

**Your on the
Street Reporter**



Uyless Black

BNP Paribas Indian Wells Tennis Tournament

BNP Paribas Open at Indian Wells

March 6, 2017

I have left our home in north Idaho for a while. There are four reasons for leaving: One, to visit the Shasta dam; two, to update assessments of Palm Springs restaurants; three, to report on the BNP Parabis Tennis Tournament; four, to avoid shoveling snow from my driveway in Hayden, Idaho.

Truth be told, the fourth reason is bogus. I no longer shovel snow. My back, hips, knees, ankles, wrists, and brain counsel against such activity. Nonetheless, going south in the winter cuts down on my fees to the snow removal crews. I can wait for the warmth of spring to remove the snow.

The Tournament

The BNP Paribas Open Tournament is considered by many people to be the most significant tennis event after the four grand slams (Wimbledon, French Open, U.S. Open, and Australian Open). The facilities are impressive. See Figure 1 for a view of its main court.¹



Figure 1. Main court at Indian Wells.

Its venue in Indian Wells, California, is one of the finest tennis facilities in the world. Its formal name is Indian Wells Tennis Garden. Its owner, Larry Ellison, has upgraded the site to be comparable to the grand slam facilities. A later piece in this series will describe Mr. Ellison's feats.

The tournament attracts the world's most famous and gifted tennis players. For 2017, both

Williams sisters are playing. So are Roger Federer, Rafael Nadal, Novak Djokovic, and Andy Murray. A lesser known but a player of great talent is Stan Wawrinka. He is in a different bracket from Federer, Nadal, and Djokovic. So, with trying to keep this article to some limits in words, we will not follow Stan unless he ends-up in the quarter-finals or semi-finals, which he likely will.

Grunts? One of the reasons I chose to attend this tournament was to report on the disparity of males' discernment of beautiful women and their un-womanly grunts...on the tennis court, that is. As much as I admire Maria Sharapova's talent on the court, I am put-off with her grunting with each of her strikes on the ball. I think to myself: *For god's*

¹ <http://www.tours4tennis.com/bnp-paribas-open/schedule>.

sake, Maria, most players manage to hit the shit out of the ball without uttering a vocal fart while doing so.

Her elegant play at the game seems to contradict her guttural moans. It is not as if she is locked in a death-to-death combat.

Nonetheless, I am disappointed to learn she is not playing in this tournament. She is not eligible to compete until April of this year. The next part of this series will examine the injustice that has been served on this gifted, articulate, beautiful...and yes, grunting athlete.

March 7, 2017: One of the Men's Quarter Draws, and a Significant Withdrawal,

Serena withdraws: Unfortunate news for the tournament spectators, but not for the women contestants: Serena Williams has pulled out of the tournament. She is suffering from a left knee injury and will be missing the upcoming Miami tournament as well. In addition, last year's winner of the women's singles, Victoria Azarenka is not playing, after having given birth to a child. As mentioned, Ms. Sharapova will not be playing either.

In the same quarter bracket. And unfortunate news for the spectator: three of the most prominent men's players in the world have been placed in the same quarter draw, as seen in Figure 2.

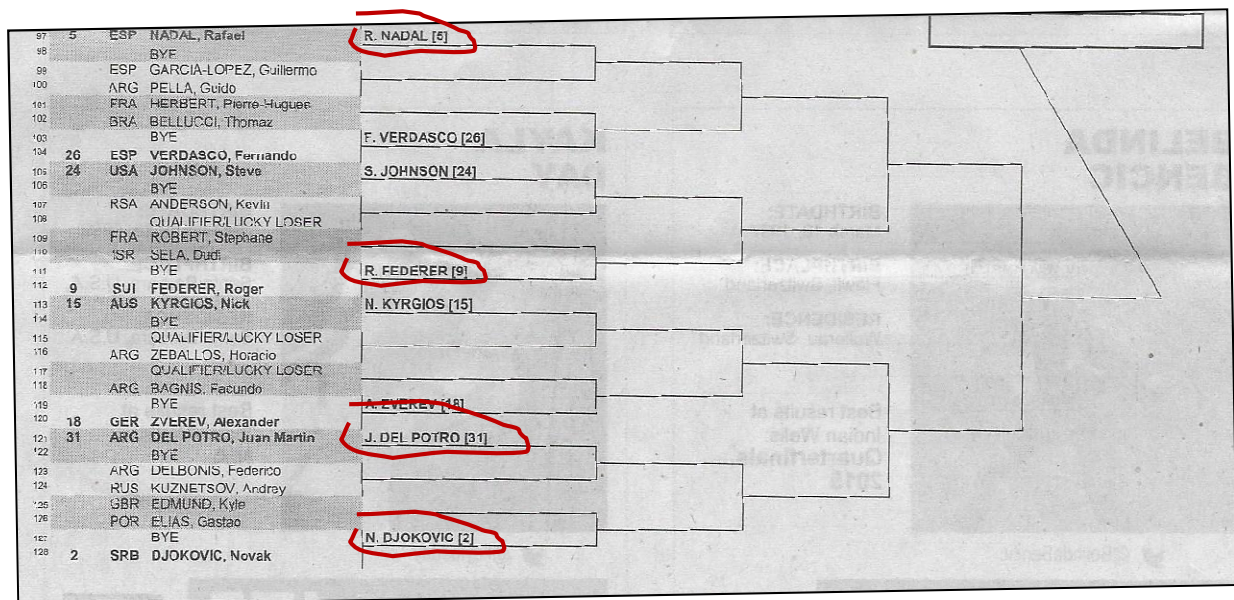


Figure 2. Seedings in one quarter.

These seedings are not done arbitrarily, but are based on the rankings of the players, and their past performances.

I have also placed in a red circle the name of Juan Martin del Potro, my favorite male tennis player. I watched Juan Martin defeat Roger Federer at the 2009 U.S. Open. I admire Mr. Federer, but I cheered for del Potro, as he was an underdog.

I am also cheering for him in this tournament. Since his victory in 2009, he has been plagued with wrist injuries, yet he managed to win a bronze medal in the 2012

men's singles at the 2012 London Olympics, a silver medal at the 2016 Rio Olympics and be a member of a successful Argentine Davis Cup team. He seems to be making a comeback.



I have not shown the quarter bracket that includes Andy Murray, the current champion of the men's singles title. To give him his due, the most recent issue of the magazine *Palm Springs Life*, presented his picture on the cover, as seen in Figure 3.

