adidas

...from Phil Dent to Jannik Sinner...

The best male singles tennis players of the Open Era in subjectively objective view

Voo de Mar

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I'll start sending you another two PDF files in April 2021

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...when I began watching tennis (the year 1990; my first playing the following year) my native country - Poland - bordered just three countries (seven currently): the Soviet Union, Germany & Czechoslovakia. Here's a "3S" picture of myself with three "neighbours" of the time, multiple Grand Slam champions: **Марат Сафин** (US Open '00 & Australian Open '05 in singles), **Michael Stich** (Wimbledon: in singles '91 & doubles '92) and **Tomáš Šmíd** (US Open '84 & Roland Garros '86 in doubles). Each of them, as a player, represents a different decade: 00s, 90s and 80s, respectively.

...special thanks to **Jovica Ilić** and **Grzegorz Augustowski**, who helped me a lot in writing this eBook, each of them at different level of equal importance

Preface

The idea to write a book about the best tennis players was born in my head in the mid 90's, I don't remember exactly when, but certainly before Roger Fedrer played his first match in ATP (Gstaad '98). I have photos from 1997 that remind me that while on vacation I had a notebook in which I decided to write down information about tennis players gathered with the help of newspapers and TV believing it would help me write a book in the future. How naive I must have been in those days? 1997 was probably the first year in which I realized the existence of the Internet, but I did not think in what direction the Internet would develop, I had no idea that a few decades later not only basic information about all tennis players would be at your fingertips, but you also will be able to watch all players 'live' or track their results point by point.

It's hard to recreate what I could think around 1997 about writing the book, but I assume that my thoughts might have gone towards writing biographies, in the way they are currently described on Wikipedia, i.e. apart from a few basic information, the chronological course of careers (not all players of my e-book are written in this style on Wikipedia in English, but probably most of those who are still active). It is possible, however, that my thoughts went in the direction which I have finally come to, comprehending that there was no point in writing a "second Wikipedia", i.e. in the direction of a synthesis of careers of the best/most interesting players, because this is the nature of a book that in the mid-90s was my main inspiration

(*"A-Z. 150 rakiet. Najlepsi tenisiści świata"*
by Zbigniew Dutkowski /
"A-Z. 150 rackets. The best tennis players")
The book about the best male and female players of the 70s, in alphabetical order. It was published in 1983 so the youngest player in the book, Mats Wilander was included as a French Open '82 champion.

I started to be passionate about tennis in October 1990, watching men and women. It was like that throughout the decade of the 90's, I think more or less in a 60/40 ratio, which over time changed into an increasing difference between the time I devoted to men and women, up to the point where I could estimate these proportions as 99/1 (it's been like this in the past ten years). In the following e-book there is basically nothing about women, perhaps only a few names appear. The idea of writing an e-book only about men probably arose in 2010. This was the time when I decided to write my first e-book

"*The History of Men's Tennis in Stories (1968-2010)*". At that time, I had no doubts that if I was willing to accurately describe tennis, I would not divide my time into being interested in both genders sportwise. I remember that in 2010, I thought a biography e-book would be about all the best players of the Open Era, so I was thinking about bringing in players like Rod Laver, John Newcombe, Stan Smith etc. Initially my approach to the work was methodical, distinguishing the best players by clearly defined criteria: 100 matches won, 1 title won and Top 40 (at least). This is how I thought about extracting 100 or 200 tennis players, but over time I realized that this approach has one drawback - not always a tennis player who meets these criteria has achieved some notable result, more intriguing than in a case of someone who does not meet the criteria.

The list of players I wanted to write about was created in 2016 with the conviction that when the e-book is finished, the list will be enriched with more names of young and upcoming players. In the meantime, I came to the conclusion that it's better to focus only on players who started their careers in the Open Era and instead of summarizing the last 50 years holistically, it's better to do it by comparing particular decades (70s, 80s, etc.). I was writing the e-book in the last five years in different countries: Greece (Crete, Corfu), Spain (Tenerife, La Palma), Italy (Sardinia, Lake Garda), Turkey (Antalya, Izmir) and Egypt (Sahl Hasheesh), where I travelled due to my professional work as a tennis instructor in four/five star hotels; by far the most I wrote in the past twelve months, ten of which I spent in Poland, my home country. The pandemic had a big impact on the final shape of my project - I had more time only for myself and thus I was not limited to 100 or 200 players, I wrote about so many that I felt I could write about, and there are over 340. Besides, I renewed a lot of statistical pictures on my website, which became the basis for creating two versions of the e-book; one you're reading now and the other for people who decide to donate me. The other version it's a hypertext thanks to which you have automatic access to hundreds of my statistical pictures.

Without the pandemic, the end result would certainly be different, I cannot exclude the possibility that I would not have finished the e-book, because although I have relatively a lot of spare time when working in hotels, it is difficult for me to motivate myself to write about tennis... It seems to me that 80% of the material has been generated since the virus unexpectedly turned the world upside down. While working on the e-book in recent years, I sometimes thought that it would be more interesting to write about the impotence that overwhelms me while writing in various places near the Mediterranean Sea, struggling with 30 degrees heat. In the end, I managed to get through the material, and it was not easy psychologically, because ten years ago I had no idea how much Wikipedia would expand and basically there is no problem to get information about everyone we are interested in, if we use the English language. I am not going to pretend that I am discovering America to you, much of the information contained here can be found on either Wikipedia or on the ATP website. I tried to write honestly about tennis players, this is for sure the difference between this e-book and the two websites

above, which are somewhat dehumanized. They only deliver the facts and you don't know who is behind the text. By reading this e-book, you may trust me that no censorship was involved, apart from my own, leaky one. To finish writing, I had to convince myself that I was doing it for me reading it in the year ~2030, to see if my thoughts about players born in the 80's and 90's would be accurate. At the same time, I had to make a compromise with myself in order to prepare the text in such a way that it would be understandable to the reader. Below is a technical explanation that may be helpful for those who will read the e-book and are not familiar with my style of writing about tennis on Twitter and my website.

Voo de Mar - March 1, 2021

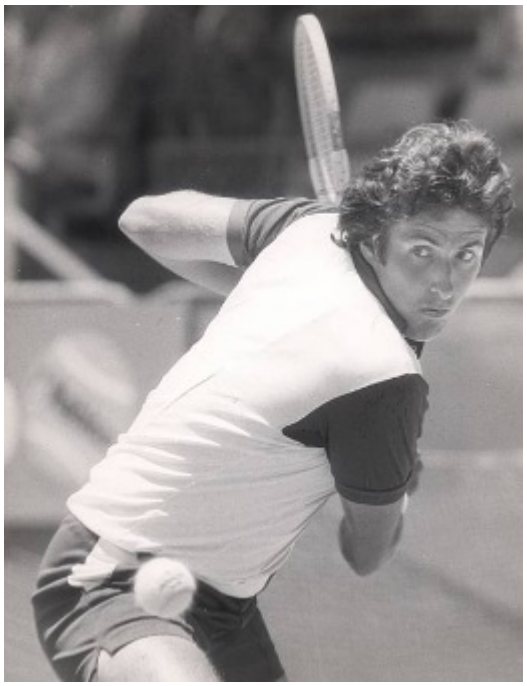
all statistical data (career record, titles, highest ranking, best Grand Slam results) is valid for the end of February 2021 (after events: Montpellier, Cordoba, Singapore)

two main fonts (Arial and Palatino Linotype) are used throughout the text
names of players with bigger font are written using the Latin scripts, characteristic for particular languages
there are introduced surnames in Cyrillic alphabet for Slavic players of countries with a historical allegiance to the Orthodox Church (font: Cambria)
I don't use compound surnames, however, I mention compound surnames of all Spanish players in their biographies
when I introduce a player to the text of a biography, first I use his name & surname; if he repeats, then I stick to the surname only
when I introduce a player, about whom I didn't write a biography, his name appears in bold type
number of main-level events (Grand Slam, Grand Prix/ATP) it's data provided by **Bryan Mayén** - you won't find it on the ATP website
acronyms: "MP" means "match point(s)", "H2H" means "Head-to-Head" (matches between two players)
"Masters 1K" means "ATP Tour Masters 1000"
in the entire text, I use the word "Masters" referring to the season-ending championships, even though the name has been modified four times since 1990 (ATP Tour World Championships, Tennis Masters Cup, ATP World Tour Finals, ATP Finals)
when you see numbers in brackets, like [67] for instance, it means the ranking of a player at the time of a story
writing about decades, I perceive them as: 1970-79 (the 70s), 1980-89 (the 80s), 1990-99 (the 90s), 2000-09 (the 00s), 2010-19 (the 10s)
I never use in the text popular phrase "unforced error" (explanation of it in the extra for donors)
the asterisk denotes who was serving... *4:5 (15/40) for instance
italic type: players who passed away

...Born in the 50s...

