 age 24, reached world number one.

However, for the next few years, due to divorce, lack of confidence, a chronic wrist and some poor life decisions, Agassi's success suddenly declined and by October 1997 his ranking had fallen to world No. 140. Having decided to re-dedicate his life to tennis, and been forced to compete in Challenger level events, he quickly made his return to the top of his game, and ended 1998 world number six.

In July 1999 he regained his world number one ranking, having won the French Open and lost in the final of Wimbledon to Pete Sampras. He then won his second US Open and ended 1999 world number one.

Agassi again won the Australian Open in 2000, 2001 and 2003, and from 2002 to the end of his career in 2006, was coached by Darren Cahill.

Altogether Agassi won eight Grand Slam titles, including Wimbledon, the French, two US and four Australian Opens. He won the gold medal at the 1996 Atlanta Olympics, and is the only man to have won the 'Golden Slam' of winning all four Grand Slams and an Olympic Gold. He also won 30 out of the 36 matches he played for the USA in the Davis Cup.

You'd have thought he made his Dad proud!

Agassi retired from professional tennis in 2006 with career prize money alone of over \$30 million. And as one of the most marketable sportsman of his generation, his total earnings were well in excess of \$150 million.

Better go buy some garbage cans!



CHILD ABUSE AND BEYOND

Of course the abusing of children by parents is not confined only to young tennis players or even sports people. Very few countries throughout time have successfully implemented the violation of one of life's basic human rights, i.e. to be able to have children. No training is given to becoming a parent and patterns of abuse are often handed down from one generation to another. Maybe it's parents like Mr's Pierce, Dokic, Lubic, Jaegar and Agassi who are the real victims - best not go there!

DEATH BY TENNIS

Then there's the almost unbelievable case of Frenchman Christophe Fauviau. The father of Valentine Fauviau, once one of France's outstanding junior girls, he was sentenced in March 2006 to eight years imprisonment, for causing death by administering toxic substances.

A retired Colonel in the French Army, Fauviau eventually admitted to 27 counts of contaminating the water bottles of his son and daughter's tennis opponents between 2000 and 2003. He would offer to fetch drinks for them and then spike them with tranquilisers!

One of his victims, Alexandre Lagardere, a 25-year-old school teacher, became so tired whilst driving home, having lost to Fauviau's then 16-year-old son Maxime, that he fell asleep at the wheel, crashed his car and died. Post mortem results showed evidence of the anti-depressant drug, Temesta, which causes extreme drowsiness. Mike Agassi said of Fauviau in his 2004 autobiography ***THE AGASSI STORY***,

"For the record - I was never as bad as that!"

THE TRUTH, THE WHOLE TRUTH AND NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH

In August 2011 Mihai Barbat, the father of Danish player Karen Barbat assaulted Dutch player Elise Tamaela in the stands at a \$25k Challenger tournament in Versmold, Germany.

Mr Barbat had objected to Tamaela's vocal support of his daughter's opponent, Dani Harmsen, and the two had become engaged in an argument. Mr Barbat then allegedly made a racist remark against Tamaela, before punching her and knocking her out. Karen Barbat was then disqualified from the event, and father and daughter then left the venue, and drove back to Denmark before police were able to interview them.

Tamaela awoke with concussion and facial swelling, and spent the following day in hospital recovering. After the incident Mr Barbat filed a court case against Tamaela, claiming he had acted in self-defence.

In October 2011 however, the ITF found in favour of Tamaela and Mr Barbat was banned from attending all ITF events until October 2013.

Apparently all of Mr Barbat's daughter's opponents' supporters were safe until then!

In May 2013 John Tomic, the father and coach of ATP Top-50 ranked Australian Bernard Tomic, was arrested and then charged with allegedly assaulting his son's hitting partner Thomas Drouet outside the tournament hotel of the Madrid Masters.

In court Tomic Sr. did not deny assaulting Drouet, but claimed he had acted in self-defence whilst allegedly head butting the Frenchman, breaking his nose and leaving him unconscious.

In October 2013 Tomic Sr. was found guilty and sentenced to eight months in prison by a Spanish court, but was not required to serve time in jail as the sentence was less than two years. He was banned from attending any ATP events until May 2014, when his case will be reviewed by the ATP.

Well, you can choose your friends but not your family!

There are many, many other examples of tennis parents who are simply not good parents, have ended up ruining their relationships with their kids, and in the process helped create unhappy, poorly balanced, angry, young adults. This sort of abuse of course is not confined solely to parents of tennis players.

How many parents have similar thoughts and hopes that their children will end up being professional sportspeople? Read the stories of parents attacking referees at schoolboy soccer matches etc. Or if music's your thing; check out

the Michael Jackson story or watch the film **SHINE**, which chronicled the troubled relationship between Australian pianist David Helfgott and his father.