He does not get the positive press coverage of these other players, partially because of his public reticence, maybe because of his shyness. Could be he is just basically bad-tempered. For his performance on the court, it is irrelevant.

Figure 3. The current champion.

I will write about this tournament as its events unfold. After all, one of the reasons for being in this part of the country is to attend this event and report it to you, not to mention to avoid shoveling snow in north Idaho.

March 8, 2017: Getting Started

The tournament is getting underway. The first days of the matches will consist of players contending to be placed in the bracket of 128 contenders. These qualifiers, numbering 12 for this tournament, are usually judged as fodder for the upper-echelon players. They are considered as practice---challenging practice for sure---to attune the tennis gentry for later matches. As we proceed through this report, we will track their progress. But given their history, we will focus on the seeded players, unless one of these 12 upset a highly seeded player.

Still, giving the unseeded players their due, they and we bow to those who attract attention. For now, I take a diversion to this tournament to write about a woman who should be a contestant.

March 9, 2017: Maria Sharapova, a Beauty in more ways than Looks.

Maria Sharapova should be playing in this tournament. She has been done a great disservice by the tennis authorities. Here are some excerpts I have paraphrased from sources on the Internet to exemplify how absurd this ban has been:

On March 7, 2016, it was revealed she had failed a drug test at the 2016 Australian Open. She attributed this incident to taking a medicine that had been prescribed to her for a heart condition. The prescription had been in effect for ten years. The medicine had not been on a banned list.

The World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) put the medicine on a list of banned substances, but did not send out a notice to this effect. Her critics say: Someone on Mrs.Sharapova's staff should have been monitoring these notices. Is a tennis player obligated to have a staff? It is not as if she were the CEO of General Motors.

The assertions of these agencies are ludicrous. Even more disturbing, the notice about this medicine was of a different name than the name on the list of Maria's medications.

Here is a direct quote from Ms. Sharapova:

I received a letter from the ITF that I failed a drugs test at the Australian Open. I take full responsibility for it. For the past ten years, I have been given a medicine called *mildronate* by my family doctor and a few days ago after I received the ITF letter, I found out that it also has another name of *meldonium*, which I did not know. It is very important for you to understand that for ten years, this medicine was not on WADA's banned list, and I had legally been taking the medicine for the past ten years. But on January 1, 2016, the rules had changed and meldonium became a prohibited substance, which I had not known. I was given this medicine by my doctor for several health issues that I was having in 2006."²



The incompetence and irresponsibility of the ITF and the WADA is stunning. They have severely compromised the career of one of the most gifted tennis players of the modern era. We can only hope they regret their imbecile actions.

Other than admiring the stunning beauty of this woman, and her take-no-holds attitude, I usually turn off the sound of a program in which she was playing, because I cannot put up with passionate grunts with each stroke of her racquet.

Figure 4. Yes, she really grunts.

I watched her interview with Charlie Rose, which I urge her detractors to watch. One of the reasons I came to this tournament was to watch Maria Sharapova grunt her way into her points. Maybe next year. In the meantime, Ms. Sharapova, I am an admirer of female beauty, as seen in Figure 4: Grunt all you wish. You've earned it, not with your looks, but with your tennis playing ability. Nonetheless, when I watch you on television, I will continue to turn the volume down.³

March 10, 2017: Larry Ellison and his Predecessors

I have been lying low. I have an increasing reluctance to venture into five hours of over-90 degrees, sun-filled skies. Granted, I came down here to report on a wonderful tennis tournament, but not to select my method of skin cancer.

Excusive of age and sun aside, this part of the article describes how this facility became one of the best tennis venues in the world.

² "Maria Sharapova fails drug test: Her statement in full after admitting testing positive for meldonium." *Independent.co.uk*. 7 March 2016.

³ Courtesy of Google.

The creators of the site and the tournament were Charlie Pasarell and Ray Moore. Both men were talented tennis players. They met at a tournament in Philadelphia in 1964. Each became nationally ranked. They eventually created what we today call the Indian Wells Tennis Tournament.

The tournament was originally located in Tucson, Arizona, then moved to Mission Hills, California, and later to the city of Indian Wells. Indian Wells was not keen on having large tennis crowds convene on the city every year. But the city eventually agreed to an (initial) 4,000-seat stadium. The main stadium now seats 16,100 and is the second largest tennis stadium in the world. The main stadium at the U.S. Open seats 23,200.

The tournament became a success, but its (eventual) board of directors felt the need to sell the tournament. The offers to buy the tournament came from Singapore and oil-rich countries, which meant this major tennis event might leave America. In 2009, Doha, Qatar, made an offer of \$87.5 million to buy the tournament.



Figure 5. Larry Ellison.

Charlie Pasarell knew Larry Ellison and of Larry's love of tennis. Larry began playing the game later in his life when he concluded he could no longer continue getting banged up playing in pickup basketball games.

Ellison is the founder of Oracle and one of the richest men in the world. (His photo is shown to the left in Figure 5.⁴) Thus, he had the funds to buy the tournament. He made an offer of \$100 million, which the board eventually accepted.

Since that time, Mr. Ellison has spent millions of dollars improving the facilities. I have visited the site five times over the past seven years. With each visit, it is evident that more improvements have been made.

When attending sports or music events that draw large crowds, more often than not, the general parking facilities are little more than dusty, semi-grass pastures. Not so for Indian Wells. As Figure 6 shows, acres upon acres of parking spaces are covered with grass that could be used on a golf fairway, green and closely mowed.



Figure 6. Manicured parking lots.

March 11, 2017. Andy Murray vs. Vasek Pospisil

⁴ Tennis.com, November/December 2010, np.

