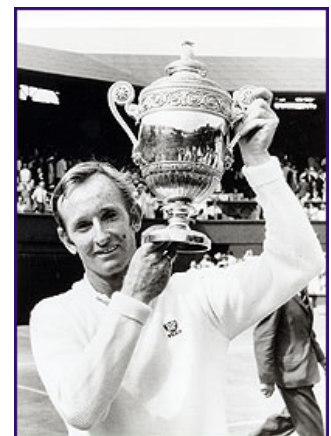


Part VII - The 1963 Roman Circus

On 22nd June 1964, the opening day of Wimbledon, South Africa's Abie Segal was serving for the match against Clark Graebner of the United States. He served, met the return with a firm volley and saw the American's attempted pass go wide into the tramlines by about one foot. Segal went to the net to shake hands but Graebner held his ground and said, "Where are you going, nobody has called out." Segal turned to look at the linesperson, Doris-Brown, but found her fast asleep. He went up to her and shouted, "Do you mind calling out." Then suddenly her eyes opened and she called "out" and pointed with her arm. Segal's comments to the press afterwards were, "I always knew my game was boring, but I didn't think it was that bad. In Italy they fall asleep all the time, but never at match point."

The year before in Rome on the red clay courts of famous Foro Italico, British Davis Cup player Tony Pickard played New Zealand's Ian Crookenden in the second round of the Italian Championships. It was David Gray, writing in the *Guardian*, who described the match as a 'Roman circus.' During the opening set both players complained to the umpire about the linesmen indulging in long conversations with spectators during play. At one stage the players started calling their own lines and the *Daily Telegraph* correspondent reported that Pickard lost at least one important point because a linesman failed to call a ball out because he was leaning over a fence buying an ice-cream at the time. The 'soft drinks' man, too, seems to have been given the freedom of the court as he interrupted the play several times to restock the refrigerator next to the umpire's chair. The *Guardian* match report read, "The most astonishing moment amidst umpiring of an alarming inefficiency came towards the end of the fourth set. In the middle of the game just as Pickard was about to serve, the scoreboard operator called for a drink. A linesman immediately crossed the court and spent some time trying to get the bottle to him, as he was just out of reach on the stand. Pickard put down his racket and watched incredulously." When asked by the press about the incident after the match the umpire said, "You must remember it was very hot out there." In the meantime the British player, Bobby Wilson and his Australian opponent Mulligan, were waiting on another court for over half an hour before they had an umpire. When the umpire finally turned up he explained, "I was having a nap and overslept."

In my youth it was the Australians that dominated the game of tennis with names like, Hoad, Emerson and Newcombe. Around the world the Australians were either winning the championships or proving an extreme nuisance to those that did. My tennis hero at this time was the red-haired, left handed Australian, Rod Laver. In 1961 he won his first Wimbledon title and the following year won the Grand Slam, winning Wimbledon and the Australian and US Championships on grass, and the French on clay. The format has now changed in that Wimbledon is the only championship on grass, with Australia and the US now on hard courts. The following year aged 24 years old, Laver turned professional which made him illegible to play in Grand Slam tournaments. However when these tournaments were opened up to all players in 1968, he won the Wimbledon Championships and the following year won his second Grand Slam. In what is usually regarded as a player's best years 24 to 29 he was illegible to play in these Tournaments. I believe that the record books would have shown Rod Laver as one of the greatest tennis champions of all time, had he had been allowed to play in these tournaments.



Rod Laver

Next Month : Part IIX - Tennis goes OPEN and produces one of the greatest matches of all time.