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Anger Management, Tennis –Style

The Ebb and Flow of Emotion

By JOHN MARTIN MELBOURNE, Australia — During his second-set meltdown at the 2011 U.S. Open against Rafael Nadal, the Argentine veteran David Nalbandian raised his racket in disgust and despair, brandishing it above his head on the Arthur Ashe Stadium court.

Soon, it appeared, the racket would be smashed to pieces. The chair umpire, Pascal Maria of France, watched closely in anticipation.

But it did not happen. Suddenly, Nalbandian pulled back from the abyss, lowered his racket and walked to the sideline, his moment of fury defused.

For tennis fans with long memories, it was a chance to ponder the ebb and flow of anger management between players and officials in the last 30 years.

Not everyone has adopted the Nalbandian style: feel it, cool it, move on.

On opening day, Ryan Harrison, who was fined \$2,100 at the French Open for flinging his racket over a fence, lost his temper on the Louis Armstrong court.

Venting his frustration,



John Martin/World Tennis Gazette

OUTBURST: David Nalbandian of Argentina argues a point in match against John Isner of United States at 2012 Australian Open.

Harrison slammed his racket and kicked a ball into the crowd during his first-round loss to Marin Cilic. But the chair umpire, Louise

Engzell of Sweden, kept her cool.

Later that afternoon, Maria Sharapova grew contentious and chal-

lenged no fewer than five calls. The chair umpire, Lynn Welch of the United States, calmly acceded to her repeated requests for video replays.

The next night, Andrey Golubev of Kazakhstan disputed several decisions in his first-round loss to Nadal, gesturing and glaring at his opponent, the crowd and the chair umpire, Carlos Ramos of Portugal. Ramos ignored him.

None of the players' behavior was deemed disruptive or excessive. Even so, by Tuesday night of the second week of the championship, United States Open umpires had cited 30 players for 33 code violations that drew \$44,600 in fines. The offenses included audible obscenities, abuse of rackets and equipment and un-sportsmanlike conduct.

What is different from the bad old days? Paid professional umpires have replaced unpaid volunteers, and players can resort to electronic replays to verify a call they think is wrong. As a result, gone are the towering tantrums of Ilie Nastase, the umpire baiting of John McEnroe and the crude gestures of Jimmy Connors.



International Men's Tennis Weekly

OUTBURST: Gene Mayer argues a point to Dick Roberson in a 1980 men's tournament dispute.

Would McEnroe Now Say: 'Are You, Sir, Perhaps Not Serious?' Not Likely

"It was dreadful," said Dick Roberson, a World Team Tennis supervisor of officials who was hired by the ATP in 1979 and became the chief Grand Prix supervisor.

"Nobody wanted to sit courtside because of the vulgar language," he said.

Roberson's mandate from the Men's International Professional Tennis Council was to conduct training, devise evaluations and certify professional chair umpires who could stand up to misbehaving players.

At the insistence of the ATP, which paid his \$35,000 salary, he became, in effect, the world's first paid professional tennis official. His corps of paid professionals would enforce the rules against profanity, racket abuse, and disruptive behavior in the tantrum-filled age.

Tournaments "were losing sponsors," Roberson said, "they were losing ticket holders."

Roberson recruited referees and umpires to attend training schools he staged in Dallas, Paris, Sydney, and Hong Kong.

Embarking on the ATP circuit, Roberson hired three fellow supervisors, including Kurt Nielsen of Denmark, the 1955 Wimbledon finalist. Together, they searched for men and women who would enforce a new code of conduct. In the process, Robertson persuaded the tennis establishments in the United States, Australia, Britain, and France to adopt his methods. Other nations followed.

One of his early recruits, Rich Kaufman, a linesman from the Pacific Northwest who lived in England, climbed into the umpire's chair in the 1983 Wimbledon Gentlemen's Singles Final. Today, Kaufman is chief umpire of the U.S. Open. Another Roberson recruit was Jim Tunney, who refereed three Super Bowls and was put to work in World Team Tennis matches in California.

"You know why I got him?" Roberson said of Tunney. "So he could handle Nastase."

The most notorious outburst of that era came from McEnroe, who re-

A VIEW FROM THE TALL CHAIR

Ten Years With The Men's Pro Tour



Dr. Charles F. Beck

TIRADE TARGET: Cover of 1988 memoir by veteran chair umpire, Dr. Charles Beck, who was berated by John McEnroe and considered whether to resign.

peatedly screamed at a Wimbledon chair umpire in 1981, including, "You cannot be serious!" It became the title of McEnroe's autobiography.

It is unlikely that McEnroe would now choose to say, "Are you, sir, perhaps, not serious?" But in the different atmosphere today, players are often more respectful toward officials. Some are downright sympathetic.

"I think it's a tough job being an umpire," Roger Federer said last year. "I think players know that, too."

One umpire who might have been pleased to hear Federer's remarks is Dr. Charles F. Beck, who faced a fellow New Yorker's ire in the late 1970s and the 1980s.

"As I drove along, I examined the match that I had done with John McEnroe," he wrote in his 1988 memoir, "A View From the Tall Chair: Ten Years With the Men's Pro Tour."

"Why did he behave so badly? Why did I put myself in a position to listen to him? Is it worth that to an umpire? No one, in my whole life, had ever yelled at me like that. In all of my participation in sports, no player had ever behaved that way."

Beck, who spent a decade on the road working at tournaments, found himself questioning his competence in the wake of McEnroe's tongue-lashing.

"Should I stop?" he wrote. "Is it possible that he is right? Maybe I am not a good official."

Maybe, with his restraint and self-examination, Beck was a better official than he realized.

