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## One of the Great Wimbledon Fortnights

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To paraphrase Joaquin Andujar, sport can be summarized in just one word, "You never know."

You never know when one of those great sport stories and great sports events will jump out at you. On Monday one did. Breakfast at Wimbledon on the extra day turned into one of the great Wimbledon Finals ever. Center court at the All-England Tennis Club showed us why sport is so compelling and why in the end the game still is the thing.

The improbable victory in the Gentleman's Final by Goran Ivanisevic was a great way to begin a week and a great way to end the fortnight plus. The fact that Ivanisevic was even in the tournament was a story, as the officials of the All-England Club had given him a wild-card. Ranked 125<sup>th</sup> in the world Ivanisevic became only the second unseeded player to win the men's championship. Boris Becker was the first.

This was the fourth time the Croatian player had been a finalist and easily the time that he least expected to be there. In fact his career has been in free fall for the last three years. After making his way through the early rounds, Goran showed that he had regained his form by beating Greg Rusedski in the fourth round and Marat Safin, the fourth seed in the quarter-finals, riding his overpowering serve to victory.

Then came the first remarkable part of the Ivanisevic victory. The semi-final match against Tim Henman took place over three days. On Friday, having just dropped the third set 6-0 Ivanisevic seemed to have run out his string. Then shortly into the fourth set the rains came to his rescue. The match was suspended.

Saturday Henman and Ivanisevic were back on center court and between rain drops they did manage to complete just under an hour of play, finishing the fourth set and beginning the fifth. Ivanisevic won the fourth in a tiebreak and the two men were on serve in the fifth and final set when rain again intervened. Sunday it took Goran only fourteen minutes to finish the dream of Tim Henman and his fellow countrymen who were hoping that a Brit would win the men's championship for the first time in nearly seventy years.

Ivanisevic knew he had been saved on Friday. He attributed the rain to God, although it is not clear that the deity has all that much interest in the Wimbledon Championships. He is of course an Englishman, but then that's another story.

Meanwhile Patrick Rafter had been waiting to play the finals since Friday when he won a dramatic victory over Andre Agassi. Overnight on Sunday the Croatian and Australian populations of London, with many of the Aussies wearing marvelous costumes of yellow and green and carrying their inflatable kangaroos, lined up for tickets to cheer their national heroes on to victory.

When the fun began Monday at noon in London, and 7 a.m. EDT, it was soon apparent that this was going to be a wild day. The costumed crowd was vocal, Croatian and Australian flags were waving everywhere, the Aussies even sang "Waltzing Matilda" at one change over, and the tennis produced magnificent combinations of power and finesse.

Ivanisevic's serve was steadily accelerating through the match moving up through the upper 120's mph and then over 130 in the fifth set. Ivanisevic won the first set, Rafter the second by identical 6-3 scores. When Ivanisevic came back to take the third set at 6-3 it began to look like he had a leg up on Rafter.

The fourth set saw Rafter break Ivanisevic twice as the powerful serve betrayed the unseeded pretender to the crown. Rafter seemed hard as nails in winning 6-2. When the second break came on a controversial line call on serve Ivanisevic exploded kicking the ball, the net, and raging at the umpire. It looked like the wheels might be coming off. They did not as Ivanisevic regrouped and pulled himself together early in the fifth set.

And what a set it was. The tension mounted. No one could break through. At 4-4 the tension became excruciating. At 5-5 it got worse. At 6-6 it escalated further and at 7-7 it was beyond the pale.

Twice in the closing games both men faced the brink, down love-30, only to come back to hold serve. Several times both men faced break points and simply refused to break. The power of the will was on full display.

When it finally ended the exhausted crowd exploded and the exhausted players embraced. In Croatia crowds went into the streets and Goran's mother told a television interviewer she had

to take tranquilizers during the match. She was not alone. Back at center court her son went into the stands to embrace his father.

The nearly impossible had happened. Resurrection in sport as elsewhere is a sight to behold. And this was clearly the resurrection of Goran Ivanisevic's career.

Everyone who saw this magnificent performance knew they had just witnessed one of those grand moments in sport when the merely human is somehow transcended.

Great art does that, and this match was precisely that. It was as John McEnroe said, "one for the ages."

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

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