Phil Dent (Australia)

Born: February 14, 1950 in Sydney
Height: 1.82 m
Plays: Right-handed



Allegedly every Australian player is a beer lover, but not every beer-lover is a tennis player. Perhaps fondness of the foam drink took something out of a very promising junior, his reflex, his speed, decreasing his durability and - summing up - prevented from achieving the results he had been predisposed to, as a junior. Dent was connected to John Alexander, but as long as **Ken Rosewall** (b. 1934) and **Lew Hoad** (1934-1994) were known as 'big twins', then Alexander & Dent only as 'small twins'. The father figure of them all, **Harry Hopman** (1906-1985), didn't hide his disillusionment that the younger Aussies didn't respect the training regime with similar solicitude of their predecessors. Dent left Australia for the United States where he managed to open a tennis school... Alexander was the youngest participant of the Davis Cup final while Dent had debuted being even younger; id est in 1976. As a junior in singles he was better than Alexander, and it preserved; they both created a strong doubles pair. Both were serving well, covering the net was very natural thanks to the Australian domain - the volleys. Perhaps a car accident made an impact on Dent's pro career, at the beginning of 1972; the injury sidelined him for one year. The year 1974 was the most important sportswise - he took advantage of the fact the local major was poorly filled (in the years 1968-1983) advancing to the final, while the year 1977 was the best; Dent rather shocked the tennis world placing himself, as an unseeded floater, in the French Open semifinal after a dramatic win over Jose Higueras. In 1980 he married one of the most attractive female players - Betty Ann Stuart and he begot a son with her - Taylor Dent - the future U.S. professional player, who will not be as successful as father in majors, but will win one main-level title more.

Career record: 411-347 [345 events]
Career titles: 3
Highest ranking: No. 17 (August 1977)
Best GS results: Australian Open (runner-up 1974)
Roland Garros (semifinalist 1977)
Wimbledon (quarterfinalist 1977)

Adriano Panatta (Italy)

Born: July 9, 1950 in Rome
Height: 1.82 m
Plays: Right-handed

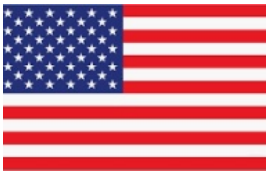
The oldest player introduced to this book among Grand Slam champions, a typical representative of the first generation of the Open Era players. He turned 18 when tennis shifted from its amateurish structure to the professional. He made his debut in Rome and the capital of Italy was a special tournament for him for the rest of his long career - he was playing there every year until the last year on the tour (1983), but triumphed just once, in 1976. At Foro Italico he played many memorable Davis Cup matches, helping Italy in advancement to the final four times within five editions (1976-80). The year 1976 was absolutely amazing compared to all others. Panatta won two biggest events on clay (Rome & Roland Garros), and in both he was one point away from defeat already in the first rounds! In Rome he survived eleven match points (ten on return) against Kim Warwick [3-6, 6-4, 7-6(8)] trailing 1:5 in the 3rd set, in the semifinal he eliminated Harold Solomon (6-2, 5-7, 4-5 ret.) in exceptionally bizarre circumstances (the American had won five games in a row and was one game away from victory when retired even though he wasn't injured, simply couldn't accept the decision of the umpire awarding Panatta the first point of the 10th game - after arguing he got a point penalty and left the court at 0/30); in the final after four tough sets, Panatta ousted Guillermo Vilas, considered as the second best clay-courter of the times behind Bjorn Borgm, whom Panatta - also in four sets - dismissed at Roland Garros in the quarterfinal. Panatta won the final again in four sets (Solomon), and just like in Rome, paradoxically the toughest match he'd experienced in the first round having defeated **Pavel Hutka** (b. 1949), a journeyman from Czechoslovakia (2-6, 6-2, 6-2, 0-6, 12-10) withstanding a match point in the decider being in a position to lose the point and the match. That year Panatta became the Davis Cup champion, he led Italy to the title winning many rubbers in singles & doubles (different format in the 90s, Italy needed to win six ties instead of four, characteristic for the following decades), including the most important ones: decisive fifth rubber against John Newcombe in Rome (semifinal) and singles & doubles rubbers to give Italy an insurmountable lead 3-0 over Chile in the final (Santiago).

Ultimately Panatta finished the season as No. 6 in the world, but if points were awarded at the time for the Davis Cup, he could have finished the season a few places higher. Emotionally he could feel himself as the third most important player of the season, only behind the legends & icons of the decade (Jimmy Connors & Borg). Panatta was one of Borg's toughest opponents, but he was struggling against Connors, defeating him just twice in eleven encounters. Very interesting was their meeting at the US Open '78 - Panatta in his only fourth round in New York, led 5:4 (30-all) in the decider on serve, then trailing 5:6 (40-all) he witnessed Connors' one of the most memorable passing-shots in the tournament history miraculously producing his fifth match point - the last one (won it 4-6, 6-4, 6-1, 1-6, 7-5). Panatta was an artist, he was able to deliver the most aesthetically pleasant tennis of the 70s, manufacturing winners of all sorts. Similarly to ten years younger Yannick Noah, despite great volley skills, Panatta was always struggling on grass, at Wimbledon he reached just one quarterfinal at the twilight of his career, and surprisingly lost to **Pat DuPre** (b. 1954), for whom it was the biggest win of his tennis life. Adriano's younger brother, **Claudio Panatta** (b. 1960) was incomparably less successful, won just one main-level event (Bari 1980) and finished his career with a negative win/loss record.

Career record:	391-244 [226 events]
Career titles:	10
Highest ranking:	No. 4 (August 1976)
Best GS results:	Roland Garros (champion 1976; semifinal 1973, 75; quarterfinal 1972 & 77) Wimbledon (quarterfinalist 1979)

Davis Cup champion '76

Dick Stockton (USA)



Born: February 18, 1951 in New York City, NY
Height: 1.88 m
Plays: Right-handed

Richard "Dick" Stockton belonged to a new wave in the American tennis along with Jimmy Connors, Roscoe Tanner, Eddie Dibbs, Harold Solomon & Brian Gottfried For another, such a successful generation, the Americans waited twenty years... He began the professional career with a wooden racquet, and continued it until 1979. Stockton, as the only one of that generation beside Dibbs, didn't reach a Grand Slam final, but marked his presence in major semifinals at two different venues (Wimbledon '74 and four years later at Roland Garros). He was expected to win one major at least as the prodigy of the American tennis (won twenty national junior titles in different age categories). His route to the Wimbledon semifinal was impressive because had defeated **Ilie Nastase** (b. 1946) and a runner-up of the preceding year - **Alex Metreveli** (b. 1944), both Top 10 players then. Stockton was a professional tennis player in the years 1971-1986. During that time, he played 18 finals. In doubles, he triumphed in sixteen events and lost fifteen finals, but never appeared in a major final. He also competed in mixed competitions, triumphing in two Grand Slam events and failing in one final. In the years 1973-1979 he represented the United States in the Davis Cup, recording five wins and five defeats. In 1979, he won the trophy with the team, even though he did not participate in the final. *"I really don't like talking about the last couple of years,"* Stockton said in 1981 when dropped outside the Top 200 after several years in the Top 10, then advanced to his last final in South Orange. *"It's been very discouraging to watch myself move down the ladder. It's a big mental thing, especially when you believe you can still play the game but you don't have the results to show it."* Participaiting in his last major (Wimbledon '84) with ranking no. 667 as a semi-retired player, he almost stunned no. 2 - Ivan Lendl.