These problems in tennis occur more often when the child is enjoying less success on the court and the parents see all **their** hard work, time, effort, financial resources and most importantly **their** dreams vanishing. Combine this with a fatally flawed personality, unrealistic expectations, little or no tennis playing or coaching experience, poor parenting and life skills, and the result is basically child abuse.

A bit heavy I know for a book on becoming a Wimbledon champion, but the fact remains that without the necessary positive parental guidance and support from a young age, the majority of those champions listed earlier would not have reached where they did.

For example who's going to stimulate the child's initial tennis interest and take them down to the tennis court in the first place? Who's going to hit those first few shots with them down at the local park? Who's going to sit there watching tennis with them on TV? Who's going to get them the right sort of tennis racquet and balls? Who's going to wind down the net, make the court smaller or buy a smaller net? Who's going to enquire about where is the best place to start playing more seriously? Who's going to find out where to get some coaching, take them there and then pay for it? Who's going to enter them into their first tournament and then embark upon a tournament and training schedule to help their child reach their tennis goals? - etcetera, etcetera, etcetera.

The answer is usually always the same – either a parent or family member

POSITIVE PARENTING



CHRIS EVERT

Three-time Wimbledon champion Chris Evert was born 21 December 1954 in Fort Lauderdale, Florida to parents Jimmy and Collette. She has two sisters and two brothers, all of whom were national age group finalists, and ended up making careers out of tennis.

She began playing tennis age five with her dad, a public parks teaching pro, in Fort Lauderdale. Jimmy, who had once dated Jimmy Connors' mother Gloria, was a strict disciplinarian and had been a US national junior champion.

Mr Evert once said, *“Kids need goals. Kids without goals come home from school and just wander. It’s not healthy. Maybe I’m old-fashioned, but I like to take time to take my kids to the courts and knock balls to them.”*

Why, if a man can feed, clothe, and shelter his family, plus have good health and a lot of fun with his kids, what else does he need? Tennis opened some great doors for me. I thought maybe it would do the same for our kids.”

By age 14, Chris was the number one ranked US 14-and-under junior, and had also won the 16-and-under US junior title. In September 1970 she accepted an invitation to play in the Carolinas International, an eight-player clay court tournament in Charlotte, North Carolina. There, as a 15-year-old, she beat Francois Durr, the second best clay court player in the world 6-1, 6-0. She then beat world number one Margaret Court, who had just completed winning the calendar year Grand Slam, 7-6, 7-6 in the semi-finals, before losing to Nancy Richey in the final.

In 1971 age 16, she became the youngest player ever to appear in the Wightman Cup against Great Britain; winning both her singles matches, including a 6-1, 6-1 victory over Virginia Wade. Later that year she won the US 18-and-under title and received a wildcard into the 1971 US Open. There, she reached the semi-final, losing 6-3, 6-2 to Billie Jean King, and ended 1971 ranked world No. 10 age 17; rising to world number three in 1972.

She turned professional on her 18th birthday and maintained her world number three ranking in 1973 by reaching the finals at both the French and Wimbledon.

In June 1974 age 19, she won her first French Open, and a month later her first Wimbledon.

In November 1975 age 20, she became the official world number one, a position she would hold for the next five years. Between 1975 and 1988 she was never out of the world’s Top-three; battling out an intense rivalry with Martina Navratilova. She again won Wimbledon in 1976 and 1981, and from 1979 to 1987 was married to British professional tennis player John Lloyd.

Evert’s 18 Grand Slam singles titles included three Wimbledons, seven French, six US and two Australian Opens. She also won three Grand Slam doubles titles and retired in 1989 having won over \$8 million in prize money.



The Williams sisters have an excellent relationship with their ‘daddy’ and the bond between Maria and Yuri Sharapov has been described as supernatural.

In a rare interview Yuri Sharapov said, *“You can’t live out your dream through your child, all you can do is try to get them to be the best that they can be.”*

Pete Sampras’ parents got so nervous watching him that eventually they preferred watching their son at home on TV. Rafael Nadal and Andy Murray’s parents, though no longer married, are often seen together at tournaments supporting their sons, as are the parents of Novak Djokovic and Roger Federer.

Of the men only Andre Agassi seems to have had a particularly difficult relationship with his father.

Andy Murray’s mother Judy, talks about the difference between pushing your kids, and pushing **for** your kids, and providing them with opportunities they’ll hopefully take advantage of.

So relationships between tennis parents and their successful tennis-playing children do not always have to be horrific. And in any case what’s wrong with wishing and then working towards giving your children a better start in life than you had, and at the same time involving them in a sport they can play for life?

John McEnroe recalled in his 2002 autobiography **SERIOUS**, *“I had dinner with Richard Williams during the 2000 French Open, he told me, Kids have no idea what they want to do most of the time. Look, I picked something great for them, something that’ll give them a tremendous living and a tremendous life. It’s crazy to think that they were capable of making those decisions when they were young. So of course I pushed them, but they needed to be pushed.”*

So, in the process of producing Wimbledon champions, particularly female ones, tennis parents may be pushy, aggressive, sometimes rude and unpopular, but they are absolutely essential.

