

2001 A Tennis Odyssey

by Mark Preston and Chris Nicholson

Last year tennis rocketed to new heights.



BEST MATCH: It was, simply, what it was always supposed to have been—brilliant. In one unforgettable evening, we remembered how the **Pete Sampras-Andre Agassi** “rivalry” had long ago been scripted. The two men had met 31 times coming into this US Open quarterfinal, with Sampras winning 17 of those meetings, but it had never been as closely contested or as perfectly played out as this. Here was Sampras the game’s supreme server and Agassi, its greatest returner, not only excelling at the respective strengths but at each others’ as well. For three hours and 33 minutes, each man played at a level that seemed impossible to sustain—and yet somehow, each did. No breaks of serve, four tie-breaks, countless thrills. In the wee hours of the morning, the 6-7, 7-6, 7-6, 7-6 victory went to Sampras. There was no loser.



IT WAS A YEAR of comebacks and coming-out parties; a year illuminated by the brilliance of a legion of young stars and the undiminished glow of the game’s established luminaries.

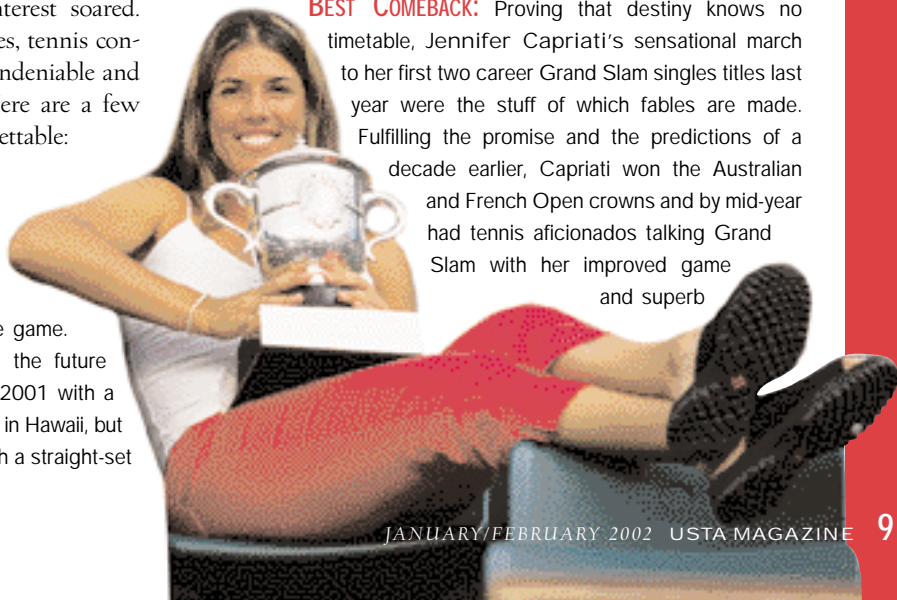
In 2001, all across the country, people were talking tennis—and playing it. Participation and fan interest soared. From the game’s grassroots to its grandest stages, tennis continued its surge in the U.S.; its vibrancy was undeniable and its popularity unmistakable. Here are a few moments that we found unforgettable:

BEST COMING-OUT: After finishing 2000 as the top-ranked junior in the world, Andy Roddick figured to have a fine future in the game.

Still, few could have guessed that the future would arrive so soon. Roddick began 2001 with a win at the USTA-Waikoloa Challenger event in Hawaii, but the future really announced his presence with a straight-set

win over Pete Sampras in the third round of the Ericsson Open in March. “He’s the real thing,” said Sampras of Roddick, who went on to win three singles titles, reach the quarters of the US Open and finish the year ranked No. 14.

BEST COMEBACK: Proving that destiny knows no timetable, Jennifer Capriati’s sensational march to her first two career Grand Slam singles titles last year were the stuff of which fables are made. Fulfilling the promise and the predictions of a decade earlier, Capriati won the Australian and French Open crowns and by mid-year had tennis aficionados talking Grand Slam with her improved game and superb



BEVERLY SCHAEFFER (2), ALLSPORT

fitness. "I'm no longer going to doubt myself in anything," said Capriati after her Aussie win. Without doubt, she'll be a force to reckon with throughout 2002 and beyond.

SO AFTER A FED CUP VICTORY, DO THEY PLAY, "YMCA?"

