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## Williams, Federer, and Nadal at Wimbledon

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE  
Williams, Federer, and Nadal at Wimbledon  
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At the beginning of play in the Gentleman's Final at the All England Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club on Sunday, I believed that at the end of day Rafael Nadal would be crowned new champion and heir to the mantle of Roger Federer.

We now know that Federer is again the Wimbledon champion, but we also know that Rafael Nadal will be the next dominant player in men's tennis. That may not happen for another year or two, but, barring injury, it is very likely that it will happen.

At times in tennis and other sports, an individual player appears and dominates that sport, or some aspect of that sport. Levels of play are raised to new heights and it seems as though the new dominant force will never be equaled. We have seen this most recently with both Tiger Woods and Roger Federer.

For the past few years many, including John McEnroe, have been calling Roger Federer the greatest tennis player in the history of the sport. His performances on the court have to a great degree validated that claim. He has now appeared in nine straight Grand Slam Finals and has won the last five Wimbledon titles, matching a feat achieved previously by Bjorn Borg. Federer has won eleven grand slam titles, matching Rod Laver, with only the French Open title still eluding him, as it did Pete Sampras, himself a winner of a record fourteen Grand Slam events.

At the French Open in the last two years, Federer has been unable to beat Rafael Nadal, losing the title in the finals to the young Spaniard. In the finals at Wimbledon last year, Nadal extended Federer and had opportunities to win. In the Wimbledon finals on Sunday Nadal extended Federer to the very edge of defeat.

Nadal pushed Federer to play his best tennis and then some. If you were watching this match without access to a scoreboard, you might easily have concluded that Nadal was winning the match. Federer broke Nadal's serve in the second game of the first set, and did not break it again until the sixth game of the fifth set, some three and a half hours later. This followed a 6-2 thumping in the fourth set when Federer looked lost and totally flustered. Then in the final set Nadal failed to cash in two

break opportunities when he had Federer down 15-40 in both games three and five.

Rafael Nadal was an eyelash away from victory but in the end, he did not close. It was an awesome display of tennis by both players and brought to mind some of the great matches of the past including the McEnroe/Borg epics.

Nadal produced a variety of powerful baseline shots, at times from impossible angles, showed great finesse at the net, and executed an occasional volley. What he did not show was a big serve producing only one ace, while Federer with twenty-four aces was able to go to the big serve time after time to save himself from a tight spot or prevent being put into a tight spot.

To see Federer being routed in the fourth set was stunning, as was seeing him totally frustrated by the events that were unfolding out of his control. The only thing more remarkable was to see Federer's recovery in the final set.

Nadal demonstrated clearly that he is the heir apparent, and the next big thing in men's tennis. Federer's message to Nadal was also clear: "Not just yet." There is more work to be done, and more history to rewrite. In the Ladies' Championship, the story was also quite compelling as Venus Williams won her fourth Wimbledon title, only six months after sitting home and watching her younger sister win the Australian Open. About half way through the fortnight Venus Williams started playing like the Venus Williams of old. Her performance in the final three matches was a treat for all those who have missed her presence on the tennis courts. Williams is the lowest ranked player to win in the open era. Having won Wimbledon in 2000, 2001, and 2005, Venus Williams has won more Wimbledon titles than anyone not named Martina, Steffi, or Billie Jean.

In the final, Williams beat Marion Bartoli, a young French woman who showed occasional flashes of brilliance. But it was in the semi-final that Bartoli made the announcement of her arrival. Bartoli dispatched Justine Henin in a match that featured a mesmerizing reversal of fortune over three sets. After losing the first set 1-6, Bartoli struggled to survive and then won the second set 7-5, before dominating 6-1 in the final set. Henin was stunned and so was most of the crowd at the All England Club.

Venus Williams was never challenged by Bartoli and dispatched her with some ease, despite a leg injury that hobbled Williams in the second set. It will be good for women's tennis if both Venus and Serena Williams stay healthy and dedicate themselves to tennis. There seem to be a plethora of young women players from Russia, Eastern and Central Europe, and France who continue to make women's tennis more interesting than the men's game. Getting the Williams sisters back on form would add significantly to the mix.

If Nadal and Federer continue to produce finals of the caliber of this year's Wimbledon, few will care if there are no other challengers in the men's game. It should be noted however that a number of French and Eastern European men seem ready to mount a challenge to the elite duo and add further interest on the men's side.

In the end, it was another excellent fortnight at the All England Club, and one that promises more great tennis to come. Seeing any sport played at the level of excellence that was on display in the Gentleman's Final is a great treat and another reminder what it is about sport that draws and holds our attention. To strive for excellence and to occasionally achieve it is the great promise and the eternal lure of sport, as it is in most other endeavors in life.

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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