As Rick Macci puts it,

“Behind every great champion is a driving force, and most of the time it is mom, dad or usually both.”

5.

GREAT TENNIS COACHING

There can be little doubt that going on and becoming a Wimbledon champion requires the help and guidance of talented, motivated, experienced, enthusiastic and knowledgeable tennis coaches. Potential Wimbledon champions, or their parents acting in their interests, seek out the best tennis coaching and environments possible for them to progress to the next level.

It's true that Pete Sampras, the Williams sisters and Andre Agassi all reached outstanding levels having been taught up to a certain age, by inexperienced parents or mentors. But what's also true is that without the help of the coaching they then later received from experienced coaches, they would not have reached the levels they later did. As Rick Macci once told me, "*Anyone can teach someone to play tennis, but not anyone can teach someone to play tennis properly.*"

The people most likely to be able to teach someone how to play tennis properly are tennis coaches, many of whom have spent their whole professional careers developing skills and passing on their experience to their pupils - for a fee of course!

Some coaches though, are, as in all professions, better and more motivated at their jobs than others, and some coaches are more effective with players of a certain age, than they are with those of another. And just because one coach works well with one player, that doesn't necessarily mean they will have similar success with a different one.

As former French Davis Cup coach and LTA Performance Director, Patrice Hagelauer once said at a conference I attended, "*In some cases I was the best coach of one shot with a player, and the worst with another shot of that same player.*"

And of course there's always the ultimate limiting factor to both a parent and a coach, of just how much *natural talent* the child or player has.

"You can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear!"

DO-IT-YOURSELF

My advice to parents regarding coaches, particularly when their child is young though, is *shop around*, until you find the right one for you, and, if you can't afford it, *do-it-yourself*.

My research suggests, that until their children reach around age 10, and sometimes beyond, that parents, if they make the time and do a little research, are just as capable of moulding youngsters into reasonably good young players with the potential to win Wimbledon, as are tennis coaches, but at considerably less expense.

Certainly Richard Williams and Mike Agassi had little regard for what tennis coaches were able to offer. The enigmatic Mr Williams said, "*Tennis coaches just coach.*"

Dr. Pete Fischer, who coached and mentored Peter Sampras free of charge from ages nine to 18, was a mere recreational player with no coaching experience whatsoever. He relied on watching videos of Rod Laver and Pancho Gonzales with Sampras, to clarify his coaching points, and employed

other coaches to help develop the areas of Pete's technique and fitness, of which he felt he didn't know enough.

Look at the games of Sampras, Agassi and the Williams sisters, and you'd have to say that what these inexperienced tennis parents or mentors taught them from a young age, in terms of their basic tennis technique and tactics, was good enough for these youngsters to have been able to go on and reach the top of the professional game.

Robert Lansdorp said of Sampras' serve, "*He's had the same serve since he was 11 years old.*" – Imagine that, the best serve in the history of the game being taught by a paediatrician.

Or look at Agassi's game and consider that the best return of serve and some of the greatest, hardest hit groundshots of all time, were taught by a Casino worker.

And how about the Williams sisters? They learned the game, until they were 11 years old, predominantly, from a father who became a tennis coach after reading books and watching a tennis instructional coaching series on TV!

COSTS OF TENNIS COACHING

The average cost of an individual tennis lesson in Great Britain for example, from an experienced coach, is usually a minimum of £20 per hour. Often it's a lot more than that, particularly if you have to add in court fees.

Let's say for example that when their child is age eight, their parents decide to get them two individual lessons at £20 each, and two group coaching lessons per week, at say £5 per session, let's say for example 30 weeks of the year. That adds up to £50 per week, or £200 per month, or around £1500 per year on coaching costs alone.

Add in racquets - £150, restrings - £200, tennis shoes - £150, tennis clothes - £200, tournament entry fees for say 10 local tournaments - £150, club membership and indoor court fees travel and hotel costs of around another £1000, and you can see why tennis is a game usually reserved for people with a somewhat sizeable disposable income.

Judy Murray once told me, "*There's no way we would have been able to afford all that!*"

These costs can easily add up to £4000 a year for an eight-year-old, and some parents, pay this sort of money out for their kids at an even younger age. By the time a child reaches age 12 the yearly cost of training and competing *properly*, can easily rise to £10,000 and that's just for one child.

How much would you spend up until age 12 helping a child become a professional soccer player? It's probably no more than about £3000, and that would be the total for six or seven years' commitment, not more than £3000

per year or upwards of £20,000 over the same time period, which some tennis parents end up spending.

How many parents can afford this sort of expenditure?

USTA General Manager of Player Development Patrick McEnroe stated that the cost of preparing a junior pro player for the circuit, including coaching, conditioning and food, is in the region of \$150,000.

The LTA state it costs around £250,000 to develop a potential professional tennis player between ages five and 18.

And the ITF estimates that it costs a minimum of \$35,500 annually, for a 17-year-old male to play on the international circuit and train for 20 weeks of the year.

