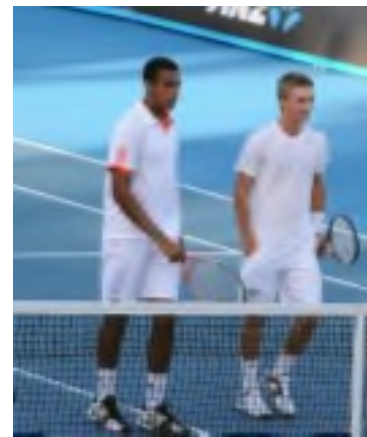
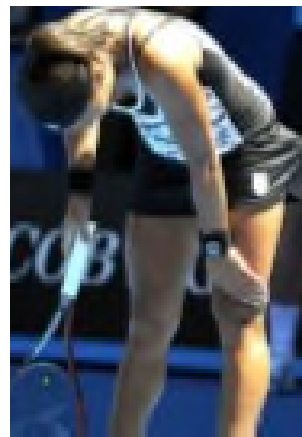
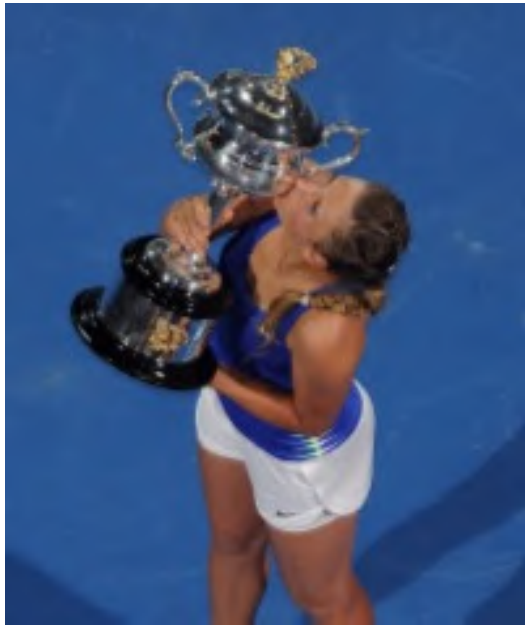




The Newsletter at the Heart of the British Game

TENNIS TODAY



The Australian Open 2012

February Newsletter Sponsored by

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A Quick review of the Australian Open

The first of this year's grand slams was cruising through to its conclusion in a semi desultory manner, that is, until the last few days. Then it just took off in an exhilarating and unexpected way with a run of some extraordinary results and exceptional performances.

In particular, the men's draw came alive when, as hoped from the outset, the top four players in the world reached their allotted places in the draw.

None of them had really been extended during their respective runs



to the semi-finals, with only Novak Djokovic and Andy Murray dropping a set en route to the last four where the pair met and set the fortnight alight with an incredibly close match lasting four hours and 50-minutes.

Djokovic admitted after his 6-3 3-6 6-7 6-1 7-5 victory, that it had been the best match he had played. Murray, who had his chances, agreed and was not disheartened by his loss believing that he had narrowed the gap with the Serbian world number one. It certainly augured well for the future. But that match was then overshadowed by the final where Djokovic, in most pundits minds, was the underdog following his debilitating semi-final win while Rafael Nadal had progressed relatively easy in his 6-7 6-2 7-6 6-4 win over Roger Federer, just three hours and 6-minutes, which had been played the day before.

And it looked as if the pundits were right as Djokovic dropped the first set of the final only to then slowly but surely turn the tables on the man who is known as the best grinder of all time, and claim the next two.

Leading by two sets to one, the rejuvenated

Djokovic looked set to be sprinting towards the finish line only for Nadal to strike back and level after with a superhuman effort.

Now it was certainly a race for the line and the Spaniard drew first blood in the decider to lead 4-2. Nadal fans were now elated at the prospect of their idol reclaiming the Australian title to redress the in-balance of six previous consecutive defeat at the hands of the Serb; but it wasn't to be.

Djokovic, who had set a 70-6 win-loss record last year, was obviously determined to maintain his current domination of the sport, somehow again raised his own game to retain his title 5-7, 6-4, 6-2, 6-7(5), 7-5 in what will go down as a classic clash played over five hours and 53-minutes to become the longest-ever match witnessed at the Australian Open and the longest men's Grand Slam final on record, surpassing the previous mark of four hours and 54-minutes achieved when Mats Wilander defeated Ivan Lendl at the 1988 US Open.

