

THE TOP 10 WIMBLEDON MATCHES

AHEAD OF WIMBLEDON FORTNIGHT, WHICH BEGINS ON MONDAY, WE BRING YOU THE MOST MEMORABLE MATCHES OF ALL TIME AT THE ALL ENGLAND CLUB



THE WORLD WEPT WITH HER
GRAF BEATS NOVOTNA, 1993

It is now almost 20 years since one of the great sporting breakdowns of all time, when the hard-hitting Czech Jana Novotna fell apart not once but twice in the space of half an hour on an emotionally charged Centre Court. Leading Steffi Graf 4-1 in the deciding set of the women's singles final, the then 24-year-old Novotna suddenly appeared struck down with fear. Was it the prospect of capturing her maiden Grand Slam title that so paralysed her, or was it simply the sight of a Teutonic goddess who had lost only one match at Wimbledon in five years standing on the other side of the net? Either way, Novotna capitulated, losing five games in a row to see the championship slip from her grasp, then promptly wept like a baby on the shoulder of the Duchess of Kent (above) when picking up her loser's (sorry, 'runners-up') shield. Thankfully, the Czech was no Jimmy White - five years later, on the very same court, she swept aside Nathalie Tauziat to win her one and only Grand Slam title.

GIVE US A (TIE-) BREAK

GONZALES BEATS PASARELL, 1969

Back in 1969, Pancho Gonzales was a 41-year-old who looked 61 and in all probability shouldn't have been doing anything for five hours and 12 minutes, let alone playing tennis. He had a touch of pedigree, though, having won the US Open as an amateur in both 1948 and 1949 - so, when faced with this marathon five-setter against the much younger Puerto Rican Charlie Pasarell, class (and a good night's sleep after he convinced the match umpire to suspend play for bad light when two sets down) just about saw the wily old dog through. To the second round. It proved a seminal moment in the history of tennis, though; a match that included a 46-game first set, 30-game third set and 20-game decider led to the introduction of the modern tie-break system. No game could ever last as long again... or could it?



MONDAY

The Championships,
Wimbledon
All England Club
BBC Two 11.30am



THE ETERNAL SET
ISNER BEATS MAHUT, 2010

It bloody well could, actually - and then some. Only two years ago, a match featuring American John Isner and Nicolas Mahut of France started life as a low-profile first-round clash between two unfancied outsiders - but ended up a titanic struggle that will go down as one of the great sporting epics. Eleven hours and five minutes of compellingly average tennis, spread over three days, climaxed in a fifth and deciding set comprising no fewer than 138 games, and which itself lasted more than eight hours. Exhausted, emotionally spent and very possibly believing they were hallucinating, the victorious Isner and his vanquished adversary each found themselves presented with a crystal bowl and some champagne flutes for their troubles. Mahut wept, they both slept... and then a spent Isner took an absolute pounding - losing 6-0, 6-3, 6-2 - by some lad whose name we forget in the second round. ➔

Wimbledon



7 VENUS FLIES THE TRAP

WILLIAMS BEATS DAVENPORT, 2005

Hard to believe it's now seven years since two giants of the modern women's game thrashed it out in the longest ladies' final in the history of Wimbledon. Lasting a full two hours and 45 minutes, this was a brutal meeting of two of the hardest hitters ever to grace women's tennis. Lindsay Davenport, the 1999 champion and baseline slugger par excellence, took the opening set and looked to be on her way to victory when enjoying matchpoint in the second. But Venus Williams, a two-time Wimbledon winner looking for a first Grand Slam title in four years, was not to be denied; she fought back to level in a tie-break before prevailing 9-7 in the third - thus becoming the first woman since 1935 to claim victory after facing championship point. Helen Jacobs in the 1935 US Open, in case you were wondering.

6



6 CHANGING OF THE GUARD

FEDERER BEATS SAMPRAS, 2001

Heading into this fourth-round meeting, Pete Sampras was a seven-time Wimbledon champion widely recognised as the greatest player ever to compete on the grass of the All England Club; Roger Federer, a decade the American's junior, was a Swiss teenager with a ponytail. Three hours and 41 minutes of scintillating and gladiatorial tennis later, Sampras stood defeated by the man who would inherit his crown as the undisputed king of SW19. It was the only time the two most

successful players in the history of men's tennis would ever face off in an ATP tournament. There was no trophy at stake, and Federer would have to wait two more years for his maiden Wimbledon title (his 2001 run being ended by - wait for it - Tim Henman), when he beat Mark Philippoussis in three sets; but this match represented the end of an era, and the first throes of what many believe is the greatest age the men's game has ever seen. Momentous stuff.