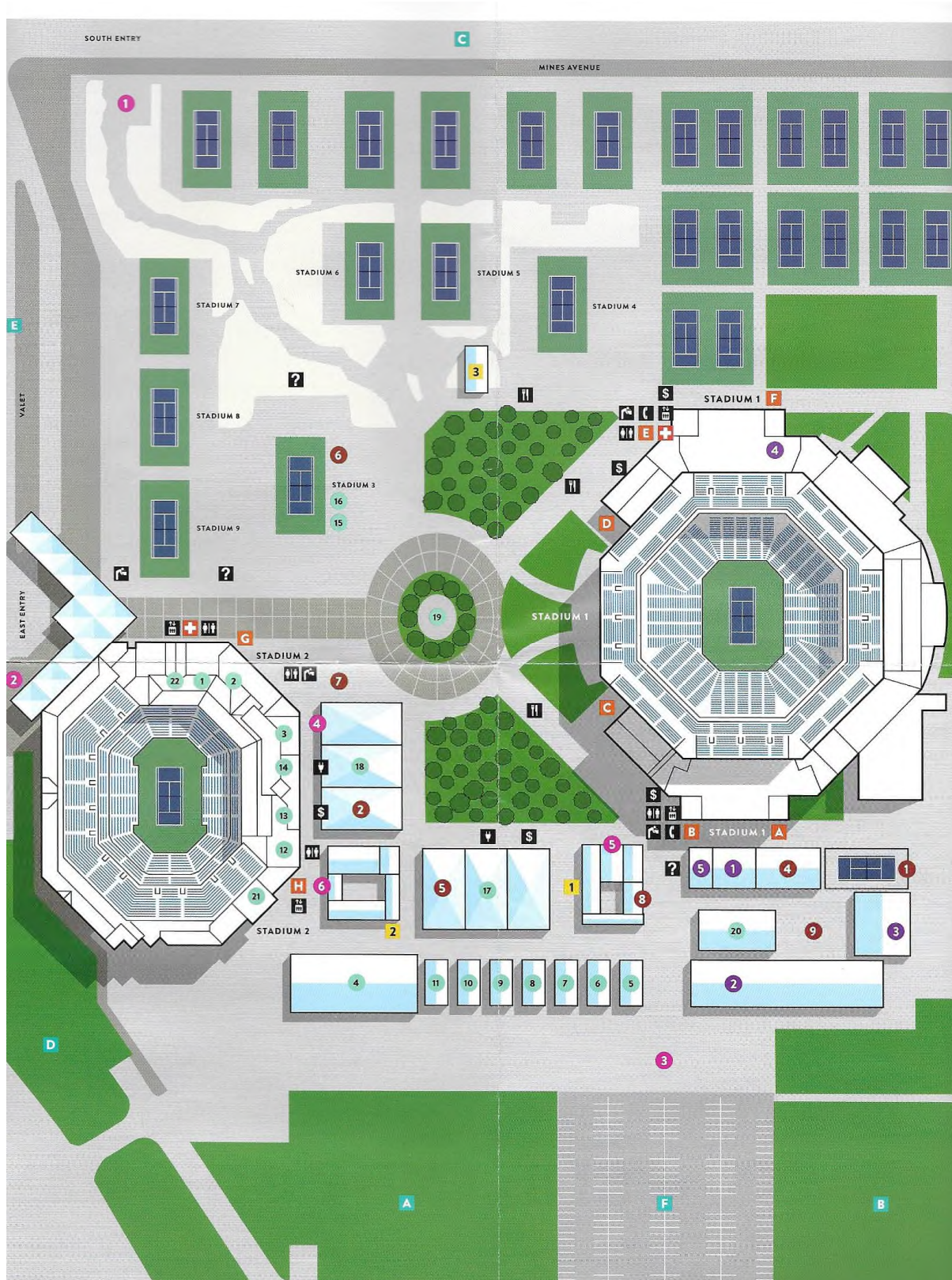
A huge upset occurred today. The number one seed, Andy Murray, was taken down by a qualifier from Canada by the name of Vasek Pospisil, with a score of 6-4 and 7-6 (tie breaker). Yes, a qualifier, not even in the 128 of contenders. But these qualifiers are not club pros. They are gifted players.

How did this come about? Let's examine some statistics as shown below. First, look at the third red circle. Only three points separated the two players. The pros are well aware of how important each point is. We hackers do not. Look at the first red circle. Andy had five more double faults than did Vasek. For the second red circle: Few people know that one of the most important factors in winning a tennis match is the ability to return a first serve in such a manner as to put the server on the defensive. As the stats show, Vasek won 33% of Andy's first serves, while Andy won 29 % of Vasek's first serves. These facts tell the tale of Pospisil's victory and Murray's loss.

Andy Murray	vs	Vasek Pospisil
Service		
3	Aces	5
7	Double Faults	2
62%	First Service	68%
30/45 (67%)	First Service Won	34/48 (71%)
11/27 (41%)	Second Service Won	8/23 (35%)
6/10 (60%)	Break Points Saved	2/5 (40%)
11	Service Games Played	11
Return		
14/48 (29%)	First Returns Won	15/45 (33%)
15/23 (65%)	Second Returns Won	16/27 (59%)
3/5 (60%)	Break Points Won	4/10 (40%)
11	Return Games Played	11
Points		
41/72 (57%)	Total Service Points Won	42/71 (59%)
29/71 (41%)	Total Return Points Won	31/72 (43%)
70/143 (49%)	Total Points Won	73/143 (51%)

March 12, 2017: A Tour of the Indian Wells Garden

I decided to spend part of this day walking around the stadium campus and watching some games on the side courts. The next page provides a map of the campus. Figures 7 and 8 show some scenes of the campus.



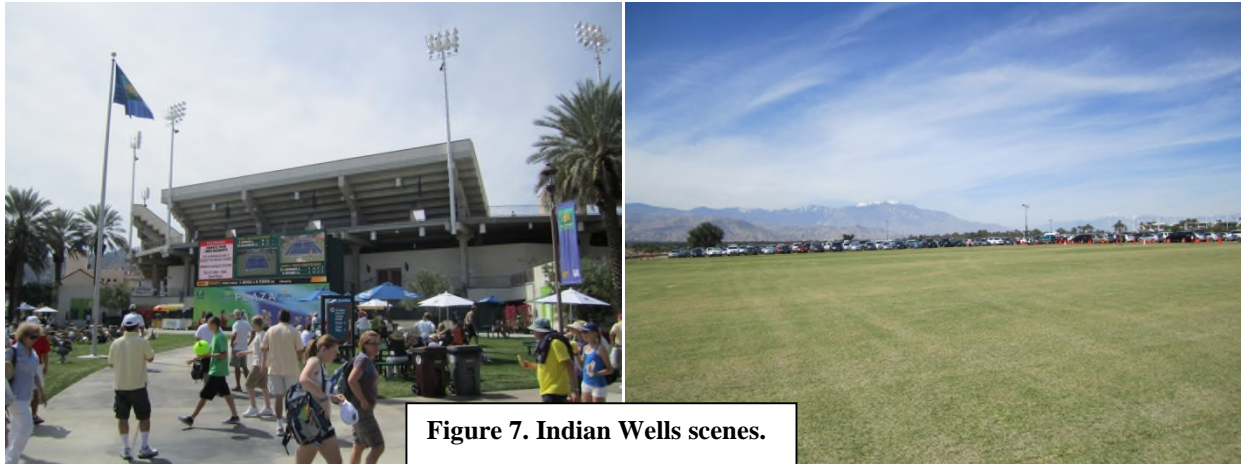


Figure 7. Indian Wells scenes.