So how can tennis parents manage to get their kids to be so good, without going bankrupt?

FAMILY MEMBERS, PARENTS OR MENTORS WHO BECOME TENNIS COACHES

From age four, Rafael Nadal has been trained by his uncle Toni, himself a professional coach and former player. Toni has never received any money from Rafa during this time. Instead Toni owns half of Rafa's father's business, and takes half the profits from it without doing any of the work, in return for dedicating his time to his nephew.

There are many examples of professional tennis players whose parents, are, or were, professional coaches. These include Andy Murray, Tommy Haas, Steffi Graf and Fabrice Santoro. Both of Richard Gasquet's and Donald Young's parents are tennis coaches, and throughout most of Caroline Wozniacki's career, her main coach has been her father Piotr, a former professional soccer player.

Then there's a group of parents who became self-taught tennis coaches, by watching tennis on TV, buying a selection of tennis instruction books and videos, and then teaching themselves and their children the basics of the game. The parents of the Williams sisters, Andre Agassi, Monica Seles, Marion Bartoli and Brad Gilbert all fall into this category.

Many Eastern European and Russian players list their parents as being their coaches. Maria Sharapova's father entrusted his daughter's development to an older and experienced coach from ages four to seven. And then when Maria failed to win a scholarship at Bollettieri's, trained her himself, in extremely difficult circumstances, until age nine, she was rewarded with a full-scholarship.

Novak Djokovic lived across the street from some tennis courts and began taking part in coaching sessions there from age six. Many professional tennis players though, were taken at young ages by their parents to tennis clubs having showed an interest and ability. They then became part of, and progressed through, the club's coaching programme before moving on later to a more demanding club or academy.

These players then received funding from their national tennis association, in return for representing their countries in international team competitions such as the Davis or Fed Cups.

There are therefore, many different roads to the top of the professional game.

The one common thing about the journey though, is that no one makes it there themselves

Natural talent, desire, dedication and often having to overcome a great deal of adversity, all play their part. And I'm not talking here just about just the players, although final responsibility for their success does lie with them, I'm talking also about the same dedication and commitment being shared by many of these player's parents, some of whom moved their entire families in search of a better tennis environment.

These tennis parents and mentors, also had the sense to seek advice from experienced coaches, when necessary, to help them improve their children's games. And thank goodness that coaches like Nick Bollettieri and Rick Macci had the ability to spot the talent, potential and ability of players such as Agassi and the Williams sisters, and award them scholarships to their academies.

DISPOSABLE ASSETS

But in the grand scheme of things, which of those coaches or mentors who took over the coaching role from the parents are still with those players? The answer - not many. Tennis coaches are often just disposable, transient, assets, who once they have outlived their purpose, can be discarded and replaced - the same of which cannot be said of parents - who are there for life!

6.

A WINNING COMBINATION

Along with talent, hard work, passion, dedicated tennis parents, and great tennis coaching, there are certain other circumstances and personal qualities, the combination of which I believe, are essential for a champion's success. These are:

- Opportunity
- Luck
- Desire and love of the game
- Self-belief
- and *the X-Factor*

OPPORTUNITY

Due to the young ages most successful tennis players start at, the opportunity for them to begin playing, is usually given to them by their parents or a family member – but not always...



EVONNE GOOLAGONG

The third of eight children of Kenny Goolagong, an itinerant Aboriginal sheep shearer, two-time Wimbledon champion Evonne Goolagong was born 31 July 1951 in Griffin, New South Wales, some 400 miles south west of Sidney, Australia. Until she eventually won Wimbledon in 1971, her house, which was an abandoned newspaper office, contained no refrigerator or telephone, and washing was done by boiling a kettle over a fire.

Seen peering through the fence by kindly Barellan resident, Bill Kurtzman, she began playing tennis as a child at the War Memorial Club in Barellan. She received her first proper coaching aged nine from travelling instructors of the Vic Edwards tennis school based out of Sidney.

The next year the Edwards' travelling coaches telephoned Edwards to tell him that this 10-year-old Aboriginal girl was the most talented child they'd ever seen. Edwards decided to make the 700-mile flight from where he was teaching in another part of New South Wales, to check out Evonne for himself. Edwards agreed with the instructors but was unsure what to do with this talented, but poor, very poor Aboriginal girl.

For the next few years Evonne was taken round the small country tournaments by Kurtzman. When she reached age 13 Kurtzman asked Edwards if he would consider taking her to live with him in Sidney, as Edwards had done with another girl several years earlier. Edwards and his wife Eva, who had five daughters of their own agreed, and in stages, Evonne spent more and more time living with them in Sidney. Edwards became a second father to her, along with being her coach and manager.

After two years living and training with Edwards in Sidney, 18-year-old Evonne played Wimbledon for the first time in 1970. In 1971 age 19, she won the French Open and went on to beat a pregnant Margaret Court in the final to win her first Wimbledon title.