Career record: 379-264 [269 events]
Career titles: 8
Highest ranking: 8 (November 1977)
Best GS results: Roland Garros (semifinalist 1978)
Wimbledon (semifinalist 1974)
US Open (quarterfinalist 1976-77)

Eddie Dibbs (USA)

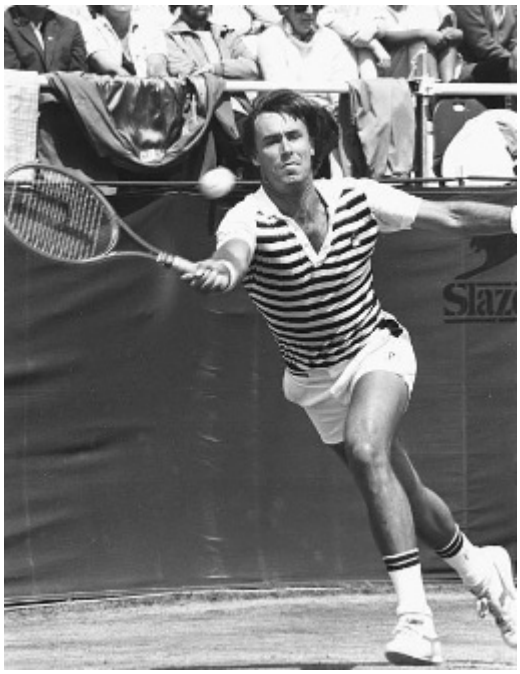
Born: February 23, 1951 in Brooklyn, New York
Height: 1.70 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

He was afraid of playing on grass, you couldn't see him at Wimbledon or Australian Open (grass in the 70s). But on the slower surfaces he knew how to collect point after point to win matches in not impressive style. He didn't care that people often said about him that he didn't play spectacular tennis, some of the fans simply said he was boring to watch. Most of all he was patient, patience it's a virtue highly required in tennis, maybe in all human activities. He could keep the ball in play with his backhand all the time, running to everything, because of that he got a nickname 'Fast Eddie'. Dibbs, Solomon, Barazzutti, Higueras, Gildemeister - those guys born in the 50s were the most patient & one-dimensional among those who reached the final stages of the biggest events. Of course patient baseliners like Bjorn Borg and Guillermo Vilas were much better, but these two could change their gamestyle to be successful with attacking games on fast courts. In the Houston '80 semifinal, Dibbs was trailing to the powerfully serving Bill Scanlon 2-6, 0:3 when began using dropshots almost at every rally to wear his opponent down, then passing him mercilessly to get six straight games; he repeated the same tactics as he trailed 2:4 to win four games in a row (they faced each other three times and Dibbs always won 6-4 in the deciding 3rd set). Dibbs made some noise around himself as he triumphed in Hamburg '73, he liked those heavy courts winning the event again in 1974 and 1976. He was always good in Paris, where he eliminated Wojtek Fibak thrice (always in the third round), leaving the good Pole without any French Open quarterfinal. He was always fighting to the end, 70% of deciding sets won speaks by itself; other interesting example of internal US affairs - the first round of the US Open vs **Bob Lutz** (b. 1947) against whom he was always easily winning or losing; he had no chance for 2.5 sets, saved a double match point at 3:5 in the 3rd to win 5-7, 2-6, 7-5, 6-0, 6-2.

Career record: 604-264 [276 events]
Career titles: 22
Highest ranking: No. 5 (July 1978)
Best GS results: Roland Garros (senmifinal 1975-76; quarterfinal 1978-79)
US Open (quarterfinal 1975-76 & 79)

John Alexander (Australia)

Born: July 4, 1951 in Sydney
Height: 1.90 m
Plays: Right-handed



A man with impressive physical stature, tall, broad-shouldered. He was an uncompromised player, who used his powerful serve to attack the net immediately. Therefore he achieved his best results on fast surfaces, but he was also able to get good results on clay, however, rather in team competitions than during regular tournaments. He contributed in 1977 to regaining the Davis Cup title for Australia, winning both singles rubbers (vs. Corrado Brazzutti & Adriano Panatta after a marathon effort 6-4, 4-6, 2-6, 8-6, 11-9); one year before he defeated both Italian players in Rome in the semifinal; mainly thanks to Alexander, Australia won the World Team Cup in Dusseldorf. Durability couldn't be considered as his strength, he wasn't a great tournament player, lost the majority of his finals, also his Grand Slam results were below expectations, not counting three Australian Open semifinals, because in the 70s reaching the last four in Melbourne was much easier than in the other majors. Once at Forest Hills he apparently served 140 mph! Who serves fast is quite often prone to suffer shoulder injuries, it occurred to Alexander in the mid 1980, it occurred again in 1981 - in the consequence he significantly dropped in the ATP ranking. He managed to come back and collected two titles in 1982; while partnering John Fitzgerald he won the Australian Open - his first major title since 1975 (along with Phil Dent played three finals; once Wimbledon, once Roland Garros). Versatile athlete, used to often play rugby, cricket and golf as a professional, also surfing and sailing. Many experts believed he would be the best in the world, he didn't even reach the Top 5 though... After his career, he devoted himself to business and political activities.

Career record: 584–432 [406 events]
Career titles: 8
Highest ranking: No. 8 (December 1975)
Best GS results: Australian Open (semifinal 1974, * 1977 twice; quarterfinal '75 & '78)

* Australian Open was held twice in 1977 (January & December)

Paolo Bertolucci (Italy)

Born: August 3, 1951 in Forte dei Marmi
Height: 1.75 m
Plays: Right-handed

A short, somewhat corpulent man, he did not resemble with his silhouette a tennis player who could share the court with the best. In casual clothes - absolutely not, in tennis dress - until the moment a match began. Of course, if we think about the Italian tennis of the 70s we should evoke Adriano Panatta, maybe we can evoke Corrado Barazzutti, but talking about successes of Italy in the Davis Cup, Bertolucci shouldn't be omitted. As opposed to Barazzutti, Bertolucci was always friendly and smiling, he didn't need to refuse spaghetti to achieve good results on the tennis court. Maybe he wasn't the fastest player due to his redundant kilograms, but his eye-hand coordination was great, so once he hit the ball, it flew in a required direction. Moreover he knew how to deal with pressure, and his endurance couldn't be questioned - he established a record of consecutive wins in the deciding sets (best of three) winning 23 consecutive matches of this type between April '73 and February '75; in ten of those matches he was at least two games away from defeat! Italy captured the Davis Cup title in 1976, defeating respectively: Poland (without Wojtek Fibak), Yugoslavia, Sweden (without Bjorn Borg), Great Britain, in the semifinals Australia and Chile in the final. Very dramatic was the tie against Australia which Italy won 3-2 obtaining the vital point in doubles as Panatta partnering Bertolucci, they unexpectedly defeated 5-time Wimbledon champions - **John Newcombe** (b. 1944) and **Tony Roche** (b. 1945). All experts agreed that Bertolucci was the best on the clay court at Foro Italico. One year later the Australians avenged that loss against the Italians defeating them in the Davis Cup final in Sydney, but Bertolucci/Panatta again won in straight sets on Saturday. A notable pre-war Italian player, Giovanni Palmieri (b. 1906) said: *"There are only a few players who can think on court just like Bertolucci in doubles or Lendl in singles."* Four years after the Italian triumph in Davis Cup, the on-court thinkers, Bertolucci and Lendl, faced each other in doubles in the second Davis Cup final for Italy. Bertolucci and Panatta lost to Lendl and Tomas Smid in five sets, they were a couple of years older and heavier, perhaps too heavy to maintain a similarly good level in a best-of-five rubber. Bertolucci achieved very average Grand Slam results, but at least in 1973 he reached the last eight in Paris, one year after his namesake, Bernardo Bertolucci directed his most famous movie *"Last Tango in Paris"*.