One aspect of the Indian Wells tennis facility is the expanse of trees and grass. In a hot desert day, they offer cool pleasant venues for the fans to take a recess, fresh respites to the intense heat of the playing courts. I took in the grass and shade for a while, while taking-in a frosty Corona---courtesy of a nearby beer booth.



Figure 8. More scenes.

Unfortunately for me, I am cutting back on attendance. The daytime temperatures are just too hot. Although I drive at night, my faulty night vision discourages frequent evening outings. Nonetheless, I intend to attend the Tuesday night match between Novak Djokovic and Juan Martin del Potro. I had seen both men play during the 2009 U.S. Open. Juan defeated Roger Federer in a five set beauty to win the championship.

March 14, 2017: Novak Djokovic vs. Juan Martin del Potro

Tonight, the temperature is perfect. No wind. I brought a jacket, but it was not needed.

Is there a point, somewhere in our bodily functions, in which mental memory enhances or inhibits our muscle memory? Of course there is. It is the ever-lasting truth

that mind is over matter. That mental memory can sometimes overcome muscle memory. And yes, muscle memory can fail mental memory.

I believe I witnessed one of the best players in the world having his mental memory get in the way of his muscle memory, lose his momentum, and therefore, the match. More on this idea shortly.



Figure 8. Two of the best.

For now, here are the contenders for a match I have hoped to see since deciding to come to this tournament. They are shown in Figure 8.⁵ To the left is del Potro. To the right is Djokovic.

Since winning the 2009 U.S. Open, del Potro has been plagued by injuries, as described earlier. Meanwhile, Djokovic has practically owned the men's singles at Indian Wells. He won the championship for the years of 2008, 2011, 2014, 2015, and 2016. He is seeded number two in the tournament, while del Potro is seeded number 31.

Again, let's use some statistics to analyze the match, as shown on the next page. Djokovic won the match by a score of 7-5, 4-6, 6-1. The first two sets, as the scores indicate, were close. For the third set, by the fifth game, I concluded Novak was on his way to a lopsided victory; that he was going to clean Juan's plow, so to speak. And that is what happened.

Take a look at the third red circle. Novak won 20 more points than Juan: 99 to 79. As indicated by the first circle, Juan's aces kept him in the match. On two separate games, he was down love - 40 (0 -40). He served three aces in succession (twice!) to eventually save both games.

However, and indicated by the second circle, Djokovic still won more of his service points and the return of service points. Case closed. My favorite player lost. He had a chance in the first set, as the scoreboard in Figure 9 shows. He was serving to even the set at 5-5. But he got behind on his serve 30-40, then lost the next point. Set to Djokovic.



Figure 9. Ad out, set point.

⁵ Courtesy of Google.

Juan Martin del Potro	vs	Novak Djokovic
Service		
13	Aces	4
3	Double Faults	1
68%	First Service	64%
41/62 (66%)	First Service Won	41/56 (73%)
10/29 (34%)	Second Service Won	18/31 (58%)
8/13 (62%)	Break Points Saved	1/4 (25%)
14	Service Games Played	15
Return		
15/56 (27%)	First Returns Won	21/62 (34%)
13/31 (42%)	Second Returns Won	19/29 (66%)
3/4 (75%)	Break Points Won	5/13 (38%)
15	Return Games Played	14
Points		
51/91 (56%)	Total Service Points Won	59/87 (68%)
28/87 (32%)	Total Return Points Won	40/91 (44%)
79/178 (44%)	Total Points Won	99/178 (56%)

Still, Juan recovered and won the second set, 6-4. The third set started evenly. In the fourth game, the players were on serve, with a score of 1-2, with Juan serving. I think the tide of the match turned for Novak on the fourth game of the set. The score was 40-40. Juan hit a soft drop shot so close to the net that I said to myself: *What a fantastic shot!* Novak was far away, outside the service line. The man is *very* fast. He got to the ball and put it away. The crowd and I could hardly believe it. The result was: Ad out, advantage Djokovic.

After this point, which made the score one point away from Novak winning the game, Juan's shoulders seem to slump. I could be off-base in this observation. but my readers are paying me (nothing) to be observant. But I will be observant anyway.

Next: del Potro's serve was in, and Djokovic hit a weak defensive return. del Potro countered what should have been an easy backhand return, but the ball went into the net, an unforced error. Novak was now in the lead, 3-1 and serving. Imagine, in only two points, the match was being decided.

Novak took over the match after that, which contributed to the lop-sided "total points won" statistics.

Mind over matter? Matter over mind? Our brain can shut down under stressful conditions. Certain parts of the brain become blocked by other parts, which impair the functioning of the neocortex. I will not bore you with any more of this biology. But it appeared to me that after Novak's improbable put-away of what appeared to be a winning point for del Potro, the Argentine's mind faltered.

In no way do I fault del Potro. Tennis, like golf, with its many pauses between action, entails more thought, more introspection, than say basketball, water polo, sprint swimming, or hockey. To achieve superior performances, all require extraordinary mental toughness. With the exception of hockey, I have played these other sports.

I was never much of competitor in golf, but for a while, I was a good club player in tennis, played in tournaments, and was pretty good at swimming. I can say with confidence that tennis, with its pauses between actions, can have a mental effect on the player. In addition, tennis and golf are solitary pursuits. No coaches to brace you up. No team-mates to pat your butt, and say "forget about it man, keep trucking!"

You are on your own, with your only companion being your mind. Placing ourselves into del Potro's shoes: *You just hit perhaps the best shot of the match, one in which you thought you had it in the bag. But you lost the point.*

Do not get down on yourself, Mr. del Potro. Join the long line of other athletic geniuses who have faltered. Greg Norman at the Masters golf tournament comes to mind. I do not question your resoluteness or your mental toughness. I am suggesting that you, like us spectators watching your brilliance, are human. All of us are often victims of the vagaries of this mysterious organ we carry-around in our heads.

March 15, 2017: Roger Federer vs. Rafael Nadal

I watched Rafael Nadal play several matches in Paris, France, at the 2010 French Open, which he won. I watched Roger Federer play several matches in New York City at the 2009 U.S. Open, which he lost (to Juan Martin del Potro).