The new atmosphere fostered by Roberson paid off in several ways, according to Brian Earley, the U.S. Open's tournament referee.

"He was known for his fairness, and also for sharing his ideas about the Code of Conduct with his colleagues, who then disseminated it to the referees and then the chair umpires," Earley said. And he was also a big supporter of chair umpires. He understood

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Richard Osborn
Editor: John Martin

Stricter Rules, Hawk-Eye Technology May Defuse Potential Outbursts

that overrule was necessary. And so we had an absolutely professional lineup, but we still, how many people go out there and call lines for a living? And so the overrule was still necessary."

The overrule enabled chair umpires to defuse outbursts from outraged players who saw the ball better, in some cases, than the linesman or lineswoman.

Jay Snyder, who was U.S. Open tournament director before retiring and becoming a consultant, said McEnroe's demeanor masked an ulterior motive: distract and frustrate his opponent.

"I think the act you saw on court was part of John's game. John never cheated. I can say that about him straight up. He never cheated. He never stole a call," Snyder said.

"But he tried to intimidate officials. And he truly was convinced that his eyes were better than anybody else's. That's why they named the slow motion camera — when CBS used that slow motion camera on the baseline and the service line to show the ball, they called it the McCam. Because John was the one who felt that his eyes were better than anybody else's."

One additional factor that has led to fewer disputes is Hawk-Eye, the image machine that translates signals from as many as ten cameras into an animated line call.

An incident last year at a tournament in Monterrey, Mexico, convinced Jelena Jankovic of Serbia of the value of ball-tracking cameras, she said.

"They didn't have the Hawk-Eye," she said, "and obviously you're gonna have some close calls."

Jankovic lost in the finals of the tournament but refused to blame the loss on a bad call.

"I mean, it was close, so you don't know if it was against you or not, because you don't have the challenge," she said. "So you can't really be sure."

Caroline Wozniacki of Denmark said the technology helps players shake off doubts about possible bad calls.



Ray Stubblebine/Associated Press

ATTACK: When tirades were tirades, John McEnroe took a swing at a television sound technician during his 1981 Open semifinal match.



Rich Kaufman

something he doubts McEnroe would accept, even today.

"The research showed — he would not believe it — but the research shows that when you're running, when you plant your foot, your eyeballs bounce, and you can't focus on a fixed point."

The problem facing Snyder and other chair umpires and lines people was McEnroe's insistence that he could see better than any official.

"I'll never forget, he was at the net, and he went to return a ball that was hit at him, and he just ducked it. He didn't turn around to see where it landed, he just knew it was going out. It was good. It was called good. And he just argued and argued and argued. He hadn't even seen it. But he just thought he knew better than anybody else."

As Roberson's regime began to take hold, he said, players grew to support the standards he imposed,

aware that they stood a better chance of prevailing in arguments if their antagonist in the dispute was a professional.

Still, as a reformer, Roberson said he faced resistance by the International Tennis Federation to the professional rules and conduct he wanted to

adopt for his certified umpires.

"It was mainly from the ITF, it was mainly from their rules people," he said. "Their attitude was 'What if there's a final at Wimbledon, and a player goes bonkers

"I think it really helps," she said, "just to check, just get the calls out of your head."

While it doesn't mean players no longer lose their tempers, the Hawk-Eye technology settles many disputes that might have erupted into a major altercation.

For Snyder, who faced McEnroe's ire as a chair umpire, the technology proves a point,

The New York Times

A condensed version of this article appeared in The New York Times on Sept. 8, 2011 under the title: "Over Time, Tantrums Become Tamer"

Over Time, Tantrums Become Tamer — Or Not, Officials Discover



Stan Honda/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

Ryan Harrison of the United States kicked ball into crowd after missing a shot on opening day of the 2011 U.S. Open. Earlier, at the 2010 French Open, he tossed his racket over a fence, violating tournament rules.

on the court. And he's swearing, and all this kind of stuff. And they said, 'Whadda you gonna do with him?' I said, 'I'm gonna default him.' 'Whatta ya mean? The fans. Think of the fans.' I said, 'Have you ever gone to a boxing match? A championship boxing match? And there was a knockout in the first 30 seconds? It's over. It's over.'"

Today, some top players still cannot control their anger. At the French Open in May, Fernando Verdasco of Spain drew a \$5,000 fine for repeated audible obscenities.

In a qualifying match at Roland Garros a few days earlier, Ryan Harrison flung his racket over a fence, narrowly missing spectators and ball kids walking on a pathway beneath a tree which deflected the racket. He refused to discuss the incident with a reporter but tournament officials fined him for his behavior.

In Melbourne last month, David Nalbandian, who managed his anger at the U.S. Open, railed against

a chair umpire who refused to allow him to challenge a call after the specified time had elapsed. For nearly five minutes, Nalbandian argued with the umpire and a supervisor who was summoned to the court.

Moments later, Nalbandian lost the final point of the match to John Isner, stormed off the court into a narrow passageway where he pushed aside tournament officials in a manner regarded as unsportsmanlike.

Still, some others have managed to curb their enthusiasm for even mild tantrums. At Wimbledon in July, Jo-Wilfried Tsonga of France missed a pop volley that could have pulled him out of a downward spiral against Novak Djokovic in the semifinals.

As his shot landed long, Tsonga raised his racket and appeared ready to slam it into the Center Court turf. Then he checked his motion, gingerly placed the racket in his mouth.

Anger managed, released, and left behind.



John Martin/World Tennis Gazette

POINT OF ORDER: Brian Earley, U.S. Open referee on French Open duty.