In 1975 she married British businessman and amateur tennis player Roger Cawley. She reached world number one in April 1976 but stopped playing in order to have her first child, a daughter, Kelly who was born in 1977. In 1980 age 29, she became the first mother for 66 years to win Wimbledon, beating Chris Evert in the final, to win her second title.

Her seven Grand Slam singles titles consisted of two Wimbledon, four Australian Opens and one French Open. She also won six Grand Slam doubles titles, one Grand Slam mixed doubles title, reached the final of Wimbledon three times and the final of the US Open four times. She retired in 1983 having won over \$1 million in prize money.



LUCK

“A chance happening, or that which is beyond a person’s control.”

I once asked former Belgian Davis and Fed Cup captain and LTA Player Director Steven Martens, *“How did a country as small as Belgium, produce two world number ones – Henin and Clijsters?”* *“Luck,”* he replied.

In **OUTLIERS** Malcolm Gladwell concluded that in his opinion, the five keys to success are: Ability, Opportunity, Culture, Effort and Luck.

Okay I hear you saying, what’s luck got to do with it? - well consider the following:

1. Most of the champions listed earlier, lived within a short distance of a tennis club.
2. They all had parents who made the time to play tennis with their children, or took them to someone who would.
3. And they all lived, or moved close to, where they could receive great coaching from an experienced coach.

One of Britain’s most experienced and successful coaches Alan Jones once told me, *“When she was about 16 years old, and I was a national coach, I had the opportunity to work with Jo Durie. I knew straight away that she was a superb striker of the ball. She needed to learn to apply herself though, but when she did, she went on to reach five in the world, and won the mixed at Wimbledon and Australia with Jeremy Bates.*

The thing is I’ve taught more than 30 players who’ve played at Wimbledon, but only Jo got to Grand Slam semi-finals, so how come I got her to that level

and not the others? I honestly don't know how - maybe I was just lucky to come across her at the right time."

So knowing what you now know, do you just want to leave everything to 'luck' in your quest to produce a player capable of playing or winning Wimbledon? Or do you perhaps believe in making a little *luck* of your own, and that the harder you try the luckier you'll get?

DESIRE AND LOVE OF THE GAME

It's the child's desire and love of the game, which will drive them forwards along their road to Wimbledon. The parents, and later the coaches of Steffi Graf and Monica Seles for example, used to complain that their kids or pupils wanted to play too much!

Nine-time Grand Slam champion Seles said in her 2009 autobiography **GETTING A GRIP: ON MY BODY, MY MIND, MY SELF**, *"From the beginning I loved it. Who knows why? It was just everything to me. I couldn't get enough of it. Tennis, tennis, tennis, every day."*

Andre Agassi would, according to his dad, *"Play on his own against the playroom wall and when he got tired, put the ball under his racquet and use it as a pillow and take a nap. Then he'd wake up and start to hit again."*

Andy Roddick would hit for hours against his garage wall imagining playing and beating his heroes Sampras and Agassi. Roger Federer's parents complained of him relentlessly hitting tennis balls against the walls both inside and outside of their home.

Age four Serbian Ana Ivanovic memorised the phone number of her local tennis club, which she'd seen on TV, and persuaded her parents to call and take her there to play.

Former LTA Head of Women's Tennis and coach to Ivanovic Nigel Sears once told me, *"You can't tell from a talent identification day what's going on in a child's head, do they have posters of their favourite players on their wall, how much do they really love the game, and want to be a player."*

When Richard Williams wouldn't let Serena enter a tournament Venus was playing, because he didn't think she was ready, eight-year-old Serena filled out the entry form herself and sent it in to the tournament referee. Serena claims that Richard was surprised, but not overly upset, when she snuck off during the event and was found playing her match, which of course she won!

The above are good examples of the *internal motivation* and love of the game found within successful modern day tennis champions.

STIMULATING THAT INITIAL INTEREST AND DESIRE

“If you love tennis, chances are that your children will love it too.”

- PATRICK MOURATOGLU from his 2008 book *EDUCATE TO WIN*

Sometimes though, a little *external motivation* in the form of parental encouragement can help stimulate a child’s initial interest. Why not get some racquets and balls and take your child down to your nearest tennis courts and hit a few balls with them. You’ll soon find out whether they enjoy it, have any natural ability and whether they want to do it again.

If they do show an interest, and even better if they show any ability, then why not make it a part of your weekly routine to play. Many of the top players learned to play the game at weekends alongside their parents.

Tennis is a sport where you have to have someone to play with or against; it’s not like golf or athletics where to a certain extent you can do it yourself. So why not take your child down to a club and group coaching session to see if they like it have fun and make some new friends. Then afterwards play on for a little with them to give them that little extra help, practice and encouragement. If you play tennis yourself you might soon find that your child is bugging you to play with them, so make the time and just do it.

And when the time comes, as it inevitably will, that they don’t want to play, then don’t make them. Let them be the one who gets the racquet out, hits against the wall and demands that you play with them again.