I have mentioned that my favorite male tennis player is Juan, partially because he has stayed tenacious, never lost faith in himself, and came back from many injuries. Yet he is ranked 35th in the world. To attest to his mental toughness, in between these injuries, I also mentioned he won the bronze medal in men's singles at the 2012 London Olympics, and the silver medal in men's singles at the 2016 Rio Olympics, plus being a member of his country's winning Davis Cup team (Argentina).

That said, I have three men tied for first on my list of favorite male tennis players. First: myself.

Dream on. The fact is that I am close to giving up the game. I have arthritis in my hips. I have a symptom of rotator cuff injury to my serving arm (right).

It is a difficult decision, as I love the game, and the camaraderie that goes along with it. Nonetheless, I have had a good run. Maybe it is time to take in the sails in this regard. ...But I have still not decided.

Back to my top three tennis competitors. In alphabetical order: del Potro, Federer, and Nadal. But why? It is not just because of their athletic ability. It is also because they are gracious men. They are the opposites of the obnoxious, infantile Jimmy Connors and the petulant, bullying John McEnroe. I have respect for these men's games. I have no respect for the men themselves.

Which brings us to the match on March 15 between Federer and Nadal.

I copied the picture in Figure 10 from *The Desert Sun*, a local newspaper in the Palm Springs area.⁶

It appears that Rafa is consoling Roger for having lost the match. Rafa is patting Roger on the chest. His face conveys: *Good game, my friend, I just had it going for me for this go-around.* Roger's face conveys: *Yeah, thanks, Rafa. I gave it my best shot. I just did not have the juice in me for this one.*



Figure 10. Who won?

What an amazing image. Quite the opposite. Federer won the match in a lopsided way: 6-2, 6-3. We will look at some stats about the match shortly. Of more importance is the picture shown in Figure 10: What class. What friendship between two arch-rivals. What elegance of camaraderie. What mutual respect. And what grace on the part of Rafa.

Can you imagine such a scene between the two...let's call a spade a spade... asses of recent American tennis: Jimmy Connors and John McEnroe?

With my competitive nature, and even if I had an inkling of the level of brilliance of Nadal's ability, the picture in Figure 10 blew me away...or using our more politically correct, modern parlance: melted my heart.

Of course, Jimmy and John might regale my dip into these maudlin depictions. If so, I would offer to them: Your ultimate worth to our race is reflected in the image in Figure 10, not in berating voluntary line judges, not in running around the adjacent court to erase a ball mark. I rarely use profanity in my work, but for this essay, I repeat: Connors and McEnroe are supreme asses. I have no respect for them. I can only hope they might learn from del Potro, Federer, and Nadal. But I doubt my hope, as it would be asking them to change their personality.

Enough about the elegance of some players and the lack of elegance of others. Let's see how Roger dissembled Rafal. For starters, from 2005 to 2010, they won 21 of

⁶ Omar Ornelas, *The Desert Sun*, March 16, 2017, 1A.

the 24 grand slams. Had not Novak Djokovic come along, this monopoly would have continued.

For this match: First, Roger was able to handle Rafal's extreme topspin. Second, he was more aggressive than usual, and moved in on Rafal's second serve more than he usually has done in the past. Third, his angle shots---not to the baseline, but to the service line---were phenomenal. Federer does not have a serve of high velocity, but he has uncanny accuracy and spin with his serve. He won 76% of this first serves, and an amazing 75% of his second serves.

Roger won 57 points. Rafal won 42 points. Game, set, match.

March 15, 2017: Current Standings in one Quarter of the Draw

Here are the standings in the quarter of the bracket we have been following. Look at the bottom part of the bracket, highlighted with a red circle. I have just discussed the match between Federer and Nadal, which I have highlighted in the blue circle

96	4	JPN	NISHIKORI, Kei				
97	5	ESP	NADAL, Rafael	R. NADAL [5]			
98			BYE		R. NADAL [5]		
99		ESP	GARCIA-LOPEZ, Guillermo	G. PELLA	63 62		
100		ARG	PELLA, Guido	46 75 62		R. NADAL [5]	
101		FRA	HERBERT, Pierre-Hugues	P. HERBERT		63 75	
102		BRA	BELLUCCI, Thomaz	76(5) 67(1) 63	F. VERDASCO [26]		
103			BYE	F. VERDASCO [26]	76(5) 61		
104	26	ESP	VERDASCO, Fernando				
105	24	USA	JOHNSON, Steve	S. JOHNSON [24]			
106			BYE		S. JOHNSON [24]		
107		RSA	ANDERSON, Kevin	K. ANDERSON	64 36 76(4)		
108	Q	ITA	GAIO, Federico	61 64		R. FEDERER [9]	
109		FRA	ROBERT, Stephane	S. ROBERT	76(3) 76(4)		
110		ISR	SELA, Dudu	64 64	R. FEDERER [9]		
111			BYE	R. FEDERER [9]	62 61		
112	9	SUI	FEDERER, Roger				
113	15	AUS	KYRGIOS, Nick	N. KYRGIOS [15]			
114			BYE		N. KYRGIOS [15]		
115	Q	ROU	COPIL, Marius	H. ZEBALLOS	63 64		
116		ARG	ZEBALLOS, Horacio	67(5) 76(2) 64		N. KYRGIOS [15]	
117	Q	FRA	BENNETEAU, Julien	F. BAGNIS		63 64	
118		ARG	BAGNIS, Facundo	57 64 62	A. ZVEREV [18]		
119			BYE	A. ZVEREV [18]	76(10) 63		
120	18	GER	ZVEREV, Alexander				
121	31	ARG	DEL POTRO, Juan Martin	J. DEL POTRO [31]			
122			BYE		J. DEL POTRO [31]		
123		ARG	DELBONIS, Federico	F. DELBONIS	76(5) 63		
124		RUS	KUZNETSOV, Andrey	63 64		N. DJOKOVIC [2]	
125		GBR	EDMUND, Kyle	K. EDMUND		75 46 61	
126		POR	ELIAS, Gastao	61 63	N. DJOKOVIC [2]		
127			BYE	N. DJOKOVIC [2]	64 76(5)		
128	2	SRB	DJOKOVIC, Novak				

Nick Kyrgios vs Novak Djokovic. Nick Kyrgios (of Australia) defeated Novak Djokovic (of Serbia) by a score of 6-4, 7-6 (tie breaker). Amazing? Not so much. Krygios had defeated Djokovic a couple weeks ago in a match at Acapulco, Mexico. It could be he has Novak's mental number.

I do not think such. My thought is that Novak had to play an early match today, following his tough match last night against del Potro. I could be off-base, but I predict the next match between these two players will go in the favor of Djokovic.

