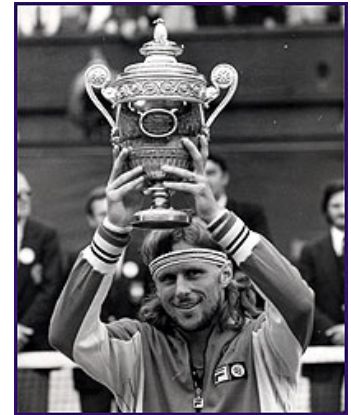


Part X - A new tennis star is Bjorn

Amidst scenes usually associated with pop stars, a young Swede changed the face of tennis when he made his debut at the 1973 Wimbledon Championships. Little did we know at this time, that Bjorn Borg at the age of 17 would grow into a tennis legend, winning five consecutive Wimbledon singles titles plus six French Opens and then to announce his retirement from the game at the ripe old age of 25 years.

Borg, seeded at six in the 1973 Wimbledon Championships was the youngest male player ever to be seeded. He was also soon to become conscious of what was in store for him as hundreds of young girls seated courtside, constantly applauded and screamed during his first round match. He won it in straight sets. For the very first time, a tennis player was about to be given the ‘pop star’ treatment by the fans. On his way to the village after this first round match, he was attacked by about three hundred girls and was pinned down for some 15 minutes before being rescued by the police.



Bjorn Borg

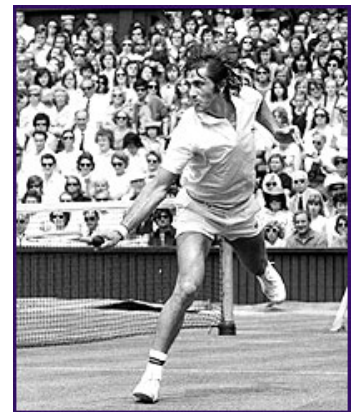
After his second round match that he also won in straight sets, he was mobbed on court by his ‘teeny-bopper’ fans. The onrush also marooned the umpire in his chair, and two policemen attempting to rescue him were swept off their feet. One of the policemen later declared that he had never seen anything like it. “There was nothing we could do,” he stated.

Borg himself was not happy and complained that these girls were trying to pull his clothes off. “This is not fun anymore. It’s not safe for me to walk around,” he declared.

Wimbledon’s committee were also quite appalled by hordes of teenage girls swamping their hallowed courts in their heels and were at first not sure how to deal with this new phenomenon. However in the end, they decided that some means of security had to be introduced to keep the young man safe from his adoring fans. Bjorn reached the semi-finals where he lost in a dramatic five setter to the Englishman, Roger Taylor. Three years later, Borg would win his first Wimbledon singles title and go on to dominate the Championships until 1981 when he would be beaten by John McEnroe in his sixth successive final. Borg established in the process a modern day record of 41 consecutive winning matches at the Championships.

In this year of 1973 when Borg made his Wimbledon debut, Ilie Nastase was taking the game of tennis by a storm. He had won 17 out of the 33 tournaments he played in, including winning the French Open and the Italian Open for the loss of just two sets. He won on grass at the pre-Wimbledon tournament at Queen’s Club and was then expected by many of us to go on to take the Wimbledon title. However, this was also the year of the ‘Wimbledon strike.’

After a dispute between the ATP, Association of Tennis Players, and the International Tennis Federation, nearly all the leading male players boycotted the 1973 Championships. This was the result of the Yugoslav, Nikki Pilic being suspended from playing tennis by his Federation for refusing to play in a Davis Cup match. The ATP, formed the previous September, claimed the suspension was unjust and seventy nine players withdrew their entries from the Wimbledon Championships. Nastase, originally the second seed was moved to top seed.



Ilie Nastase

The Romanian born Ilie Nastase was playing some wonderful tennis at this time and I considered him as one of the most entertaining players that I've had the privilege to watch. However at these Wimbledon Championships he was under pressure from his country to play and from his fellow players not to. Nastase recalled afterwards, "The Players Association asked me not to play, but the President of Romania (communist dictator, Mr Ceaucescu) phoned me personally and put pressure on me to play." On the middle Saturday Nastase tumbled out of the Championships in the fourth round, after losing several important games from a *deuce* position. I believe to this day, this was a diplomatic loss by Nastase.

Deuce in the game of tennis goes back a very long way, well before the Wimbledon Championships. Back in the sixteenth century when a player fought back to 40-all, they reasoned he'd earned the chance not to be beaten on the very next point. 'A *deux*,' the French would cry, meaning 'to two.' In the May of 1975 at Surbiton, one of Surrey's finest tennis clubs, a match was being played between Keith Glass (UK) & A. Fawcett (Rhodesian). Whilst Surbiton wasn't Wimbledon, it was a prestige tournament in the British tennis calendar and well worth winning. In the 5th game of the second set the umpire called 'deuce' 37 times, in a game of 80 points. It entered the record books for the most points in a single game ever officially recorded. It lasted 31 minutes.

Next Month : Part XI - Great Champions