The 2012 Australian Open will be remembered mostly for that epic final and over time, history might well point to this event



as the tournament that saw the next generation of players establish themselves. Roger Federer still looks good for another major, but it looks increasingly unlikely as both

Djokovic and Nadal seem to have the edge on him in speed and power. Murray also, is quicker and his confidence is now very much on the rise under the guidance of Ivan Lendl,

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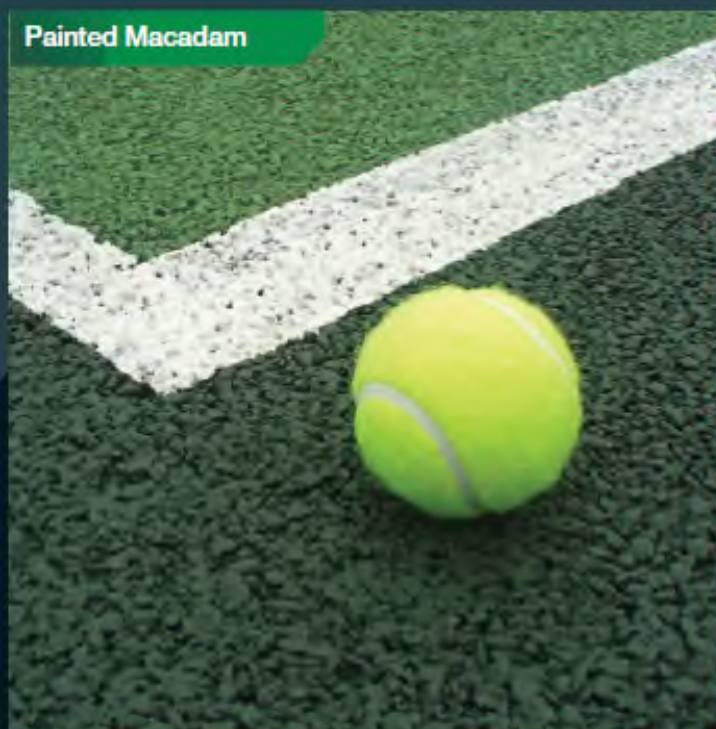


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A Quick review of the Australian Open (Continued)

a former player who has experienced both the highs and lows, overcoming initial disappointments to go on and win eight grand slam titles.

The rising stars in the men's draw include Japan's Kei Nishikori, who reached the last eight by eliminating Jo-Wilfried Tsonga 2-6 6-2 6-1 3-6 6-3 only to lose to Murray; the revival of Juan Martin del Potro's form, the former US Open champion who lost a year through injury, plus the Canadian giant, Milos Raonic, the Kazhakstani Mikhail Kukushkin and the very exciting Bernard Tomic, the Australian teenager who reached the last 16 where Federer proved too experienced for him.

But the changing of the guard is possibly more evident in the women's game. Unlike the men's draw, only three of the top players made the semis. The exception was Caroline Wozniacki who became world number one without winning a grand slam and has lived with that stigma throughout her 67 week reign. Unfortunately she still has to live with it, but not as the top player in the world but perhaps, now that she has slipped down the



rankings, the quest will be easier.

Wozniacki was beaten by the defending champion Kim Clijsters who has announced she will be retiring at the end of the 2012 season. At 28-years of age, the Belgian mother-of-one, has decided she has called time on her

professional career to allow the next generation to take over.

She then lost to Victoria Azarenka who in turn, went on to replace her as Australian Open champion, and as an additional bonus, leapt to the top of the women's world rankings by trouncing Maria Sharapova in what turned out to be a rather one-sided final.

The Belarussian's 6-3 6-0 victory over the leggy Russian, a three-time grand slam champion, was the 22 year-olds first triumph at a major championships and definitely heralds a new generation for she is the fifth different woman to win a grand slam in the last 12 months, and the fourth first-time champion in succession, following Li Na at Roland Garros, Petra Kvitova at Wimbledon and Samantha Stosur at the US Open.



The 21-year-old Kvitova went into the

tournament as one of the favourites but was beaten in straight sets by Sharapova in the semis in what was a surprising result for the Czech had come through comfortably to that stage using her powerful serve to great effect. But as the newcomers take over, the Australian Open definitely saw some of the previous generation entering their twilight years as regards the tour.

Serena Williams, 30, who is virtually a part-time player due to injuries and a lack of motivation, was soundly beaten in the fourth round by unheralded Russian Ekaterina Makarova, a player who could be joining the next generation.

The American, a 13-time grand slam winner, didn't play after last year's US Open, later admitting she had fallen out of love with tennis and came into the tournament 'not match fit' after injuring her ankle in Brisbane. She did get through the first three rounds comfortably but had no answer against the 56th-ranked Makarova, who had not been past a first round since August.

Local favourite Stosur, 28, crumbled under the pressure of home expectations when she lost

A Quick review of the Australian Open (Continued)

to little-known Romanian Sorana Cirstea in the first round, while two-time grand slam winner Svetlana Kuznetsova, 26, lost her fourth round match to 22-year-old German Sabine Lisicki while her compatriot, Vera Zvonareva, crashed out in round two to the aforementioned Makarova.