But then, Novak is aging a bit. Yes, he is still short in the tooth (29 years old). But in tennis, being over 30 begins to place the player into the "older" category. We can only take inspiration in Roger Federer winning a grand slam this year at the age of 35 (the Australian Open).

March 17, 2017: A Sensational Tennis Match

What a semi-finals match! Karolina Pliskova of the Czech Republic played against Svetlana Kuznetsova of Russia. Svetlana, pictured in the right photo in Figure 11, won in two tie breakers: 7-6 (5), and 7-6 (2). The numbers in the parenthesis connote the points the loser obtained in a 7-point tie breaker.⁷



Figure 11. Two beauties, in more ways than one.

To my hacker buddies at our local club: Don't get your hopes up. These beautiful women would kick your ass without taking a deep breath. Figure 12 shows them in action on the tennis courts.⁸ To my hacker buddies, thank your lucky stars, as do I, that we are contented duffers. I did not go to the site today, so in the match this evening, I found myself shouting to myself, *Oh my god, what a shot!* My wife Holly, in another room, even came in to the TV room to share in watching the reruns.

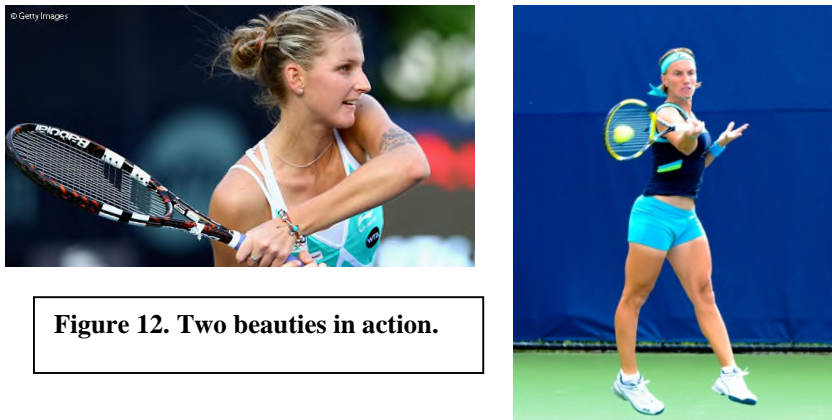


Figure 12. Two beauties in action.

Obviously, a match decided by two tie breakers is a close contest. As indicated in the table below, the match was decided by who won the most service points and return points...points I hope have become obvious to you by now.

Nonetheless, the match, with only four points separating the opponents, hinged on an unforced error, or a double fault here and there. It was that close.

⁷ Photos courtesy of Google.

⁸ Ibid.

These two women are spectacular tennis players and brilliant athletes. Enough said. I will not take my adulation to any more extremes.

Karolina Pliskova	vs	Svetlana Kuznetsova
54/90 (60%)	Total Service Points Won	53/84 (63%)
31/84 (37%)	Total Return Points Won	36/90 (40%)
85/174 (49%)	Total Points Won	89/174 (51%)

I did not watch the other women's semi-finals. The news informs me the winner was Elena Vesnina of Russia over Kristina Mladenovic of France. Thus, the women single finals will have two Russians in contest with each other.

Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin will be proud. For myself, I am nationally agnostic about my tennis players. As long as they play well and conduct themselves with grace, they have me in their corner.

Federer, Nadal, and del Potro fit into this corner. Connors and McEnroe do not come close.

March 18, 2017: The Men's Semi-finals

This article has concentrated on only one quarter of the men's singles bracket. Thus, I have not mentioned Stan Wawrinka, a Swiss who is seeded third in the tournament. Today, he defeated Pablo Carreno Busto, a talented Spaniard, to advance to tomorrow's finals. Also, today Roger Federer advanced to the finals by beating an American, Jack Sock, who was seeded 17. Mr. Sock was the highest American seed in the tournament.

I did not attend today's games, because of the sun and high temperature. However, I did watch the matches on television, and I will be at the tournament tomorrow to watch the finals.

The score was 6-1, and 7-6 (tie breaker). Roger won 69 points. Jack won 52. I thought the difference would be greater, as Roger dominated the first set. But giving Mr. Sock credit, he kept his composure, and forced the second set into a tie breaker, losing 7 to 4.

Part of the reason for the close second set was Roger's first serve failing him. For the match, he got only 53% of his first serves in. In the first set, his first serves-in was 61%. For the second set, only 49%. With his first serve faltering, I think he was fortunate to win the tie breaker.

However, Federer has a great second serve. In the second set, he won 65% of the points on his second serve. Jack won only 40%, and that difference was a major factor in the match.

Tomorrow is the last day of the tournament. Heat or no heat, sun or no sun, I came down to Palm Springs to attend and report on this tournament. I am looking forward to all the matches.

I do not know much about the female finalists, Elena SvetlanVesnina and Kuznetsova. Until this tournament, yesterday was the first time I saw either woman play. I have watched Roger Federer and Stan Wawrinka play many times, but I have never seen a match in which they were opponents. Head-to-head, Roger is far out in the lead: 19 to 3.

But this record does not reflect the progress Mr. Wawrinka has made in improving his game over the past few years. However, the three victories of Stan against Roger came on clay courts. On hard surfaces, Stan has never defeated Roger.

Nonetheless, in their last match at this year's Australian Open (in which Roger won his unprecedented 18th grand slam, at the age of 35!), it took five sets for Roger to put away Stan: 7-5, 6-3, 1-6, 4-6, and 6-3.

If I were betting on tomorrow's match, I would put my money on Roger Federer. But I would bet even-even. No two-to-one or such. Stan (at age 31) is four years younger than Roger. Yet, Roger Federer, a genius of tennis, and at an impossible age, is winning major championships. Down my way in the southwest plains of America, we would say, "This man is kicking ass."

Roger Federer reminds me of that country and western song, with this alteration: "Honey, I can't wait 'till tomorrow, 'cause I'm getting better every day."

See you tomorrow, after I have returned from the matches.

March 19, 2017: The Womens' and Mens' Singles Finals.

A fine Women's Finals, interspersed with a fine meal. Hello again, reporting from the Indian Wells Tennis facility on the women's and BNP Parabis mens' singles finals matches. It is going to be a hot day, with little breeze. The two matches might take up to four to six hours for their completion. That's fine with me. We are going to have an "everything day." We will do any and everything that makes this day special; one we will remember.