Career record: 198-147 [150 events]
Career titles: 6
Highest ranking: No. 12 (August 1973)
Best GS result: Roland Garros (quarterfinal 1973)

Tim & Tom Gullikson (USA)

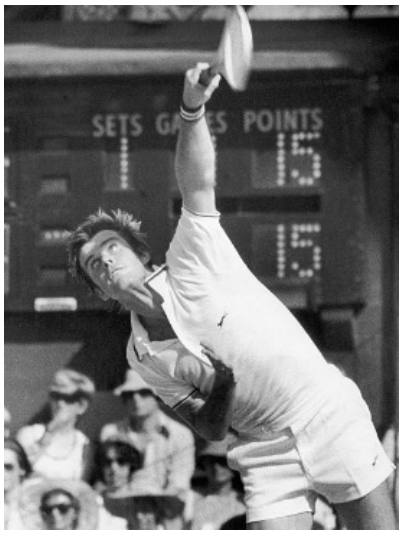
Born: September 8, 1951 in La Crosse, Wisconsin

If one of them was not left-handed, it'd be difficult to tell them apart. They looked identically, the lefty Tom was a few minutes younger. Because of his leftiness, when they were playing doubles together, they couldn't cheat like the Romanian brothers - **Viziru (Marin and Gogu)** - in the 50s when the better serving guy sometimes replaced his twin. Both Tim and Tom came to tennis from basketball as versatile athletes. Tim appeared in the ranking first. His sportive and financial success encouraged Tom to focus only on tennis. Above of all, the money earned in doubles would stay in the family. In 1979, 'an autistic' McEnroe was driven crazy playing day-by-day against an identically looking opponent who was using a different hand - he beat Tom quite easily, but had no chance facing Tim - it was the only time in 18 meetings against the twins, Big Mac left the court as a loser. The twins faced each other four times sharing the wins, Tim was better twice 2-0, Tom twice 2-1. During the years on the tour it looked like one was always mirroring the other, they looked the same, they both were playing the same type of tennis, so characteristic for the 70s and 80s, serve and volley, admittedly Tim was generally better than Tom, in the end each of them had one Grand Slam quarterfinal though. Their lives after professional tennis went in different directions albeit both were connected to tennis. Tim was coaching Pete Sampras in the years 1992-95, helping him to become the best player of the 90s... Tom was a Davis Cup coach of the US team in the years 1994-99, conquering it in 1995. Tim was diagnosed with brain cancer in 1995, and died in 1996 at the age of 45.

	Tim Gullikson	**Tom Gullikson**
Died	May 3, 1996 in Wheaton, Illinois	X
Height:	1.80 m	1.80 m
Plays:	Right-handed	Left-handed
Career record:	272-222 [226 events]	217-225 [226 events]
Career titles:	4	1
Highest ranking:	No. 15 (October 1979)	No. 34 (April 1984)
Best GS results:	Wimbledon (quarterfinalist 1979)	US Open (quarterfinalist 1982)

Roscoe Tanner (USA)

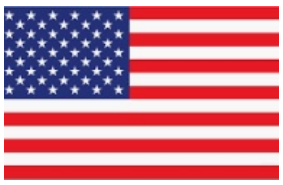
Born: October 15, 1951 in Chattanooga, Tennessee
Height: 1.84 m
Plays: Left-handed



In the 70s Tanner was a prototype of a new player: "all-server". He raised the significance of the serve to a new level. He's considered as the first guy who'd served 140 mph (225 kph), twenty years before it officially happened. His height isn't impressive in the third decade of the 21st Century, but in the 70s he belonged to the tallest players born in the early 50s; he was a bulky left-hander with broad arms, so he was giving an impression that he could serve from a higher level than his height would indicate. His serving technique was quite peculiar because he was hitting the ball on the rise, at the top of the toss, and he could hit the ball curved which not all players were able to do at the time. In the late 70s he was the toughest opponent for the top guys - they knew that when his serve was on, breaking him it was a very tough task, and holding wasn't easy either because he didn't give any rhythm with his awkward baseline game. The almighty Bjorn Borg was a victim four times (twice as the best player in the world), one of his most bitter defeats came at the US Open '79. Borg had won Roland Garros & Wimbledon (defeating Tanner in five sets in the final) and was on his way for the third successive major title, but Tanner stunned him 6-2, 4-6, 6-2, 7-6 in the quarterfinal snapping a 31-match winning streak of the Swede. It was a magnificent night for Tanner, he put the serving Borg on constant pressure and even a straight set victory hung in the air as he led 3:2* (40/30) in the 2nd set. One point separated this four-set thriller from a one-sided four-setter: Tanner blew two match points serving at 5:3 in the 4th set, but he kept his cool & played a perfect 7/2 tie-break. Tanner served only 4 double faults and had 11 aces, three in one game and many on crucial points during the 2-hour-26-minute match. That game when Tanner didn't convert match points was extraordinary, after one of his furious serves the net had to be fixed... Tanner defeated both Jimmy Connors & Guillermo Vilas four times, twice Ivan Lendl & John McEnroe. Tanner's second win over McEnroe was his last big one, it happened in Richmond (6-3, 5-7, 6-2)... McEnroe was a ranking leader with six consecutive easy wins over Tanner, who was already 32 years-old.

Career record: 592–297 [301 events]
Career titles: 15
Highest ranking: No. 4 (July 1979)
Best GS results: Australian Open (champion 1977)
Wimbledon (runner-up 1979; semifinalist 1975-76; quarterfinal 1980 & 83)
US Open (semifinal 1974 & 79; quarterfinal 1972, 1980-81)

Brian Gottfried (USA)



Born: January 27, 1952 in Baltimore, Maryland
Height: 1.81 m
Plays: Right-handed

How to play perfect volleys off fast passing-shots? Gottfried, considered as one of the best volleyers in the 70s, responded: *"When I was 14, my trainer Nick Bollettieri, ordered me to stay close to the net, trying to protect myself from the balls that were hit at me by other boys from the baseline. I was like a moving wall! I was complaining about that exercise, but it helped me a lot to improve my volley skills."* The volleys are necessary in doubles, so it's quite obvious that from the beginning, Gottfried was playing doubles often, and with very good results. He was the best American junior player in doubles at the end of the 60s, but he also won the USTA boys 18s singles championship. As a professional player he co-created one of the best doubles pairs of the 70s along with Raul Ramirez (beside pairs Lutz/Smith, Hewitt/McMillan & Riessen/Stewart). They captured plenty of titles, including three majors. It didn't damage his singles results. Tennis in the 70s wasn't so physically demanding yet, some good singles players already limited their doubles activity, not Gottfried though. In his best two years on tour 1976-77, Gottfried could be considered as a potential best player in the world in singles and doubles! He needed a Grand Slam win in singles though; in 1977 he reached his first major final, but it was a brutal experience as he grabbed just three games against Guillermo Vilas. In that moment it was quite clear that the No. 1 in singles was beyond his abilities. Before the French Open '77 final, Gottfried had beaten Vilas in two finals that year (carpet, hard), but on clay Gottfried's serve-and-volley game couldn't be so efficient. Soon he lost to Vilas also two clay-court finals following their meeting in Paris. The American played as many as 15 finals in 1977 (record: 5-10). Gottfried's seven years younger compatriot John McEnroe proved that you could be more successful in the singles-doubles combination at a time when it seemed less likely because the game became much more physical with an increasing number of players using aluminium rackets. After a 5-year-break, the United States won the Davis Cup (`78) with these