But there were promising signs for former French Open winner and ex-world number one Ana Ivanovic, who returns to the top 20 after reaching the fourth round, and for Poland's Agnieszka Radwanska, who rises to six after reaching the semis while question marks hang over Jelena Jankovic and Daniela Hantuchova.

The Brits

The British contingent, at 6, was the best we have had in Australia for 20 years but that is as far as it went. Andy Murray aside, the other five were a let-down for they won only 20 games between them as they all failed to get past the opening round.

At the start of the event there was plenty of

euphoria following James Ward and Laura Robson's success at the qualifying tournament to make their respective singles main draws, but then the luck of the draw went against them!



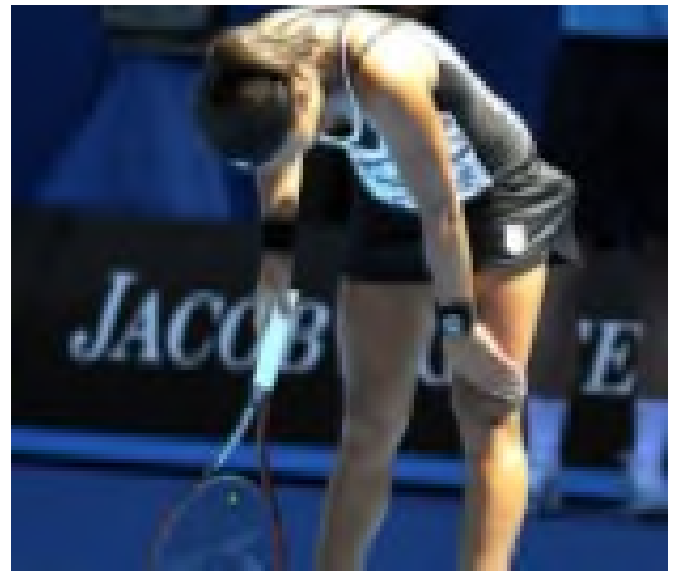
In the case of Heather Watson and Laura Robson that was certainly the case as they faced Victoria Azarenka and Jelena Jankovic respectively, so their 6-1 6-0 and 6-2 6-0 defeats were not entirely unexpected.

Anne Keothavong was forced to retire with a stomach problem after losing a bagel first set to Germany's Mona Barthel but perhaps the biggest

disappointments were the losses of Elena Baltacha and James Ward in matches well within their grasp.

Ward lost to the Slovenian Baz Kavcic 6-4 6-3 6-4 and said: "It was difficult out there due to the wind but it was the same for both of us and there are no excuses, it was a tough day," while Baltacha lost to the lower ranked (107) 30 year-old Frenchwoman, Foretz Gacon 6-2 6-4.

Yes, disappointment all round but to give the



two youngsters who are currently carrying British hopes, namely Watson and Robson, the experience will have taught them plenty as Watson admitted she hadn't lived up to expectations. However, while upset at such an emphatic loss to the world number three, did agree that she had learnt a lot.

Nonetheless, there was some good news. In the Juniors event, Liam Broady and Joshua Ward-Hibbert captured the Boys' Doubles with a 6-3 6-2 victory over the Czech Adam Pavlasek and Croatia's Filip Veger.

Congratulations also to Peter Norfolk who won his fifth Australian Open quad singles title.

Henry Wancke

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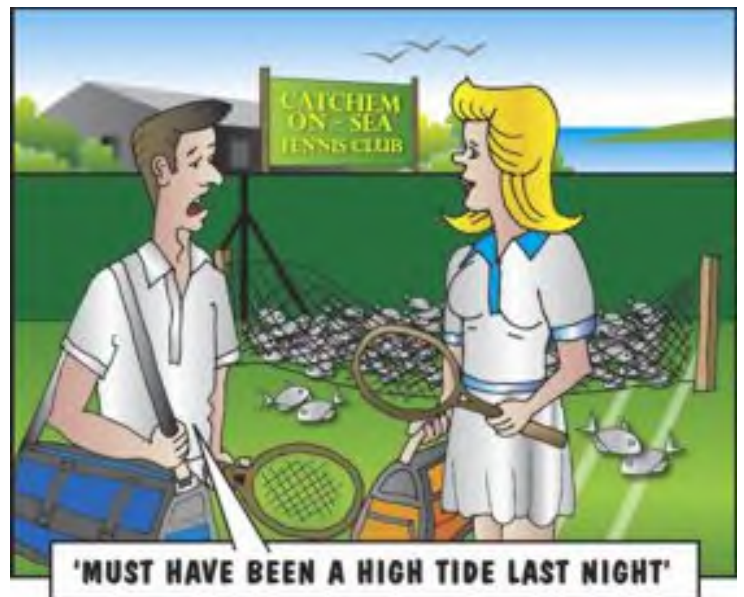
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