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Wimbledon

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Every now and again there are sports weekends during which one can see the very best qualities of sport on display in multiple venues. When this happens it is a clear reminder why we still watch the games despite all the other nonsense surrounding sport these days.

Wimbledon offered one such venue with several examples of great sport. While the women dominated the headlines and provided most of interest during the fortnight of tennis, and while Lindsay Davenport wrote another important line for her tennis resume, it was in the men's final that near perfection was achieved.

Pete Sampras won his sixth Wimbledon title, his twelfth grand slam title, and in the process tied Roy Emerson for most grand slam titles. Sampras, by his own estimation, played Sunday as well as he has ever played. Andre Agassi played very good tennis and never had a chance. Sampras had an overpowering first serve, and an overpowering second serve. Agassi who is reputed to have the best return of serve in tennis was the repeated victim of service aces on Pete's second serve. The last two points of the match came on aces, and both were second serves. No one does that to Agassi. At least not until Sunday.

Everything else Sampras tried seemed to work. Every stroke was delivered with precision and power. Agassi had no answers, because there were none to be had. I was listening to the BBC broadcast for part of the match and repeatedly the commentators mentioned that Agassi was being dominated but that he was playing very good tennis.

In the wake of this performance some are asking if Pete Sampras is the best player ever. The answer of course can only be "no." To be the best player requires the ability to win on all surfaces, and Pete can not master the clay. One must believe that if he took the time and effort he could overcome whatever problems he has on clay. The question will be if he wants to make the effort.

On the women's side at Wimbledon several new young girls emerged as stars, but unfortunately they brought along the excess baggage of problem parents that seem so much a part of the game. Fortunately Lindsay Davenport carries no such baggage. She played extremely good tennis for two weeks on a surface she had once dreaded. Her victory over Steffi Graf in the finals marks

her emergence as a major force in the women's game. For Graf, who still plays a very good game of tennis, it may have marked the end of her competition at the home of strawberries and cream. If so Graf leaves behind a standard of excellence that will be a long time in duplicating and a formidable goal for all the young pretenders and contenders

Within a few hours of the men's final at Wimbledon, the Women's World Cup semifinals were underway. The U.S. women played a very solid, disciplined, and physical game against the Brazilians. For those who have not seen any of the World Cup because you think you don't like soccer, or don't like women's soccer, I can only say that you are missing a very entertaining and interesting event.

The performance by Michelle Akers on Sunday was not only superb but also inspiring. Nearly knocked out in the first half, and then catching a kick to the face ten minutes later, she came back to anchor the team. It was fitting that her penalty shot gave the U.S. its second goal and put the game out of reach.

Equally remarkable was the second semi-final game. Relegated to the Deuce (ESPN2) this game turned into a clinic by the Chinese. Defending World Cup Champion Norway looked nearly helpless as the Chinese ran, passed and dribbled circles around the Norwegians. The Norwegian goalie looked to be in shock by the time the fifth goal was resting in the net behind her.

The Chinese will offer the U.S. a major challenge in the finals on Saturday. It is more than clear that in the Chinese and Americans we have two teams that represent the very best in women's soccer. It should be a magnificent game, a display of just how far women's soccer has developed in this decade, and will be played before a sellout crowd at the Rose Bowl.

Finally I do want to mention one other less happy event of the past two weeks. As an alumnus of the University of Minnesota I am deeply disappointed and dismayed by the scandal that rocked their basketball program. Clem Haskins looked like the ideal coach, but ultimately he turned out like so many others. Tarnished by the cesspool of corruption that underlies intercollegiate athletics, St. Clem became one more piece of road-kill on the road to the Final Four.

The only comic relief provided by the whole sordid story was Utah Coach Rick Majerus announcing that he was a candidate for the job, and then quickly turning down the offer he never

received. I am always surprised when his resume does not turn up when we have an opening in our history department.

On Sport and Society this is Dick Crepeau reminding you that you don't have to be a good sport to be a bad loser.

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