After Roger Federer clinched the first-round Davis Cup tie for Switzerland over the U.S. with a win over Jan-Michael Gambill, the arena's P.A. system immediately began belting out Shania Twain's "Man, I Feel Like a Woman." Insert punch line here.

YOU CAN TAKE THE BOY OUT OF VEGAS, BUT YOU CAN'T TAKE VEGAS OUT OF THE BOY:

Asked during the Australian Open for his Super Bowl pick, Las Vegas native Andre Agassi answered, "The Giants are a much better team at home, but the Ravens defense is just too good. It will definitely be a defensive win, and it wouldn't surprise me if a defensive player was named MVP." The Ravens won the one-sided affair 34-7, and linebacker Ray Lewis was named the game's MVP. So, if you *should* ever see Agassi in a Vegas sports book, you might want to get close behind him in line.



WE HAVEN'T WITNESSED A DROUGHT THIS STARTLING SINCE WE SAW "THE GRAPES OF WRATH:"

All-time Grand Slam singles champ and longtime No. 1 Pete Sampras was 0-for-2001, failing to win a single singles title for the first year since 1989, his second year as a pro.

KEEPING GOOD COMPANY:

James Blake joined Arthur Ashe and Mal Washington as the only African-Americans to take the court for the US Davis Cup team when he made his debut against India in October. Blake, who starred at Harvard University in 1998 and 1999, also became the first former Harvard student in 75 years to represent the U.S. in Davis Cup play. Richard Norris Williams, who survived the sinking of the Titanic in 1912, was the last Harvard man to play for the U.S. when he played his last Davis Cup tie in 1926. The Davis Cup was founded by Harvard student Dwight Davis and the first US team consisted of Davis and his Harvard teammates Holcombe Ward and Malcolm Whitman.

ANOTHER COUPLE OF ROUNDS AND THEY MAY HAVE BROUGHT OUT CONNORS AND McENROE:

En route to the US Open final, Pete Sampras became the first man in the history of the event to ever consecutively defeat three former US Open champions. In the round of 16, Sampras defeated 1997 and 1998 champion Patrick Rafter. In the quarterfinals, Sampras defeated 1994 and 1999 champion Andre Agassi. In the semifinals, Sampras defeated 2000 champion Marat Safin. He lost the final to Lleyton Hewitt, who had never before won a Grand Slam. Now that he has, he figures to be an easier mark for Sampras this year.

THREE FOR THE SHOW:

U.S. women finished the year at No. 1, 2 and 3 in the WTA rankings. **Lindsay Davenport**, despite not winning a Grand Slam title, claimed the top spot, while two-time Slam champ **Jennifer Capriati** finished No. 2 and Wimbledon and US Open winner **Venus Williams** came in at No. 3. Call it a red, white and blue trifecta—paying off nicely for the status of U.S. women's tennis.

IF YOU COULD MAJOR IN WINNING, SHE'D BE VALEDICTORIAN:

Stanford University sophomore Laura Granville set the NCAA Division I record for most consecutive women's singles victories at 58 when she beat Vanderbilt's Julie Ditty in the semifinals at the USTA/ITA Women's National Team Indoor Championships in Madison, Wis., in February. The woman whose record she'd bested, former Cardinal Patty Fendick, was on hand to see Granville set the remarkable mark, which was snapped in the final when Granville was upset by Georgia's Aarthi Venkatesan.



A CHAMPIONSHIP GESTURE: The USTA Eastern section's 4.0 and 3.0 championship teams, which play out of the Eastern Athletic Club in Blue Point, Long Island, almost didn't make the trip to the National League Championships in Tucson, coming as it did on the heels of the tragic events of Sept. 11. But Nancy Finno, co-captain of the 4.0 team, and Eileen Green, captain of the 3.0 team, decided that the honor of representing New York at the event was reason enough to go. Both teams arrived wearing caps emblazoned with "NYPD" and "FDNY" to honor the heroes still toiling away in New York.

