

Part VI - The New Breed

During the Second World War, tennis was put on the back burner, while the 'Free Nations' went to war with the 'Axis Powers.' During this time, all necessary resources in the United Kingdom were made available for the defence of the country. In the London area for example, sports fields were often occupied by the army for the placement of 'Anti-Aircraft guns.' The premises of some tennis clubs, including Wimbledon, would not be an exception.

The grounds at Church Road, Wimbledon, were used for a variety of civil defence and military functions such as fire and ambulance services, Home Guard and a decontamination unit. Troops stationed within the vicinity, used the grounds for drilling. During this period the Germans were bombing food convoys to the United Kingdom, so the government encouraged the population to grow food at home. The slogan at the time was 'Dig for Victory.' That's why a familiar sight around the Wimbledon club during the early war years, would be rows of vegetables and a small farmyard consisting of pigs, hens, geese and rabbits. In October 1940 a 'stick' of five 500lb bombs struck the Centre Court, resulting in the loss of 1,200 seats. War ended in 1945 and the first post war Wimbledon Championships were held the following year.

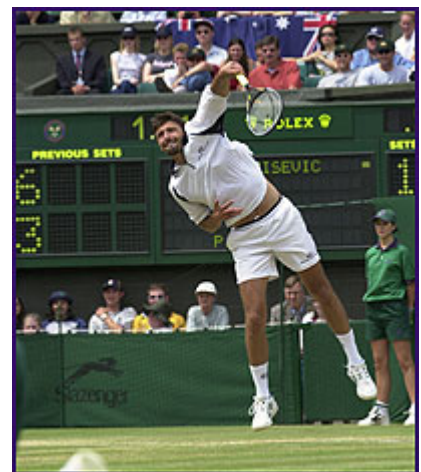
The post war generation of players were a new breed that went on to transform the sport, adding many technical improvements that turned the game into a popular pastime for the middle classes. Now the war was over, gone were the long trousers for men and the ladies could once more become preoccupied with fashion and the colour of their tennis attire. In 1949, Wimbledon responded with an 'all white' requirement for tennis clothing.

The 'second serve' was introduced at Wimbledon from the very first year of the championships. This rule was introduced to help get the game in motion, but of late, has been used by players to get the point over very quickly, like in a few tenths of a second. Officials of the game have experimented with lower pressure balls, a slightly larger ball and talked of having a smaller service box, all to bring back tennis rally's to the men's game. In my opinion, we only need to do away with the second serve. What do you think – let me know by commenting on our Web Site.

However, the record books show that the 'second serve' rule wasn't much help to Miss de Amorin of Brazil in 1957. She was beaten in the second round of the Ladies single's championships at Wimbledon by Mrs Thung of Holland 6-3, 4-6, 6-1. Although able to hit a good return of serve, Miss de Amorin from the start of the match was unable to serve very well. She served 17 consecutive double faults. After the match she commented, "I was very nervous."

The Croatian giant, Goran Ivanisevic, one of the world's greatest ever servers in 1996 served more than 1,500 aces in tournaments. Yet, in New Delhi 1995 in his Davis Cup singles against India's Leander Paes he served 25 double faults in the match, not far from a men's record.

Coaches will tell you, when you are under stress for one reason or another, like first time in a big tournament, serving for the match, etc, the muscles can tense, the elbow wobbles, the throw-up goes all to pot, the head swims and the brain clouds over. A few years ago I had some coaching lessons at Stan Smith's Tennis Academy at Hilton Head, South Carolina, USA. It was said that Stan would recall how in the 1972 Wimbledon final when he beat Nastase, he was very uptight and tense when walking out onto Centre Court. He knew from experience that when his muscles were this tense he would always serve short and into the net so he opened his first service game aiming at Nastase's base line. Stan's first serve was an ace.



Goran Ivanisevic

With the spread of television introducing the game to a much wider audience, tennis was becoming a big-money international sport. The first colour television broadcast from Wimbledon came in 1967, giving the game yet another boost.

In the 1960's Australians, like Rod Laver and Roy Emerson dominated the game, and in the 1970's and 1980's the game become dominated by another new breed of international player. The crowds become captivated by the likes of Bjorn Borg, Jimmy Connors, John McEnroe, Chris Evert, Sue Barker and Martina Natilova.

The speed and quality of the game increased, yet for a short while, there was no corresponding increase in the quality of the Umpires and Line Judges. You may remember some bad calls at Wimbledon from this era, but they were not as bad as the calls in Rome 1963. David Gray, writing in the Guardian newspaper described the tournament as a "*Roman circus*." He then went on to say, "This one will go down in tennis history, for the lack of quality of its officials."

Next Month : Part VII - The 1963 Roman Circus