

by **Joanne Cox** (from Melbourne, Australia)



Roger Federer practicing in Melbourne, Jan 13th 2014 ©Joanne Cox

I live in Melbourne so always look forward to the Aussie Open where I can see my favourite players and live the tennis for two weeks. This year I took the fortnight off work for the very first time – the tennis being such a distraction from my job and all the late nights watching on TV or attending matches gets very tiring. What a great decision that was! The recent news that Stefan Edberg would take up a part time coaching with Roger Federer meant my all time favourite player would be back in Melbourne. Not only is Roger my current favourite, with Stefan well known to be his hero, many people believe Roger to be the best player ever to play the game. His footwork, agility and grace around the court are very reminiscent of Stefan. I am a long-time Roger fan so this partnership is my tennis heaven, something I had never even considered possible so it is not a dream fulfilled but rather a wonderful present from my two very favourite players.



Stefan Edberg arrives for Roger Federer's first round match at Australian Open in Melbourne
©Joanne Cox

I was very keen to see Roger practice with his new coach so headed down on the first Monday to wait at the practice courts. The practice courts schedule is posted on the AO website and tweeted each morning. This takes all the guess work out of finding your player. One of the many great things about the 'happy slam', besides being so welcoming of fans and players alike, is the access to the players. Unlike Wimbledon and the US Open (I have not attended the French Open but believe it is difficult to see the top players there) fans can watch all the practice courts 16-18 and 5-7. It is easy to watch the top players, who usually use 16/17/18, to take photos and get autographs.

According to the schedule Roger was on court 18 after Novak Djokovic, who was there with his own newly appointed Legend coach Boris Becker. I was so excited, as well as anxious, to see if Stefan would be there. According to the papers he had arrived late on Sunday but who knew for sure? Soon after Nole leaves, Team #Fedberg are here!!! Cue pandemonium!!! Always when Roger first arrives there are screams and cheers along with applause. And right behind Roger and Severin Luthi comes Stefan Edberg. It was simply amazing to see Roger on the same court as Stefan. Stefan has not changed much and most observers thought he looked well and were very pleased to see him.



Severin Luthi and Stefan watch Roger practice ©Joanne Cox

I was in the second row (of about eight) of people standing along the long side of the court 18. After a one hour practice Roger signed for fans- he always signs for as many people he can see –and he and Stefan left to more applause. Roger is extremely popular in Australia (everywhere

else too!), last year an estimated 2,500 watched Roger practice on the middle Sunday so a seated stand has been installed at his preferred practice court 16, at the end of the row of courts. This means hundreds of people can sit to watch and take photos.

On Day Two I did not see their practice as Roger and Stefan practiced on Rod Laver arena before play started for the day (at 11am) ahead of his first round match against local player James Duckworth. Roger was second on RLA and I had tickets for the lowest level so could easily walk around to the player box to wait for Stefan to arrive. He was the last to get to Roger's player box, after Mirka Federer (pregnant with the couple's third child), Luthi and Roger's Agent Tony Godsick (the husband of Mary Jo Fernandez, former top US player from the 1990's).



Stefan Edberg watches Roger Federer practice, Melbourne ©Joanne Cox

I attended Roger's matches through to the quarter finals (five matches) and saw him practice several times. Each time Stefan was present so I saw them most days I attended the tennis. It was wonderful to see Stefan in person again. He looks great and after the mild shock of seeing so many people at the first practice – he seemed slightly intimidated at the crowds! – was happy to wander around the court and hit up with Roger some times. He and Severin Luthi spent a lot of time talking together and watching Roger.

I have wanted Stefan to return to Melbourne since I moved here seven years ago, I had hoped he would one day play in the Legends doubles with his Swedish friends Mats Wilander, Joakim Nystrom or Anders Jarryd. A number of his contemporaries regularly come to Australia, including Goran Ivanisevic, Henri Leconte, Guy Forget, Thomas Muster, Cedric Pioline and of course Aussies Pat Cash, The Woodies (doubles greats Mark Woodforde and Todd Woodbridge) and Pat Rafter. This year Yannick Noah played for the first time and Pete Sampras presented the trophy, last year it was Andre Agassi.

Stefan has made an even bigger impact than any of them, taking up possibly the highest profile role in men's tennis: coaching the GOAT Roger Federer. One wag in the British press wrote that Stefan won the Legend's Coaching Invitational when his player beat Andy Murray in the quarter finals. I wish them all the best, I personally believe they will be successful as they have much in common, Stefan has a wise tennis mind and Roger respects him immensely. I can't thank Roger enough for this, how grateful I am that he asked Stefan to help him (I did tell him on three separate occasions!). Roger was playing some of his best tennis in a long time (injury free) and moving beautifully, this along with baby number three due mid-year are reminiscent of his fabulous 2009 (when he won the French and Wimbledon and returned to No 1) so I hope Roger has another vintage year. With coach Edberg in his team things are looking good!