

# US Open Tennis

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR ARETE - US Open Tennis  
SEPTEMBER 12, 2016

In London it is the Wimbledon Fortnight. What can be called simply "two weeks of damn good tennis" concluded this weekend at the USTA Billie Jean King National Tennis Center where the fourth and final Grand Slam event of the tennis season was contested. As it often does the U.S. Open produced some very high quality tennis, along with some "interesting" moments, and promising new, and not so new, faces arriving in the spotlight.

Among the new faces was Korolína Plíšková of the Czech Republic who announced her arrival on the big stage with victories over Venus Williams and Serena Williams on her way to the Women's Finals. She lost to Angelique Kerber of Germany, the new number one women's player in the world, in a three set final of high quality tennis. This was Kerber's second Grand Slam win of the year, and her third appearance in a Grand Slam final this year.

The bigger surprise was clearly Korolína Plíšková who had never advanced to the round of sixteen in a Grand Slam event. Her match against Venus Williams may have been the best of the tournament, and her victory over Serena Williams made her only the fourth player to defeat both sisters in an individual grand slam event. Plíšková's 6'1" frame made for an imposing and strong serve, accompanied by powerful ground strokes, and her shot making was at times of the highest quality. In the end what she lacked was consistency and perhaps conditioning.

Angelique Kerber now moves to number one in the rankings at the relatively older age of 28. How long she stays at the top remains to be seen, but the way she is playing this season, she will not be giving up the number one spot soon.

There was a lot of talk by commentators about the Williams sisters and whether or not this was finally the end of an era. It may be, but I am not sure I would bank on that, as Serena and Venus Williams continue to play at a very high level. Health is an issue for Venus, and of course, time is the enemy for both of these great players.

For those who continue to insist that women should not be paid as much as the men in prize money, the U.S. Open once again demonstrated why the quality of women's tennis continues to equal, and indeed may exceed, that of the men. It's time to end this discussion.

Questions too have been raised about the decline of the Big Four in men's tennis. Clearly Roger Federer is on the downside of his career and his absence from the U.S. Open underlines that reality. Rafael Nadal's early departure seemed no longer to be a major shock and he too may be in decline. As for Novak Djokovic he continues to play at a high level although the physical issues seem to be mounting. As for Andy Murray, it appeared he had reached his peak, but when he lost in the quarterfinals to Kei Nishikori, he seemed to have channeled the unpredictable and volatile Andy Murray from his past.

Apparently in control of the match Murray became distracted and unnerved by an electronic gong that came out of the sound system in the fourth set in the middle of a rally that had the appearance of heading toward a Murray break. He then lost 10 of the next 12 points and dropped the next seven games and the set. It was shades of The Gong Show. Murray recovered in the fifth set but in the end Nishikori prevailed.

The gong, which had been heard earlier in the tournament, and would be heard one more time between points, pointed to some unexpected issues with the redesigned center court. A cover had been installed which would allow for an enclosure of the court in case of rain. This was a much anticipated and welcomed improvement. It seemed that the cover, even when open, produced sound reverberation that made center court a place of considerable background noise. When closed it produced additional noise when the rain hit the cover. One report indicated that in a strange pattern of sound, conversations taking place in the top rows of the stadium were clearly heard on court.

All this aside the men's championship produced some excellent tennis with Stan Warwinka of Switzerland emerging the champion. Warwinka has now won three of the Grand Slam events and defeated the number one ranked player in the world in each of those victories. At age 28 he too is among the older players on tour, but clearly at this point age is not an issue.

Yesterday's match was a brutal four set, four hour, ordeal, filled with great shot making. Warwinka's will carried him forward in the face of the heat and humidity that dogged the players through much of the tournament. Warwinka's win also marks him as one of the top players on tour, and several commentators suggested that the notion of The Big Four in men's tennis now needed to be expanded to The Big Five.

One other oddity of this tournament came in the men's semi-final when Gael Monfils of France met Novak Djokovic. It was as strange a match as has ever been seen at The U.S. Open. Monfils, off to a miserable start in the first set, apparently decided at

5-1 there was no point in expending energy in the heat and humidity so near the end of the set. Monfils simply played the role of a backboard, blocking shots back to Djokovic who apparently became distracted by the development and dropped two games in succession. In the second set it appeared as though Monfils had again lost interest. In the third set after going down 0-2 Monfils resurrected his game, made some amazing shots, and won the set 6-3. Djokovic restored order to win the fourth set and the match in relatively easy fashion. As a commentator for ESPN John McEnroe was puzzled, annoyed, angered, puzzled again, and at times reached a level of disgust with Monfils' approach. Many wondered if this was all part of a strategy by Monfils, and in the post-match news conference Monfils did not offer many answers to the puzzle.

So as always the U.S. Open offered some great tennis, some memorable moments, and some strange developments.

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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