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Like Sachin Tendulkar at the approach of Curtly Ambrose, like George Best, exercising his taunting skills, there is a danger in the air when Edberg steps onto the tennis court. Not the physical danger which enhances Gower's natural elegance, but the danger of embarrassment -the embarrassment of the author forgetting his lines.

Even at the end of 1990, when he was world no 1, Edberg's play had to be measured on a scale different from the rest. The ordinary dimensions of good and bad just could not cope with the excesses which, in 1990, made him a Wimbledon Champion, took him close to perfection in his annihilation of Wilander in the semis of the Aussie Open and near despair in 1st rd defeats at the French and US Opens.

Even when he is playing in "zones" other forever forseek, Edberg has a forlorn look which recalls the description by the great American Champion Tony Trabert "The only problem with Stefan is that he walks on his chin." Its true.

Edberg's expression is part frown, part bewilderment and he has a habit of jutting out his chin when in trouble. Occasionally ,if he has just won a huge point or produced a flash of brilliance, he will clench his fist and pull it towards him as if he was trying to start a lawnmower.

But that is the farthest tip of Edberg's demonstrativeness. Edberg defied those laws of mind and body which govern the outcome of tennis matches. Unlike Sampras,Becker and Lendl who look winners even when they are losing, Edberg looks beaten every moment of the match. He has the hangdog of a loser, which makes his many wins all the more beautiful and unexpected.

Like watching birds, watching Edberg is a specialized and often frustrating occupation. You can wait long hours just for a glimpse of genius but when it comes -like a decisive half volley drop shot winner- all the patience is rewarded.

The semis of the 1990 Aussie Open, when Wilander, the world champion a year before won just 4 games in 3 sets, the 3 sets of semis of 1990 Wimbledon when Lendl realised that no matter how hard he tried,no matter how many months he practiced on grass, he could never enter the promised lands which Edberg passes through from time to time, the match against Courier 1991 US Open final when Courier was made to look like a beginner.

Yet, earlier in his career, Edberg was considered just one of a host of good Swedish players following the footsteps of great Bjorn. Clubs were overflowing with Carlsons and Svenssons and a thousand others, all wanting to emulate the legendary champion who won an incredible 11 Grand Slam titles.

The one difference was that while contemporaries were standing Borg-like at the back of their clay courts, hammering top spin forehands and 2 handed backhands, Edberg was rushing to the net and clipping away the volleys. However much you search for the elusive scrap of motivation which is supposedly common to all great sportsmen, when Edberg says "I want to be No 1", it sounds more like an apology rather than a statement of intent. Until he became No 1 in August 1990, that is.

Even though he won 6 Slams, it seems Edberg's finest moment of glory was not at any of the Slams but at the less glamorous surroundings of the Madison Square Gardens in New York which played host to the Nabisco Masters.

At 23, Edberg was still struggling to assert his presence at the very top of men's tennis. Yes, he had already won 3 Grand Slam titles, 2 Australian Open titles and 1 Wimbledon and in 1987 won 7 titles (including the Australian Open) and it seemed that he would be no 1 in the world which it seemed was preserved only for the efficient (Borg, Lendl, Connors) rather than the elegant.

There was no indication that Edberg's successes were any more than passing comets. Lendl and Becker were firm favourites. Lendl was world no 1 but Becker had won the last 2 Grand Slam tournaments. Becker was expected to beat Lendl in the finals to confirm his status.

And there was no indication, in the early matches that this order would be overturned. Becker comfortably won all his round robin matches to set up a semis clash with McEnroe. Becker even let his guard drop a bit when he said that a final between him and Lendl would be a fair and fitting conclusion to the year.

Edberg, too, had qualified for the semis, but there was little sign of him upsetting the form book. But sometime before his semifinal, he discovered the inspiration which touches his game from time to time like the beam of a lighthouse. By the time Lendl had realized the danger, Edberg was in his rhythm, serving with that graceful arc and wicked flick of the wrists that reduces the receiver to impotence and makes the volley a mere formality.

Lendl as ever when faced with Edberg at his best, had no answer, lost 67 57.

This set up a repeat of the previous 2 Wimbledon finals with Becker against Edberg. Becker, was expected to win with crushing finality but, like Lendl he too overestimated his own form, and Edberg romped away with the final set to join a list of greats like McEnroe, Borg, Connors and Becker,

Class? Genius? Greatness? Edberg can rise to all as easily as he can descend to fragility and incompetence. But let the day never come when the elegance in Edberg's game is reduced to mediocrity.