two great singles-doubles players. Nevertheless Gottfried suffered arguably his most bitter defeat losing after 4 hours 29 minutes to **Christopher "Buster" Mottram** (b. 1955) 6-4, 6-2, 8-10, 3-6, 2-6, squandering a match point. The loss could have been much more bitter if the 19-year-old McEnroe hadn't been in superb form. McEnroe easily outplayed John Lloyd and Mottram to give the USA insurmountable 3:1 lead over Great Britain (the second point obtained doubles specialists, the ageing Smith and Lutz). Gottfried didn't feel himself comfortably in five-setters, he lost in five sets inter alia to the best players of the 70s (Bjorn Borg at US Open '76 and Jimmy Connors in Philadelphia '78), leading two-sets-to-love in both matches (suffered eight defeats of this type in total).

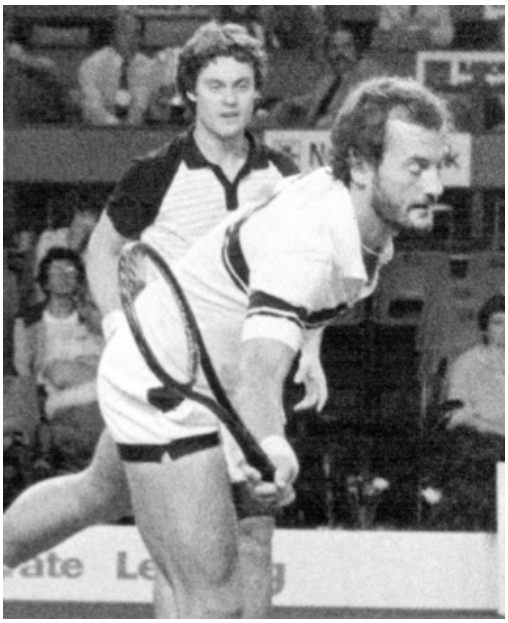
Career record:	702-330 [347 events]
Career titles:	25
Highest ranking:	No. 3 (June 1977)
Best GS results:	Roland Garros (runner-up 1977) Wimbledon (semifinalist 1980; quarterfinalist 1978) US Open (quarterfinalist 1977-78)

Davis Cup champion 1978

Sandy Mayer (USA)

Born: April 5, 1952 in Flushing, New York
Height: 1.78 m
Plays: Right-handed

Career record: 363-196 [213 events]
Career titles: 12
Highest ranking: No. 7 (April 1984)
Best GS result: Wimbledon (semifinal '73)



The best brothers at the turn of the 70s & 80s; the Sanchez brothers were the best 80s/90s. Between the Spaniards there is a 3-year difference and the older brother was more successful, in Mayer's case the older brother was born four years earlier, but it is difficult to say about him "better". Their careers were very similar, each of them won a dozen or so events, each of them advanced to the Top 10. The ambidextrous Gene never played a major semifinal (Sandy did), but in 1980 he played a Masters semi final having defeated all players at the round robin stage (including John McEnroe & Bjorn Borg). He trashed Borg 6-0, 6-3, but the Swede simply wanted to finish it as quickly as possible with the prospect of another two matches against top players... deefated them and won the title. Sandy was generally playing at majors below his status in men's tennis, but in a specific Wimbledon 1973 (as many as 81 players withdrew!) he reached the semifinal... that result could have been easily underestimated if he hadn't defeated the top seed Ilie Nastase in the fourth round.
Trivia: Boris Becker lost his first two main-level matches to the Mayer brothers; first to 15 years older Sandy (6-3, 4-6, 4-6) in his debut in Cologne, then to 11 years older Gene (6-3, 1-6, 6-7) a few months later in Luxembourg.

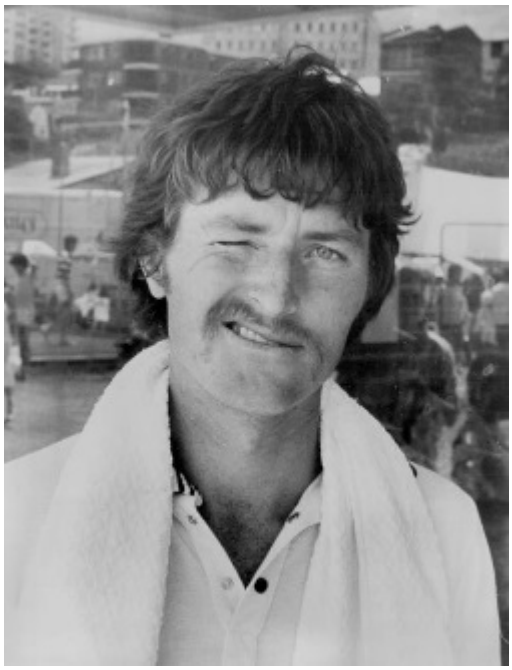
Gene Mayer (USA)

Born: April 11, 1956 in Flushing, New York
Height: 1.81 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed both sides)

Career record: 321-159 [172 events]
Career titles: 14
Highest ranking: No. 4 (October 1980)
Best GS result: Wimbledon (quarterfinalist 1980, 1982)
US Open (quarterfinalist 1982, 1984)

Kim Warwick (Australia)

Born: April 8, 1952 in Sydney
Height: 1.83 m
Plays: Right-handed



First of all a Grand Slam runner-up. Australian Open '80 held between 26th December and 4th January; Warwick was ranked 36 - high enough to be seeded with no. 14. Despite severe pain, the most enjoyable tournament in his career, not only advanced to the singles final, he also triumphed in doubles (partnering Mark Edmondson). In the singles semifinal he defeated Guillermo Vilas in a two-day five-setter suspended due to darkness. Warwick struggled through the singles final with a shoulder injury that had been getting progressively worse as the tournament progressed. He took a pain-killing injection before the doubles final. During the break between the semifinal against Vilas and the final, he was given ultrasound treatment and used ice and hot liniment. No match up for the legends born in the 50s: (0-2 vs Bjorn Borg, 0-5 vs Jimmy Connors, 0-4 vs John McEnroe, being severely beatn on every occasion), but easily otplayed a young Ivan Lendl on grass in Sydney '80.