While the Eastern teams were making travel plans, the 3.0 Southern California Section champs from the Murrieta Tennis Club

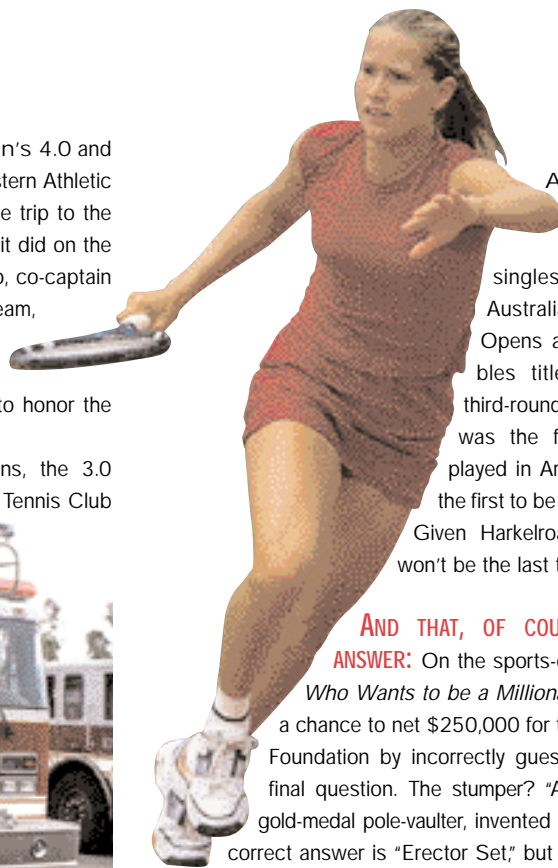


in Murrieta, Calif., were thinking of ways they could help the victims back East. "The team met for practice as always on Tuesday, the same day of the attack," says Mike Deigan, MTC's head pro and the coach of the club's 3.0 women's team. "All we could talk about was what had happened in New York."

The team, Deigan and club owner Scott Dickey got together and decided to organize a tennis exhibition to raise funds for a family victimized by the attacks. The event raised \$3,000. But whom should they give it to? When the team arrived in Tucson, the New Yorkers were easy to spot. Deigan told them about the fund-raiser and asked them if they could help identify a family in need. The New Yorkers had a list of families, and eventually selected the mother of two small children whose husband, a New York City firefighter, had lost his life in the day's carnage. The Southern California team turned the funds over to the team for that family.

"It was truly an amazing, emotional experience for the New York teams," says New York's Linda Saver. "I have never felt so much love and support from so many people. I've been to nationals many times and the teams from New York are usually the teams everybody loves to hate. This time it was different."

LOBBING THE CRADLE: John Korff, promoter of the A&P Classic women's tennis exhibition in Mahwah, N.J., exhibited his entrepreneurial chutzpah when he offered \$10 million to Andre Agassi and Steffi Graf as a guarantee for their as-yet-unborn child, if a girl, to play at his event in 2017. Alas, in November the child was born a boy, Jaden Gil, ruining the chance for the easy prize. The tennis star couple fined the newborn one week's allowance for his first unforced error.

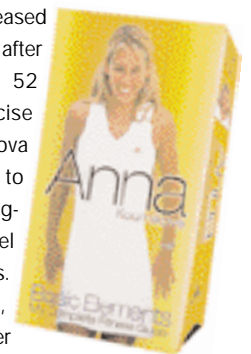


COMING ATTRACTION: Ashley Harkelroad, 16, of Wesley Chapel, Fla., reached the girls' singles semifinals at the Australian, French and US Opens and won the girls' doubles title at Wimbledon. Her third-round match at the US Open was the first junior match ever played in Arthur Ashe Stadium and the first to be aired live on national TV. Given Harkelroad's talent, it certainly won't be the last time for either.

AND THAT, OF COURSE, WAS HIS FINAL ANSWER: On the sports-celebrity version of TV's *Who Wants to be a Millionaire*, Jim Courier missed a chance to net \$250,000 for the Tim & Tom Gullikson Foundation by incorrectly guessing the answer to his final question. The stumper? "A.C. Gilbert, an Olympic gold-medal pole-vaulter, invented what popular toy?" The correct answer is "Erector Set," but Courier, having used all his lifelines, guessed "View Master." Despite the gaffe, Courier still won \$32,000 for the foundation—and an appreciation for just how much spare time pole-vaulters have.

THERE'S SUDDENLY A RUN ON VCRs IN COLLEGE TOWNS ACROSS AMERICA:

For what could end up being the best-selling video of all time—at least among teenage boys—Anna Kournikova donned her warm-up gear for "Basic Elements: My Complete Fitness Guide," released on VHS and DVD after the US Open. In 52 minutes of exercise routines, Kournikova teaches how to develop a toned figure and a high level of general fitness. In her next video, she plans to cover exercises to relieve thumb cramps caused by over-using VCR replay buttons.