Given this lofty idea, what should two gray panthers do to (a) enjoy this everything play, and (b) find respite from intense sun and heat? Answer: Find sanctuary

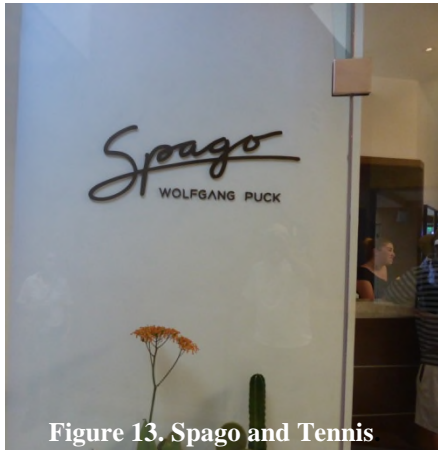


Figure 13. Spago and Tennis

in a fine restaurant chain in America, one at a tennis facility that is air-conditioned and offers delicious food and drink, not to mention shade. The place is called Spago, with its entrance shown in Figure 13.

The founder of the Spago restaurants is Wolfgang Puck, an Austrian, who has over the years, won several Michelin stars at his restaurants. These ratings are not to be taken lightly. I have had the pleasure to dine in a few of them, and I find their food and presentation so far removed from my pedestrian tastes that the delicacies seem to come from another world.

We opted to live it up. Considering that a reverse mortgage might be in our future, we chose the option of having seating that allowed us to watch the tennis action directly, instead of from a television, located farther back in the restaurant.

Figure 14 shows, from left to right, our seating arrangements, our view of the main court, and this writer's somewhat bemused countenance. Let me explain by

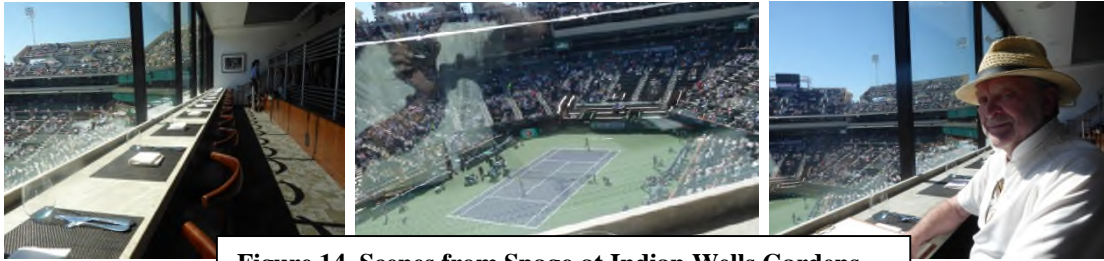


Figure 14. Scenes from Spago at Indian Wells Gardens.

paraphrasing the conversation we had with the receptionists upon our entering the restaurant.

- Receptionists: *We have options for you. You can dine from our al la carte menu, and be seated in an area where you can watch tennis from television. Or you can choose a fee of \$150 each, which guarantees seats overlooking the tennis court and you can have all the food and drink you want.*
- Our responses, somewhat interspersed and jumbled: *\$300! That takes in a lot of food and drink.* The old saw was playing in my mind: location is everything, especially if you are bent on having an everything day. And all of us, poor, rich, or in between, we should allot some times to have the experiences of an everything day. Of course, the financial “opulence” for this day will vary, depending on one’s income level. But income alone should not define opulence for this kind of day. The key is mental opulence. For a while, I was making multiple former-wife payments as well as child support for Tommy. It was not unusual to have a can of baked beans for dinner. But on occasion, I allowed myself to have an everything day. This day included a succulent pork chop. An everything day is a relative day.
- Anyway, on this day, I thought: *In for a dime, in for 3,000 dimes. Dimes don’t bury well for the owner of those coins.*
- We responded: *We’ll go with the \$300.*

And there we found ourselves in a prime seating place in Spago. But notice I am still wearing my hat. Wolfgang Puck could not alter the movements of the sun, so I do not fault this man for my having to wear sun-protective gear in his restaurant. Nonetheless, it was not a pleasant seating. The air conditioning helped, but the sun was still hot.

The Action on the court and the action on our Table. Today, I learned: I cannot eat the fine food offered by Spago and also concentrate on a tennis match. I do not have the ability to feast my eyes on the tennis match, while in parallel, feast my eyes and mouth on Mr. Puck’s offerings.

I watched the women’s final event unfold to these results:

Svetlana Kuznetsova (RUS)	7	5	4
Elena Vesnina (RUS)	6 (6)	7	6

It was both a wonderful and frustrating event. The players were evenly matched. Five points separated them, in favor of Elena. The frustrating aspect of the contest was that neither player could exploit an ad-in point, or even double ad-in points.

The match was three hours and one minute, a tournament record for a women's three-set match. It was the only the fourth women's match to last three sets since 2000.

And the old-timers came through. Kuzentsova (31) and Vesina (30) were the firth- and sixth-oldest women to play in the tournament.⁹

My concentration on the exciting contest was interrupted by the food that came across our table. I could not concentrate on both. Take a look:



Figure 15. Competition for Attentions.

On the left, Chilean Sea Bass. In the middle, veal. On the right, a banana sorbet. All the while, I was trying to concentrate on the women's finals. Confessing to no success, we left Spago, but not before meeting Wolfgang Puck, Shown in Figure 16.



Figure 16. A famous Chef.

As he passed by, I asked him if he were Wolfgang Puck. After all, how was I to know? The only notable chefs I have seen have been from the television show, "Chopped." He might have been one of the chefs of the restaurant. But Holly knew his face and said to me, "That is Wolfgang Puck."

As he was taking a pause from our neighboring eaters, I asked the man, "Are you Wolfgang Puck?" He said, "I am." I said, "I have never eaten at one of your restaurants, and I wondered why you had branched into airport fast-food places. But I want you to know, my meal today is the finest I have had any tennis match I have attended."

⁹ Shad Powers, *The Desert Sun*, March 20, 2017, 4c.

He ignored my possible references to nearby hotdog stands, as he said thank you and then engaged me beyond food, “Where are you from?”

“North Idaho.”

We talked about different locales and left it at that. He remains in my mind a gracious, unassuming man.

Back to the Match, highlighted by three sets of statistics shown below:

Svetlana Kuznetsova		Elena Vesnina
25/70 (36%)	First Returns Won	35/82 (43%)
34/52 (65%)	Second Returns Won	28/43 (65%)
7/18 (39%)	Break Points Won	9/18 (50%)

It should come as no surprise. In my watching and reporting on major tennis tournaments, it is evident there is a relationship of the statistics of the game to its outcome. One minor surprise to the stats in the table above is the joint 65% of success on second returns won. However, the other two stats: first returns won, and break points won favored Elena, and thus, the match.