Why not make a trip to Wimbledon or another of the Grand Slams? Or make sure you have the TV on when Wimbledon or any of the other tournaments are being shown.

Tape matches and let your kids see how the players look and play. Get them some posters of their favourite players and put them on their bedroom walls.

Invest in satellite or cable TV - there’s loads of tennis coverage throughout the year. Do anything to stimulate and maintain that natural interest in tennis and you’ll soon find out if they have any real desire to play the game.

SELF-BELIEF

Throughout the journey which leads you (your child or protégé) to Wimbledon, your belief in yourself and what you’re doing, and that you will be successful in reaching your goal - will be one of the most important reasons for your success.

Richard Williams once told Mouratoglou that, *“He forbade doubts to enter his home. And that he forbade his daughters to even consider failure as a viable option!”*

Hardly a surprise then that Venus later said, *“There’s something about me and Serena, no matter what we’re ranked, no matter what the next person says, ultimately we just believe in ourselves, and I think that’s the difference.”*

Novak Djokovic said during his incredible 2011 winning run, *“If there is anything that I can say that is 100% sure about me, and being here, and deserving to be here, it’s my self-belief.”*

THE X-FACTOR

Many sports commentators and coaches refer to players possessing the *X-Factor* - that *Xtra* element required to go on and win major championships.

Others refer to this piece of a tennis champion’s make-up as *Genius*, and Pete Sampras in his 2009 autobiography, ***A CHAMPION’S MIND: LESSONS FROM A LIFE IN TENNIS***, referred to it as *The Gift*.

Possessing the *X-Factor*, *Genius* or *The Gift* is what Roger Federer, Pete Sampras, John McEnroe, Bjorn Borg and Boris Becker, who all won three or more Wimbledon titles, have in abundance.



I’m British, and proud to be so, however, I can’t say I’m overly proud of my nation’s tennis achievements over the last 100 years. And only in my wildest dreams did I expect to be able to include the next mini-autobiography in this book – but here goes...

ANDY MURRAY O.B.E.

The 2013 Wimbledon men’s champion was born 15 May 1987 in Glasgow, Scotland. Andy Barron Murray grew up with his elder brother Jamie, in Dunblane near Stirling. His mother Judy was an outstanding player and had won 64 Scottish titles. Having decided the pro tour wasn’t for her, she decided instead to concentrate on becoming a coach, and whilst raising a family, also ran a children’s clothes shop. Andy’s father Willie works in the retail trade.

EARLY YEARS

As toddlers Andy and Jamie played various sports in the garden at their home. (Visit www.set4sport.com for details of the games Judy made up for them.) Later, along with other children, they took part in their mother’s coaching sessions at the nearby Dunblane sports club.

Initially Andy wasn’t as good a player as Jamie, (who is a 15 months older), and Judy spent extra time feeding him balls to help his coordination. Andy soon improved, and although he played his first tournament age five, tennis was just one of the many sports he and Jamie tried along with golf, rugby and

gymnastics. Andy was most taken by soccer, for which his maternal grandfather, Roy Erskine, had played professionally for Hibernian.

In the mid-1990s Judy became Scottish National Coach, and organised trips for groups of the best Scottish juniors, including Andy and Jamie, around Great Britain.

UNOFFICIAL WORLD JUNIOR CHAMPION AGE 12

Age eight Andy won the prestigious 10-and-under tournament at Solihull; winning the event three years running. Jamie was also an excellent junior, and reached the final of the 1998 12-and-under junior Orange Bowl – the unofficial world junior championships.

Judy said that having Jamie as an older, stronger brother encouraged Andy to work extra hard to try and keep up.

When Andy was 11, Judy asked Scottish coach Leon Smith to take over the role of being his main coach. Smith held this position for the next six years (he is the current Great Britain Davis Cup coach), and Judy trusted and allowed him a free reign to develop Andy's game.

In December 1999 Andy went one better than Jamie; winning the 12-and-under junior Orange Bowl, beating Tomas Piskacek of the Czech Republic in the final.

Just before his 13th birthday, Andy was given the chance to sign as a schoolboy for Glasgow Rangers Football Club. He turned it down though, as by then he had decided that he wanted to be a professional tennis player instead. Around this time Jamie left home to attend an academy in England, but returned within a year, upset, having not improved as much as he and Judy felt he should have done.

Despite having few good standard hitting partners, Andy's progress continued, and in January 2001 age 13, he reached the final of the 14-and-under Petit As tournament at Tarbes I (the unofficial European junior championships), losing there to Russian Alexandre Krasnoroutski.

LEAVING FOR SPAIN

In 2002 age 15, Andy enrolled at the Sanchez-Casal Academy in Barcelona. He had made the decision to train abroad the previous year, when playing in the 16-and-under European Cup, in which Great Britain lost in the final to Spain.