TENNIS, EVERYONE: More than 2.7 million people attended ATP and WTA Tour American events in 2001—an all-time record. The greatest draw was the game's Grandest Slam—the US Open—which drew more than 640,000 fans, making it the best-attended annual sporting event in the world.

AND THEY PROBABLY ALSO CAN HIT THE CURVE BALL: Megan Bradley (below right), 18, of Pinecrest, Fla., won the 18s title at the USTA National Spring Championships/Easter Bowl in April. Carly Gullickson, 14, of Brentwood, Tenn., became the youngest singles champion in 13 years at the USTA Girls' 18s Super National Clay Court Championships in Memphis in July. These two budding stars have more than world-class talent in common. Both of their fathers are former major league baseball players: Phil Bradley, a former outfielder with the Orioles and Mariners, and Bill Gullickson, a former pitcher with the Expos, Tigers and Yankees. In other words, neither young lady should be unfamiliar with Grand Slams.



BEST HIRE: After John McEnroe stepped down as U.S. Davis Cup captain after just one season at the helm, many wondered where the U.S. Cup program would go from here. Happily, the USTA found a stellar replacement, without ever even having to turn a page of the phone book, as it named Patrick McEnroe to step in for his older brother. Despite the U.S.'s first-round loss to Switzerland in World Group play, McEnroe, one of the game's best-liked personalities, proved to be a cathartic force for the U.S.'s Davis Cup effort, quickly winning the respect and commitment of a legion of up-and-coming young stars, as well as a surprising commitment for 2002 from one of the game's all-time greats, Pete Sampras. Winning its relegation tie against India got the U.S. back into the World Group, and with McEnroe at the helm, the U.S. Davis Cup effort seems at last to have a clear course, and a captain who can ensure smooth sailing with the help of a dedicated crew.

IN MEMORIAM

PENNY BRAWLEY, 59, University of North Carolina—Charlotte women's tennis coach for more than 20 years and a USTA official, died in February.

DR. HOWARD DREDGE, 83, former president of the USTA Midwest Section and head of the association's first Family of the Year, died Jan. 19.

JAROSLAV DROBNY, 79, winner of the French Open in 1951 and 1952 and member of the International Tennis Hall of Fame, died Sept. 13.

EDWARD EDMUNDS JR., president of the USTA Southwest Section from 1967 to 1969, died June 6.

DAVID FREED, 92, U.S. Davis Cup captain from 1960-61 and secretary of the U.S. Lawn Tennis Association in 1964, died Sept. 1.

ROSALIND GREENWOOD, 74, first chair of the Federation Cup, captain of the U.S. Fed Cup team in 1966, and member of the Middle States Hall of Fame, died in March.

LAURA LOU KUNNEN, 68, winner of five national titles and member of USA Tennis Florida's Hall of Fame, died May 22.

MICKY McNULTY (right), 74, former president of the Louisiana Tennis Association and the USTA Southern Section, and retired state district judge, died Oct. 13.



HERMAN RATCLIFFE, 91, winner of a USTA grand slam in doubles three times, once in the 80s division and twice in the 85s, died April 1.

ROBERT SMITH, 72, former USTA Middle States president, former chair of the Olympic Committee and USTA delegate to the U.S. Olympic Committee board, died in March.

HAL SURFACE, 88, player on the 1936 U.S. Davis Cup team, died Sept. 2.