5 BEST OF THREE

EDBERG BEATS BECKER, 1990

Back in the days when grass-court tennis was still ruled by the serve-and-volleyers, few rivalries could match that enjoyed by the implacable Swede Stefan Edberg and his more explosive German counterpart Boris Becker. Their respective styles were the same and yet intriguingly contrasting, so the three consecutive finals they played out between 1988 and 1990 made for fascinating viewing. Edberg won the first in four sets with the minimum of fuss, but was blown away by Becker's sheer power 12

months later; so the third was to act as something of a decider - and, appropriately, it was by some way the best of the three. Edberg, all class and precision, coasted into a two-set lead; but no sooner had he done so than Becker bounced back with sets three and four. The momentum was going in only one direction, but nobody had told the ice-cool Swede. Edberg struck the final blow and took his second Wimbledon title - the last time that either great man would lift the trophy on Centre Court.

4

4 MARTINA RAISES THE BAR

NAVRATILOVA BEATS EVERT, 1978

Billie Jean King started the ball rolling for women's tennis to be taken seriously in the 1960s, but it was the Czech-born Martina Navratilova who took that ball and hammered it home for the best part of two decades after her. And it all started with this, her first Grand Slam title, achieved with a captivating three-set win over the darling of the crowd, Chris Evert, in 1978. Where Evert was all elegance and deftness of touch, Navratilova wielded her racket with a hammer of a left arm, displaying power never before seen but which informed many of the great female players (Graf, Davenport, the Williams sisters) who succeeded her. It was a contrast that beguiled the watching world across a staggering 60 finals for Navratilova - but this one set the tone. →



Wimbledon

3 THE WILDCARD

IVANISEVIC BEATS RAFTER, 2001

The first Wimbledon men's final to be played on a Monday, due to even more inclement weather than usual in SW19, became known as 'the people's final' – and in the big-serving, big-hearted Croatian Goran Ivanisevic, it threw up a winner as appropriate as he was unlikely. Three times a beaten finalist in the previous nine years, Ivanisevic rocked up in 2001 as a wildcard, a likeable veteran whose imposing frame had

started to fail him – but as other more fancied figures fell, the Croat rediscovered his best form and (with a little help from the weather) managed to see off Tim Henman on his way to a final against the popular Australian Pat Rafter. Ivanisevic's creaking back held out for five gruelling sets; he took the decider 9-7, thus etching his name into the history books... and on to the heart of every man, woman and child there.



2



BJORN AGAIN

BORG BEATS MCENROE, 1980

Few envisaged four-time champion Bjorn Borg having any trouble in securing a fifth straight All England title when he showed up for the 1980 tournament, but then few had taken into account a certain combustible 21-year-old American. There was little sign of the pleasingly sardonic pundit he was to become, because John McEnroe was all attitude, emotion and, let's not forget, raw talent. The American raced through the first set and then, having dropped sets two and three, prevailed 18-16 in the most famous tie-break in Wimbledon history. The experienced Bjorn had been there, done it and invested in every T-shirt and pair of overpriced designer kecks going, however – and when the going got tough in the decider, the Swede got going. McEnroe succumbed 8-6 in the fifth, but would have his revenge a year later.

Want more?

For Tim Henman's expert insight into Wimbledon 2012, including yet more thoughts on what Andy Murray has to do to win a Grand Slam event, download the iPad version of Sport magazine now



9.16 **ROLEX** **4.48**

PREVIOUS SETS		SETS GAMES POINTS
4 4 7 7	R. FEDERER	2 7 40
5 8	v	
6 6 6 6	R. NADAL	2 8

CHALLENGES REMAINING
FEDERER 3
NADAL 3

1

THE GREATEST MATCH OF ALL TIME

NADAL BEATS FEDERER, 2008

Those who remember Rod Laver and Ken Rosewall at their best may dispute our assertion that we are living through the greatest era of tennis the men's game has ever known, but not many others would want to argue the toss. And, while Novak Djokovic continues his one-man assault on the standards and records set by Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal over the past eight or nine years, we are left to look back on what remains widely regarded as the greatest single tennis match ever. It was the Wimbledon men's singles final of 2008 – and, after two previous failed attempts to rob Federer of the title that meant most to

him, Nadal finally saw off the Swiss lion in his own personal, grassy den. It took him four hours and 48 minutes to do so, through five sets of rain-interrupted but spectacular tennis that ended in near darkness. The scoreboard read 9.15pm when Federer slammed his final shot into the net to gift his great rival a 6-4, 6-4, 6-7, 6-7, 9-7 victory; the champion defeated, Nadal fell exhausted, but jubilant, to the ground, leaving the rest of us to marvel at one of the greatest battles tennis – nay, sport as a whole – had ever served up. Before putting the kettle on and turning over for Downton Abbey. Probably.