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## Martina Navratilova - Jennifer Capriati - Connors and McEnroe

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This past weekend in one of those nameless faceless tennis tournaments that no one pays much attention to, Martina Navratilova made tennis history by becoming the oldest player to ever defeat a number one ranked player. At age 36 years, 3 months and 29 days, Martina beat the 19 year old Monica Seles in three sets, winning a third set tie breaker. This match ended Seles' winning streak at 34 matches.

Among other things Seles said "For her age it's incredible," thus emphasizing the point of how much tennis and so many other professional sports have become games of the very young. The record also points to the fact that we are now well into the third generation of high profile women's tennis, or tennis ABJ, After Billy Jean.

With Chris Evert no longer on the circuit, Martina is the only strong connection to the second generation, and it is clear that she is nearing the end of her career. A few months ago Martina reflected on her past and future, and the fact that her career was winding down. Navratilova feels that she can still win some big tournaments, and last weekend she proved she can.

She relies more on strategy and preparation than speed, but as Seles pointed out, Navratilova is very strong, and still can overpower an opponent.

How will she know when it's over? Chris Evert told Martina that she knew "because sometimes she didn't care when she lost." Navratilova has not reached that point. She still cares when she loses, although "it's not quite as devastating. But it still keeps me up at night," she said.

While Navratilova approaches retirement, at the other end of the age spectrum Jennifer Capriati contemplates her own future. At age 16 she is already a veteran of the tour. Capriati made her grand slam debut at age 14 in 1990, and her star rose rapidly. Her earnings for singles tennis went above a half-million dollars in 1991, but then last year she dropped below her first year earnings.

Now this bright young star of women's tennis finds herself at a crossroads. For Jennifer there is already some thought of retirement. Not after a great career, but after a very frustrating year in 1992. Her game was up and down, she fired

her coach, and despite winning a few tournaments including the Olympic gold medal, overall it was, she said, "a waste." Capriati was at times near tears on the court, and found she often could not give 100%. Some saw her heading down the same road taken by Andrea Jeager.

Like many players in the tennis world Capriati labors on the hard courts to please her father, and like many tennis fathers he has been accused of putting too much pressure on the young player. Her biggest problem may simply be that she is a teenager. "I wasn't happy with myself," she said. "I didn't like anybody else and I felt like no one really was able to listen to me or understand me." Doesn't that sound familiar? Being a sixteen year old isn't easy, and being a sixteen year old millionaire performing in the public eye where people comment on your weight is even worse.

And so at sixteen Jennifer Capriati says that if things don't get better in 1993, if tennis isn't fun again, she will seriously consider retirement. It really is a shame but she wouldn't be the first, nor the last. Let's hope the fun returns, and Capriati rejoins Seles and Graf at the top of women's tennis for many years to come.

On the men's side of the game it is also the time of notable departures. Jimmy Connor's is all but finished, and John McEnroe is. The 33 year old terror of tennis for 15 years, will not be on the circuit this year. No doubt there are many lines persons who will not miss him, but many fans will. He went out with a blaze of glory leading the U.S. team to a Davis Cup last year still displaying the fire that characterized his career.

I must admit I have always liked McEnroe, and I must say that this has troubled and disturbed me. It has also puzzled me, because I have always detested Jimmy Connors. These two players seem to be the same kind of brat that has become the bane of contemporary tennis. In point of fact they are the prototypes and inspirations for a whole emerging generation of tennis brats. Why did I like Johnny Mac but not Connors? Was there any real difference? Perhaps it had something to do with attitude and carriage, John was always scrambling and scrapping, while Connors seemed to have an upper middle class superiority and bully boy demeanor. Maybe that's it. I really don't know. But whatever it was I hate to see McEnroe go, and will even miss Connors a bit.

The new generation of American male tennis players have arrived. Sampras, Courier, and Agassi have moved to the top. These new stars may change the game just as Connors and McEnroe eclipsed the previous era of Smith, Tanner, and Ashe. But whether any of them will leave the dominating marks in the record book is doubtful.

Whether tennis will ever again achieve the notoriety that it had when Evert, Navratilova, Connors and McEnroe took the game to its greatest popularity in the United States remains to be seen. Somehow it doesn't seem possible, but of course it invariably is.

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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