None of the data in this article reveals the mental mechanizations of a person, of how mental success or mental failure can enhance or compromise muscle memory. It is an ironic display of humans’ whimsical nature. Scientists are making inroads in learning about these seemingly mental contradictions.

After breaking Svetlana in the third set and going up 5-4, Elena said a calm settled over her. The mental scientists would say she was able to keep her brain organ, the amygdala, from blocking the functioning of the neocortex. In plain words, she did not allow herself to choke.

And let’s give much credit to the loser, Svetlana Kuznetsova. She showed grit all though the match. She has lost in the finals in 2007 and 2008. It seemed to Holly and me that she was limping a bit in the second set, but she never commented on it. I sensed she might have been getting more tired than Elena, But in her comments to the press after the match, she showed her toughness and positive mental attitude:

“Look, I gotta be positive. It’s no way to be negative. ...I made the finals here is great. I lost a match that I should have won. This is a game. Nobody died, so I move on, and I’m on a good way. I’m playing better. I’m winning lots of matches in a good way, in two sets. I’m really positive. Definitely, I’m really frustrated with that loss, but I will go above that, hopefully, and will be all right.”¹⁰

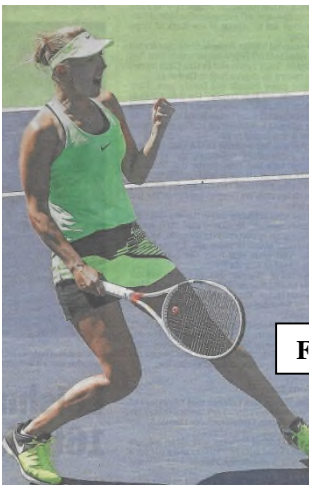
Propping oneself up improves one’s mental muscle. Ms. Kuznetsova will be just fine. Of course, so will Elena Vesnina. Victories can do marvelous things for a victor’s mental muscles.

¹⁰ Ibid.

This tennis match, regardless of is numerous double faults, and long-played break and double-break points, was one of the best tennis games I have witnessed. By the way, take a look at the number of break-point games the women played:

Svetlana Kuznetsova		Elena Vesnina
7/18 (39%)	Break Points Won	9/18 (50%)

Small wonder the match was a long one. Small wonder they were tired at the end of the match.



Here is the victor, as seen in Figure 17.¹¹ The substance of her mental meat---not to mention, her mental muscle---was awesome

Good for you, Ms. Vesina. Good for your grit. Good for your victory.

Figure 17. Ms. Vesina celebrates.

The Men's Finals, interspersed with heat and sun. Here we go, two competitors and country compatriots in battle with each other. As cited earlier and shown in Figure 18, the win-loss of the 3 wins comes from Wawrinka's three wins on clay.¹²

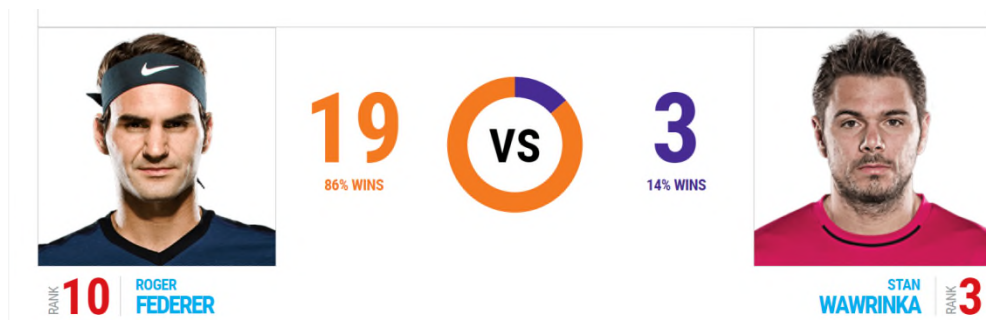


Figure 18. Federer vs. Wawrinka.

Nonetheless, it should be stated that Roger Federer would never have won the French Open (a clay court), and the fourth grand slam, had Nadal not been injured, Anyway, below are the statistics for this match:

¹¹ *The Desert Sun*, March 20, 2017, 8c.

¹² Courtesy of Google.

Stan Wawrinka	vs	Roger Federer
Service		
5	Aces	2
3	Double Faults	1
61%	First Service	63%
31/44 (70%)	First Service Won	28/36 (78%)
11/28 (39%)	Second Service Won	14/21 (67%)
2/5 (40%)	Break Points Saved	2/3 (67%)
11	Service Games Played	11
Return		
8/36 (22%)	First Returns Won	13/44 (30%)
7/21 (33%)	Second Returns Won	17/28 (61%)
1/3 (33%)	Break Points Won	3/5 (60%)
11	Return Games Played	11
Points		
42/72 (58%)	Total Service Points Won	42/57 (74%)
15/57 (26%)	Total Return Points Won	30/72 (42%)
57/129 (44%)	Total Points Won	72/129 (56%)

It was not a close match. Roger won 72 (56%) of the points, while Stan won only 57 (44%). See second red circle. I mentioned the effectiveness of Roger's second serve. See the first red circle.

We started watching the match in our stadium seats. The heat had defeated us. During the first set, we left our stadium seats to walk the campus to find chairs and drinks underneath a large canopy, as seen in Figure 19.



Figure 19. Celebration from the sun.

celebrating his final winning point.¹³



Figure 20. Mr. Federer celebrates.

Which did I enjoy more, Spago or the tent? Tennis in Spago's sun-filled venue, the tennis court's unremitting heat and glare? The tent with the strawberry and lime popsicle. No ties here. I enjoyed them all, each in a different way.

There is an old saying that says, "Experience is a hard teacher, because she gives us the test first, and the lesson."¹⁴

Experience taught us some lessons about this tournament: to attend more night sessions; to ask Spago for a place away from the sun; to make sure our stadium tickets had the sun to our back; and as we had done before, attend the first week and watch the contests on the out-courts (See the map on page 7).

Taking an adage, and modifying the cliché a bit: "Once (sun) burned, twice shy."

The BNP Paribas Indian Wells tournament is on a par with three of the three majors I have attended. Here's hoping there will be more in the future.

Good work, Mr. Ellison.

¹³ *The Desert Sun*, *ibid*.

¹⁴ Vernon Law, "How to be a Winner," *This Week*, August 14, 1960, in Leonard Roy Frank, *Quotationary* (New York: Random House, 2001), 260.