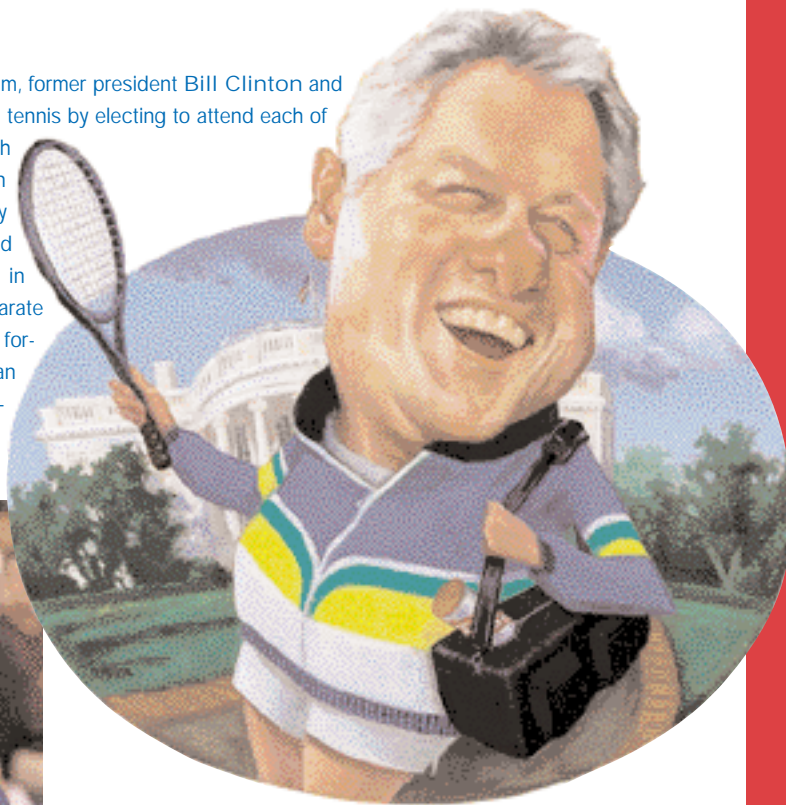
JIM VERDIECK, 82, tennis coach at the University of Redlands whose teams compiled a 921-281 record and won 11 NAIA titles, three Division III championships and one College Division crown, died in October.

GENE WARD, 68, ranked four times in Northern California's Top 10, died Jan. 1.

JIM ZIMMERMAN, 42, umpire since 1980 and USTA supervisor since 1990, died Aug. 4. Zimmerman chaired the US Open men's final in 1997.

FROM LEFT: ROBERT KENAS. COURTESY TOPPS (2); USTA PHOTO (2); FRED MULLANE

EXECUTIVE PRIVILEGE: With the woes of Washington behind him, former president Bill Clinton and the former first family showed their partisanship for professional tennis by electing to attend each of the summer's Grand Slam events. Bill dropped by the French Open, where the press blamed him for jinxing Andre Agassi in the quarterfinals, and then Bill and wife, U.S. Senator Hillary Clinton, visited Wimbledon, where the former president followed Venus Williams' run to a second All-England crown. Finally, in September, Hillary and daughter Chelsea Clinton attended separate sessions of the US Open. Tennis is a fabulous sport," said the former chief executive. "Being there is dramatically better than watching it on television." Sounds like a man ready for a little public service—and volleying.



READY FOR PRIME-TIME PLAYERS: The US Open made history last year when it announced that for the first time in any Grand Slam event, the women's final would be held in prime-time. But the event became even more historic—and more of a prime proceeding—as it featured Venus vs. Serena Williams playing for the title. It was the first time sisters had met in a Slam singles final since 1884, which was hardly a prime time for anyone. Before a packed house and a TV audience of 22.7 million, Venus straight-setted her younger sister and was, on that evening, the brightest star in a brilliant night.

THE DEFINITION OF A WHEEL CHAMPION: Californian Brad Parks, the father of wheelchair tennis, received the International Tennis Federation's prestigious "Special Services to the Game Award" at the annual ITF World Champions Dinner during the French Open. The sport celebrated 25 years of existence in 2001 and it has been Parks' unwavering commitment to the sport that got it—and kept it—rolling. Wheelchair tennis is now the fastest-growing disabled sport in the world, with a pro tour boasting more than \$500,000 in prize money at more than 120 events in 32 countries.



MOST ANIMATED PLAYERS

You know tennis has hit the big time when comes to Springfield, U.S. home of the Simpson family. In February, Venus and Serena Williams, Andre Agassi and Pete Sampras came courting with Homer Simpson and the entire clan in an episode of the hit Fox-TV series. Just one more sign of tennis's ever-widening appeal and further proof that these U.S. stars are the game's top "draws"



HEY, WHEN YOU CAN RUN TWO CAMPAIGNS AT THE SAME TIME, YOU DESERVE AN AWARD: USA Tennis Month spokesperson Bradley Whitford, who campaigned nationwide for the positives of tennis as a family sport with his wife, actress Jane Kaczmarek of FOX's *Malcolm in the Middle*, won an Emmy last year for his portrayal of Josh Lyman, White House Deputy Chief of Staff and a key cog in the re-election campaign of President Jed Bartlet on the NBC hit series, *The West Wing*. "Tennis is a great sport," says Whitford. "It's vigorous exercise that doesn't destroy you and leave you in the emergency room with mid-life crisis issues." Now, if he'd just ask Donna out... ■

