

# World Tennis Gazette

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## After 11 Days, Djokovic Gets the Boot And the Tennis World Moves On

*Covering the Australian Open Via Television From Courtside In Santa Monica and New York*

By JOHN MARTIN

It was early January when Australian government officials first rejected Novak Djokovic's insistence that he be allowed to compete without vaccinating in the 2022 Australian Open.

As they ordered him expelled from the country, my cellphone rang.

It was Dick Roberson, the retired U.S. official widely credited with establishing tennis's first professional codes of personal conduct, in the late 1970s.

"Hey John," he said, a nod to our first-name friendship. "So," I said, "what do you think?"

Among several answers, he said that Australia was "the very first Grand Slam that I went into with my program, and they absolutely loved it."

The reason, Roberson said, was the country's love of sports and fair play.

"They were already tired of Connors and Agassi," he said, "but their own Mark Edmondson was quite a hothead, and they didn't know how to control him."

As Roberson recalled, Australians followed the rules with powerful, determined attention

A day or two later, French sports officials declared that Djokovic was welcome to compete at Roland Garros this year without vaccinating. A few days later, French government health officials said the equivalent of "not so fast."

The world began debating Djokovic's insistence that he need not accept the vaccine or obey rules to protect the public's health.



John Martin photo  
**EXCLAMATION POINT:** In 2012, Djokovic ripped off his shirt and screamed to signal his victory in the Australian Open men's final.

A *New York Times* columnist called Djokovic "The sport's most visible vaccine skeptic,

A New York City doorman called him "No-Vax" Djokovic.

Commentator Mary Carillo, told the *PBS Newshour*: "This is a guy who is so precise in his footwork on the court, but he has made so many missteps. He's lost the favor of the country and the locker room...I think he's got to pull out."

The *New Yorker* saw a "dis-mally confusing polarizing fiasco."

By week's end, Djokovic had again been ordered to leave and was again appealing in court.

As the world waited, I remembered Roberson's conclusion: "Whatever their rules are, they (Australians) enforce them 100 percent. And there are no exceptions. You can walk on water, and there's still no exceptions to whatever they want." He was right.

When Djokovic left, the Open opened and players began playing. Watching from a Tennis Channel studio in Santa Monica, Martina Navratilova, Lindsay Davenport, and Jon Wertheim began doing what they do. Comment. *World Tennis Gazette* reported (remotely via television and laptop computer) from New York.

Was Djokovic forgotten? Yes and no.

On Day 3, Germany's Yannick Hanfmann, a qualifier, smashed a crosscourt backhand far beyond Rafael Nadal's running reach. I heard an ESPN voice say, "Is Djokovic here?"

There was no answer, of course. The world's No. 1-ranked player was not there and would not be.