Having talked to Rafael Nadal following a game of racquetball, he told his mother, *"Rafa's practising with Carlos Moya, and I'm having to practice with a few county-level players, my brother and my mum. Rafa's out in the sun all*

day – he hardly goes to school, and he’s playing four-and-a-half hours a day. I’m playing four-and-a-half hours a week. It’s not enough!”

The cost of the academy at the time was £25,000 per year, plus competition costs. Funding and sponsorship from the LTA, SportsScotland and the Royal Bank of Scotland paid some of the bill, but the Murrays had to fund around half the cost themselves.

At Sanchez-Casal’s Andy was able to train outdoors in the sun for up to six hours a day, with players from all over the world. Within a short time of his arrival, and on consecutive days, he beat Guillermo Coria, and split sets with Carlos Moya, both of whom were ranked in the world’s Top-five at the time.

US OPEN JUNIOR CHAMPION

In mid-2002 Murray began playing the qualifying of Futures events, failing however, to make it through to any main draws. In 2003 he played a combined schedule of junior and senior events, and reached the last 16 of the French Open juniors. Having received a wildcard into the main draw of the Challenger at Manchester, he won two matches and gained his first world ranking at No. 774.

After in early November reaching the last 16 of the Nottingham Challenger, Murray went to play a Futures event in Gran Canaria. There though, he suffered the major setback of a serious knee injury, which kept him out of competition for the next seven months. Age 16, he finished 2003 ranked No. 540.

Having turned 17 and with little preparation, Murray made little impact on his return to the tour. By then he had split with Smith and was being coached by Pato Alvarez, a then 69-year-old Colombian coach from Sanchez-Casal’s.

Having failed to secure a wildcard into Wimbledon, Murray then headed back to continental Europe. In August he won two of the four Futures events he played in Spain and Italy, and then headed to New York to play the junior US Open.

As a result of his European success, when Murray arrived in New York he was match-ready and eager to make up for the time he’d lost out through injury. He won the tournament, beating amongst others, Juan-Martin del Potro, and then Sergiy Stakhovsky in the final. Following the US Open Murray returned to Europe, where he won back-to-back Spanish Futures and age 17, ended 2004 world No. 411.

INSIDE THE TOP-100

2005 started off poorly for Murray who made little impact on the South American Challenger clay court circuit, in which he and Alvarez had decided he should compete. Because of these poor results, and partly because of the age difference between them, he then decided to split with Alvarez.

In June Murray lost to Marin Cilic in the semi-finals of the French Open juniors, but having won matches in a mixture of Futures and Challenger events, was ranked just outside the world's Top-300. He then teamed up for the grass court season with British coach and former world No. 80, Mark Petchey.

Having received wildcards he reached the third rounds of the main draws at both Queen's and Wimbledon and moved inside the Top-200.

He then qualified and reached the second round of the US Open, before reaching the final of the ATP event in Bangkok, where he lost to Roger Federer.

In October he entered the Top-100 and age 18, ended 2005 ranked No. 64.

THREE-TIME GRAND SLAM FINALIST AND WORLD NUMBER TWO

In February 2006 Murray beat Lleyton Hewitt in the San Jose final to win his first ATP title and entered the Top-50. He reached the fourth round at both Wimbledon and the US Open but then decided to split from Petchey. In September he teamed up with Brad Gilbert, who had previously been the coach of Andre Agassi and Andy Roddick, and ended the year No. 17.

2007 started well for Murray who reached the fourth round of the Australian Open and the semi-finals of the Masters Series events at both Indian Wells and Miami; results which lifted him into the world's Top-10.

Disaster struck in May though, when at the Hamburg Masters, he suffered a wrist injury, which kept him out of action for the next four months. Despite being unable to play at the French Open or Wimbledon, he still ended the year ranked No. 11.

At the end of 2007 Murray announced his split from Gilbert, and the appointment of a new team of coaches, led by Miles Maclagan, and physical trainers to help him. In early 2008 he returned to the Top-10, winning titles at Doha and Marseille before losing to Nadal in the quarter-finals at Wimbledon. Murray then won the Masters event at Cincinnati, and at the US Open reached his first Grand Slam final, losing there to Federer. Age 21, he ended 2008 ranked world number four.

Murray began the 2009 season fantastically, beating Andy Roddick in the final of Doha, and then Nadal in the final of Rotterdam. He then reached the final at Indian Wells, losing there to Nadal, after beating Federer in the semi-finals, and the following week beat Novak Djokovic in the final of the Miami Masters. These results lifted him to world number three.

After winning Queen's, Murray then lost to Nadal in the semi-finals of Wimbledon, but then won the Masters event at Montreal. In August age 22, he reached a career high ranking of world number two.

Murray reached the final of the 2010 Australian Open, losing there to Federer, again reached and lost to Nadal in the semi-finals of Wimbledon, before winning Masters titles at Toronto and Shanghai. Having lost in a third set tie-break to Nadal in the semi-finals of the end-of-year ATP World Tour finals, age 23, Murray ended 2010 world number four.