Trivia:

holds the record for the most match points missed, having held eleven chances to defeat eventual champion Adriano Panatta in the Rome Masters in 1976 & ultimately lost 6-3, 4-6, 6-7(6)

notched 21 consecutive Grand Slam appearances between 1975 and 1980; it was the first serious Open Era record in this regard, surpassed by Ivan Lendl and Stefan Edberg, who would run it out to 54 consecutive Grand Slam appearances

Career record: 293-270 [272 events]
Career titles: 3
Highest ranking: No. 15 (October 1981)
Best GS results: Australian Open (runner-up 1980)
US Open (quarterfinalist 1982)

Guillermo Vilas (Argentina)

Born: August 17, 1952 in Mar del Plata
Height: 1.78 m
Plays: Left-handed

Winning multiple Grand Slam titles is actually reserved for players who reach the very top of men's tennis, however, two guys in different generations managed to claim a few Slams even though they didn't become no. 1 - I mean Vilas and Stan Wawrinka; the Argentinian won four majors in the 70s, the Swiss one major fewer in the 10s. The historic status of them both isn't similar though: Vilas is one of the icons of the 70s, beside Bjorn Borg and Jimmy Connors, while the inconsistent Wawrinka, during the years he stunned the tennis world three times, was never considered as a potential no. 1; he was always in the shadow of Roger Federer, Rafael Nadal, Novak Djokovic, and even in the shadow of Andy Murray, against whom Wawa has a very good H2H record. Vilas kept the status of a Top 10 player for nine years, and twice finished the season as no. 2 (it happened in 1975 & 1977). Is he the best player of the Open Era who never became no. 1. I have no doubts that he is. Let's look closely at his best year (1977) comparing his results to other two titans of those times:
- number of titles: 16 Vilas, 12 Borg, 8 Connors
- number of major titles: 2 Vilas (Roland Garros & US Open), 1 Borg (Wimbledon), 1 Connors (Masters)
- win/loss record: 136-14 Vilas, 78-7 Borg, 69-11 Connors

On the assumption they were the three best players of the season, you don't need to be a rocket scientist to find out that Vilas was the best in 1977, then Borg, Connors third... but it was just the fourth year of the ATP ranking which was based on the average of a player's results back then, and somehow, 'miraculously' the final positions had this order: 1 - Connors (!), 2 - Vilas, 3 - Borg. It's one of the biggest controversies of the Open Era, much bigger than Petr Korda's triumph at the Australian Open '98, allegedly under the influence of forbidden substances. Marcelo Rios, who lost to Korda the final, many years later wanted to get the trophy - in vain. Also Vilas felt that he should have finished the 1977 season as a tennis king - in May 2015 the ATP announced it had decided not to make the No. 1 position for Vilas officially. Vilas was playing like crazy in 1977, no-one has won as many matches as he did then. Especially the period after the

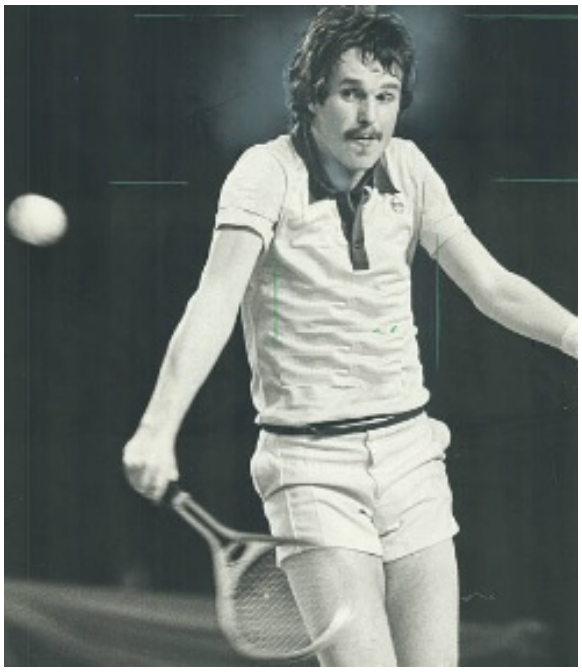
grass season was extraordinary - seven titles in a row (all on clay), then a loss in the Aix-en-Provence final to snap his 46-match winning streak and 53-match winning streak on clay (lost to Ilie Nastase in controversial circumstances), then five consecutive titles and a defeat to Borg in the Masters semifinal (held in January of '78). Unreal frequency of event appearances and compaction of matches; between July and October, Vilas was playing almost every day - his trips are also astonishing: for instance in September he wins two matches in the Davis Cup tie in Argentina (South America), then flights to Europe, plays two events week-by-week reaching the finals in both, then makes a trip to Western Asia and triumphs in Teheran; mind-blowing stuff, impossible two decades later when tennis became more physical and majority of players didn't want to play even three weeks in a row regardless of the stage they reached in a tournament preceding. Vilas is considered as one of the best clay-courters of the Open Era, actually the third best behind Nadal and Borg, but his great career kicked off on grass as he unexpectedly triumphed at Masters '74, held in Melbourne. He was 22, it was his first appearance in the season-ending championships. Keeping in memory Vilas' steady clay-court game, based on heavy top-spins and incredible patience, it's really remarkable that he won that event attacking the net behind both serves. Well, until the mid 70s the serve-and-volley tactics was almost obligatory on grass, Borg & Connors were doing the same (the American won that year two majors on grass trashing Ken Rosewall on both occasions, attacking the net constantly). The year 1982 was the last one when Vilas was an elite player. Despite losing his status of a serious threat in the biggest events, he continued for another seven years, retiring from the ATP Tour in 1989. After one year break he decided to make a return in 1991, played on the Challenger for two years in the meantime receiving 'wild cards' to two ATP events, losing the first round in them both, but in Atlanta '92, playing the penultimate match of his career on the main-level, he had a match point against Alexander Volkov [18]. It's amazing that Volkov one year later will be a point away from losing to Borg when the Swede will be playing the last match of his career. The rivalry between two tennis legends, whose careers Volkov ended in dramatic fashion, was quite upsetting because Borg was doing everything a little bit better than Vilas. In the years 1976-80 when they both were at their prime, Borg defeated Vilas as many as eleven times (three times in big finals: Roland Garros 1975 & 78 and Monte Carlo 1980); the Swede was simply destroying the Argentinian like a mediocre player, not allowing him to win even 4 games in a set, counting 18 sets in a row!

Career record: 951–297 [343 events]
Career titles: 62
Highest ranking: No. 2 (April 1975)
Best GS results:
Australian Open (champion 1978-79; runner-up 1977; semifinalist 1980)
Roland Garros (champion 1977; runner-up 1975, 78 & 82; quarterfinalist 1976, 79-80, 83 & 86)
Wimbledon (quarterfinalist 1975-76)
US Open (champion 1977; semifinalist 1975-76 & 82)

Wojtek Fibak (Poland)

Born: August 30, 1952 in Poznań
Height: 1.82 m
Plays: Right-handed

Unquestionably the best Polish player in history, but never reached a major semifinal (Jerzy Janowicz did it at Wimbledon '13). A final at Masters '76 is some sort of consolation. Fibak was very close to win the final against **Manuel Orantes** (b. 1949), whom had defeated in two sets, opening the event at group stage), but lost 7-5, 2-6, 6-0, 6-7, 1-6. Very weird circumstances are associated with that final. As Fibak led with a double break 4:1 in the 4th set, an interview with a Hollywood superstar Kirk Dougles (one of 13.5000 spectators) was displayed on two TV-screens inside the hall. *"Instead of only thinking about the Masters, about the last tournament,"* Fibak said, *"Instead of putting all my thoughts on the match, I was thinking about the TV transmission to Poland. I was caring how it looked and what was to be said, especially when they had those interviews."* Fibak was serving at 5:4, but failed to close the match out and lost his mind in the decider, and the final 10 points dwelling on wasted chances. *"I think he got a little too anxious in the fourth set,"* Orantes said. *"He never played one important match like this."* The other side of the story is that Fibak was generally lucky to appear in the event at all, because three best players at the time (Jimmy Connors, Bjorn Borg & Ilie Nastase) withdrew from the event due to different reasons (!) - never before or after something like that happened in the season ending championships. Among his four major quarterfinals, the closest to reach the semifinals Fibak was in New York '80 - then not Orantes, but another player with tremendous fighting spirit spoiled the occasion - Johan Kriek. The South African, one of the finest five-set players in history, recovered from a 2:5 deficit in the deciding tie-break, collecting five points in a row to win 4-6, 6-2, 3-6, 6-1, 7-6. Before that match Fibak led 3:0 in their Head-to-Head. Fibak defeated the three greatest players of his time (Borg, Connors & John McEnroe) - each of them once. He never managed to get a win against his good friend, Ivan Lendl. At the end of his career, Fibak turned into Lendl's coach & business mentor, helping him to become the best player in the world & inspiring to aquire famous paintings of Alfons Mucha - Czech's representative of the Art Nouveau period. Fibak also helped a bit in the development of a teenage Boris Becker. The West German won his first



main-level title pairing with Fibak (Munich '84). Many years later Fibak said that he regretted that he didn't recognize tremendous potential in Becker, because he could be his manager, but left this function to Ion Tiriac. A few years after retirement, Fibak took over the function of the Davis Cup captain in his native country, and kept it in the years 1990-92 playing two rubbers in doubles (he'd officially ended his career in 1988). Trivia: at the beginning of his career (1974) Fibak won one of the most incredible matches of the 70s; his thriller against a young & inexperienced Balazs Taroczy, was suspended due to darkness as the Hungarian was supposed to serve for the match at 5:4 in the 4th set. On the following day Taroczy quickly got three points, and something that looked like a brief resumption turned into one hour. Fibak saved the triple match point on return to win 4-6, 6-4, 5-7, 7-5, 6-4!