In 2011 Murray lost to Djokovic in the final of the Australian Open, and the semi-finals of Roland Garros, Wimbledon and the US Open - all to Nadal.

He then won three consecutive titles in Asia, including the Shanghai Masters, and rose once again to world number three. Having been forced to withdraw from the ATP World Tour Finals with a groin injury, age 24, he ended the year world number four.

Then in December 2011 Murray announced the appointment of eight-time Grand Slam champion Ivan Lendl as his coach.

COMING OF AGE

2012 saw Murray lose in five gruelling sets in the semi-final of the Australian Open to Djokovic, the finals at Dubai and Miami, and the quarter-finals at the French – hardly the sign, from a British perspective, of the amazing things which were to happen in the following months.

Having lost to the unheralded Nicholas Mahut in his first match at the pre-Wimbledon event at Queen's Club, few would have believed Murray a genuine contender for SW19, particularly when he was handed with one of the hardest draws imaginable.

Incredibly though, Murray defeated Nikolay Davydenko, Ivo Karlovic, Marcos Baghdatis, Marin Cilic, David Ferrer and Jo-Wilfried Tsonga en route to becoming the first British man to reach the Wimbledon final since 1938. And at a set and break point up in the second against Federer, it appeared that Murray was poised to become the first British man since Fred Perry in 1936 to win the Championships.

Alas for Murray, Federer upped his game, held serve, levelled the match at one set all, and went on to complete a four set victory.

A month later Murray faced Federer once again on Wimbledon Centre Court in the final of the London Olympics. This time Murray ran out a straight sets winner to collect the gold medal.

As if this wasn't enough for the Scot, he then claimed his first Grand Slam title beating defending champion Djokovic in the final of the US Open and ended the year world number three.

WIMBLEDON CHAMPION

Having lost to Djokovic in the final of the 2013 Australian Open, in March Murray returned to world number two having won his ninth Masters Series title; defeating David Ferrer in the final at Miami.

Murray struggled with a back injury throughout the European clay court season, and at one set all against Marcel Granollers in the second round of the Rome Masters in May, was forced to withdraw – an injury, which caused him to miss the French Open.

Returning to the tour in June, Murray won the pre-Wimbledon event at Queen's Club and was seeded No. 2 for the Championships.

Then, after making his way to the final for the loss of just three sets, Murray overcame world No. 1 Djokovic in three straight sets to become the first British man in 77 years to win the title.

The rest of the year saw Murray struggle with the same back injury, which had bothered him for the previous two years. He opted for surgery to cure the problem and missed the rest of the ATP season.

By the end of 2013 Murray had won 28 career ATP titles and earned over \$30 million in on-court prize money.

To cap off an incredible year, in October Murray was made an Officer of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (O.B.E.) by his Royal Highness, Prince William, Duke of Cambridge at a ceremony at Buckingham Palace, and in December named BBC Sports Personality of the Year.



Many players work really, really hard to become successful professional tennis players. Very few though, go on to become Grand Slam winners. Being a tremendous competitor, possessing masses of natural athletic and tennis playing ability are a must for success - but players like Martina Navratilova, the Williams sisters, Steffi Graf, Chris Evert, Monica Seles, Maria Sharapova, Justine Henin, Rafael Nadal, Novak Djokovic and Andre Agassi all possess something just that little bit *Xtra*.

These are the greatest players of the modern era and the *X-Factor* they possess, which makes them just a little better than those around them, makes them among the greatest players of all time, in a variety of tennis playing styles and forms.

The *X-Factor*, *Genius* or *The Gift* cannot be taught; players either have them or they don't.

TIE-BREAK

So what do you think? – are Wimbledon champions born or made?

Alan Jones has an interesting take on the subject.

“Martin,” he said to me, “if Pete Sampras had been born in Barcelona, or Rafael Nadal in Southern California, do you think they would have become tennis champions?”

“Yep,” I replied, “they would have found a way to become great.”

“Exactly,” said Alan, “Sampras would probably have played mostly from the baseline, and Nadal wouldn’t have used a full-western grip on his forehand, and would probably have gone to the net a bit more earlier on in his career; but both of them would have become champions no matter what.”

In 2011 I asked Christophe Fournerie, former coach of 2006 Wimbledon champion Amelie Mauresmo,

“Why is it that despite having lots of players in the world’s Top-100, France has only had two home-grown Grand Slam champions in recent times, Amelie and Yannick Noah?”

“Well I think that to get that level, you have to be an exceptional person,” Christophe replied, “and as for Amelie - she was an absolute diamond!”

Joan Forcades, Rafael Nadal’s physical trainer from age 14 perhaps answers the question best, saying in Nadal’s 2011 autobiography **RAFA: MY LIFE**, *“People sometimes wonder if champions are born or made...Both are true. Because if you are born with certain talents but don’t train and you aren’t passionate about what you do, you won’t get anywhere.”*

So what do you think makes a champion? – nature, nurture, neither or neither!