Career record:	536-314 [320 events]
Career titles:	15
Highest ranking:	No. 10 (July 1977)
Best GS results:	Roland Garros (quarterfinalist 1977, 1980) Wimbledon (quarterfinalist 1980) US Open (quarterfinalist 1980)

Jimmy Connors (USA)

Born: September 2, 1952 in East St. Louis, Illinois
Height: 1.77 m
Plays: Left-handed (two-handed backhand)

Connors has a special place in the history of tennis as a remarkably long-lived champion. The American won his first title in 1972 (Queens Club) and the last one 17 years later (Tel Aviv), actually nothing unusual comparing to other great champions like Andre Agassi, Roger Federer & Rafael Nadal, but in terms of achieving valuable results in the span of more than twenty years, Connors is still ahead of them, albeit the Swiss approaches. In his first professional year (1970) he was able to win two consecutive matches, as well as 25 years (!) later when he reached a quarterfinal in Halle. Connors' regular career was extended over the years 1970-1992 (with an exception in 1990 when he played just three events). In the final years of his career (1993-96) he was irregularly appearing, sticking to the American events, but in 1995 he decided to make a trip to Halle, and he reached there his last quarterfinal, losing 6-7, 3-6, to the eventual champion Marc Rosset. Afterwards he played only two more matches, but in the last one (Atlanta '96), at the age of almost 44 he was able to steal a set from Richey Reneberg. *"The way I was taught to play tennis is the way he plays,"* Reneberg said. *"Anytime you play against Connors, it's fun. He deserves to have the crowd behind him. I couldn't make much of an impression on him tonight. I thought he volleyed well."* Being asked about other challenges, Connors replied: *"A lot depends on timing and the places I feel quite comfortable with. I'll have to see how the scheduling goes."* Apparently it didn't go very well because Connors never played another ATP event, nevertheless he was playing for another few years on the senior circuit. What's the most staggering in terms of Connors' longevity, it's the way he was playing. Despite being a left-handed player, which at least in theory allows to get more cheap points attacking backhand of right-handed opponents with the out-wide serve, Connors was obtaining fewer points behind the serve than any other great champion of the Open Era. He had to work hard on the majority of points during his matches, so the number of rallies he was involved in is actually mind blowing (as a great receiver he was putting constant pressure on the servers, forcing them to work hard on obtaining points too). How the hell someone who had to run so much during his matches, could keep the body in such a great shape to win five-setters for more than twenty years (his first won five-setter comes from the US

Open '70, the last one from the same event 21 years later when he stunned everyone reaching the semifinal following two epic wins over much younger compatriots: Patrick McEnroe & Aaron Krickstein). Very temperamental "Jimbo", entertained the specktators all over the world for two full decades. In those years he experienced an amazing technological shift, when he had begun his career, the guys born in the 30s like Ken Rosewall & **Rod Laver** (b. 1938) were still there, trying to win the biggest events with their wooden rackets and old-fashioned styles, using one grip for all strokes... when he was close to the finishing line, he had to deal with youngster born in the 70s, who were displaying a modern tennis based on powerful serves and top-spin forehands; so over the years he was involved in interesting matches against the masters of wooden, steel/aluminium and finally graphite racquets; in spite of keeping the same style based on flat shots, baseline rallies & frequent attacks to the net, Connors was capable of finding himself in constantly changing circumstances. The two decades (70s & 80s) were marked by his fascinating rivalries with other legends of the sport: Bjorn Borg, John McEnroe & Ivan Lendl. Connors played 23, 34 and 35 matches against them respectively, losing the rivalries in each case, but against them all he won the major finals, even twice against Borg & Lendl. Connors played arguably the best match of his life in the US Open '78 final. Borg, who was chasing his third different major title that year (Australian Open wasn't prestigious then), had been unbeaten in 49 consecutive matches, yet Connors, inspired by the home-crowd, dismantled the great Swede. Observing Connors' matches I particularly like the way he moves on the court making a transition from defense to offense. His on-court awareness was second to none, the ability to attack the net almost always when the opponent played a slower ball landing on the boxes; this style required great eye-hand coordination, and in my opinion it's a main secret of Connors holding so many times despite not obtaining too many points behind the serve (rarely 20%). Especially as a server, Connors was unique in terms of making an advantage constructing the points wisely: first very precise serve (often more than 70% of 1st serve in), moving the opponent in some direction, then usually pushing him to another direction and forcing to run a long distance with his penetrating smooth shots off both wings (Connors' backhand was more reliable).

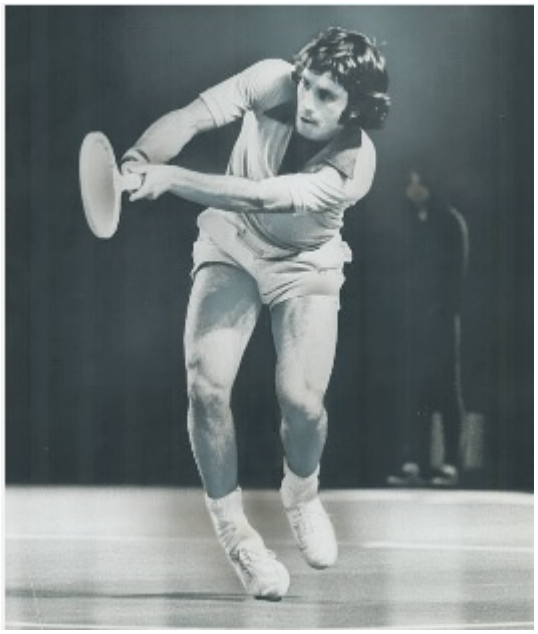
Career record: 1274–283 [400 events]
Career titles: 109
Highest ranking: No. 1 (July 1974)
Best GS result:
Australian Open (champion 1974; runner-up 1975)
Roland Garros (semifinalist 1979, 1980, 1984-85; quarterfinalist 1981-83 & 87)
Wimbledon (champion (1974, 1982; runner-up 1975, 1977-78 & 84; semifinal 1979-81, 85 & 87; quarterfinal 1972-73, 76)
US Open (champion 1974, 1976, 1978, 1982-83; runner-up 1975, 77; semifinal 1979-81, 84-85, 87 & 91; quarterfinal 1973, 1988-89)

Year-end ranking 1973-92... 3-1-1-1-1-1-2-3-2-2-3-2-4-8-4-7-14-936-49-84

Harold Solomon (USA)

Born: September 17, 1952 in Washington D.C.
Height: 1.68 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

For the generation of guys like Bjorn Borg, Jimmy Connors & Guillermo Vilas, Solomon was someone like David Ferrer for the generation of Roger Federer, Rafael Nadal & Novak Djokovic. The Jewish Solomon defeated all the best players who played on the turn of the 70s & 80s except Borg (Head-to-Head 0:15) meanwhile the thirty years younger Ferrer defeated all the best guys of the 00s & 10s except Federer (Head-to-Head 0:17). Both Solomon & Ferrer based their tennis on great physical preparation, tenacity, exceptional resistance and "never say die" attitude. All those assets helped Solomon to keep one of the best 5-set records of the Open Era (18:6). Admittedly as a pro Solomon was ~7 cm shorter than Ferrer, but in the 70s ~180 cm meant more or less the same as ~185 cm in the times when Ferrer was usually dealing with much taller opponents. Ferrer had a better career overall (mainly thanks to his Davis Cup appearances), but some of his numbers are very similar to Solomon's: 27 vs 22 titles, 66% vs 63% of matches won, 3 vs 5 highest ranking, also the best Slam result - French Open final (Ferrer in 2013, Solomon in 1976). Solomon was a specialist of moonballing, his backhand was rock-solid, helped him a lot in passing opponents who had no patience to be involved in neverending rallies with the short man from the U.S. capital. Since the Borg was patient and had a much better service, Solomon couldn't stand against him and their rivalry is one of the most one-sided comparing elite players. At a time when Solomon seemed to be in great shape, he lost two Slam matches to Borg after the same embarrassing result (2-6, 2-6, 0-6). A few years after retirement he continued his tennis journey being a coach of many well-known players, females mainly.

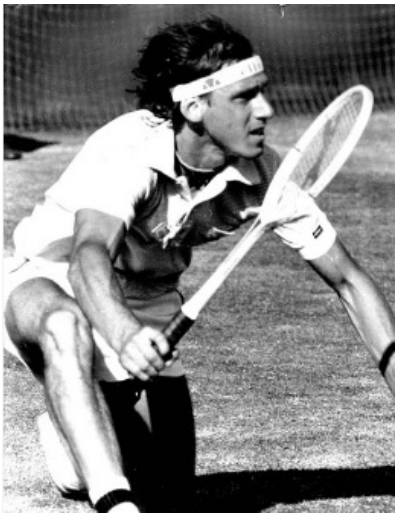


Career record: 585-339 [332 events]
Career titles: 22
Highest ranking: No. 5 (September 1980)
Best GS results:
Roland Garros (runner-up 1976; semifinal 1974 & 1980; quarterfinal 1972, 1975)
US Open (semifinalist 1977)

Davis Cup champion 1978 (didn't play the final)

Corrado Barazzutti (Italy)

Born: February 19, 1953 in Udine
Height: 1.78 m
Plays: Right-handed



In the 70s and 80s, to some degree in the 90s as well, typical clay-courters couldn't count on good results at Wimbledon. Barazzutti belonged to that group. He was a typical counter-puncher, who was relying on opponent's errors more than on his own winners. With this attitude he could outplay plenty of players on clay, but on grass the same players could beat him quite easily applying serve-and-volley tactics. Therefore he was skipping Wimbledon or losing early. Nevertheless he was relatively close to reach the third round in 1980 after a sweet win because he faced his much more famous compatriot, the ageing Adriano Panatta. Barazzutti had won their four preceding matches without troubles (all on clay), so he had the mental edge. Panatta: elegant in his appearance and tennis skills, an artist... Barazzutti: a carpenter, whose best virtues were strong legs and regular keeping the ball in play. During their Wimbledon meeting Panatta was in attack all the time, Barazzutti always in defense. The three years older Panatta ultimately survived taking the 5th set 6-1, and took the momentum in their H2H winning their last two meetings, or three counting a Challenger final in San Benedetto '81. Barazzutti was a malcontent, always unhappy. When he missed an easy ball, he couldn't understand it; when he hit a good ball, he was angry too, because it should have happened all the time. In great shots of opponents he saw coincidences to be unhappy as well, instead of being - for instance - happy that something interesting occurred on the court. There will be another player with a similar attitude in the 80s - Karel Novacek. Already from the beginning of the match they were dejected, even though leading 2:0... but they knew how to win more often than lose. Thanks to tennis, Barazzutti achieved much more than his father who'd been working as a truck driver. Barazzutti was reaching plenty of quarterfinals in smaller tournaments, but had the best period in his career between September '77 & May '78 when he advanced to the semifinals in New York & Paris, and it helped him to enter the Top 10. Barazzutti used to argue on the courts, didn't feel respect for anyone. In Monte Carlo '81 he lost to John McEnroe (1-6, 6-0, 2-6) and after one of rallies they exchanged so many vulgarisms that they were fined with 500$ each.

Career record: 317–231 [207 events]
Career titles: 5
Highest ranking: No. 7 (August 1978)
Best GS results: Roland Garros (semifinal 1978; quarterfinal 1980)
US Open (semifinal 1977)

Jose Higueras (Spain)

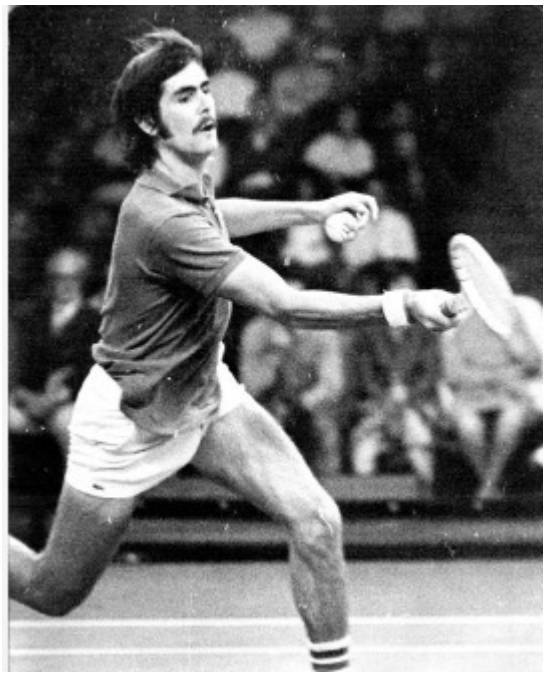
Born: March 1, 1953 in Diezma
Height: 1.78 m
Plays: Right-handed

As a coach, to some degree Higueras was a wizard helping Michael Chang & Jim Courier to win Roland Garros titles. Admittedly they did it on Higueras' favorite surface, but the Spaniard was only a few years after retiring from the professional circuit and he isn't a native speaker of the English language. Higueras played 26 out of his 28 main-level finals on clay. In Hamburg '82 he'd co-created one of the most memorable matches of the 80s as he defeated Paul McNamara 6-4, 7-6, 6-7, 3-6, 7-6 after 5 hours 6 minutes, and until Rome '14 it was the longest "best of five" final. Higueras held a match point leading 5:3 in the 3rd set, then he came back from 2:4 in the 5th, saving a match point at 5:6 before clinching the tie-break 7/3. Higueras belonged to the tennis elite in 1979, but another two years were tough for him because he struggled with hepatitis. *"Almost all the world ended me. I had to fight a lot. And in the United States I found the necessary help to be able to achieve it"* said Higueras about his sensational comeback to the elite in 1982. He was a favorite to win Roland Garros that year as he destroyed Jimmy Connors 6-2, 6-2, 6-2 in the quarterfinal, unfortunately for him, almost as easily as he beat "Jimbo", he lost to the ageing Guillermo Vilas in the semis. *"We were close in a lot of games,"* said Connors. *"I just couldn't put two or three points together. I wasn't hitting the ball badly, but he didn't miss many."* The patience was Higueras' biggest merit. One year later in Paris he was patient enough to outlast Vilas in the quarterfinal, yet that victory cost him too much and a teenage Mats Wilander took advantage of it in the semis. Higueras paid for his demanding game-style at the age of 32, in 1985 he was just a shadow of himself and decided to quit the following year. In his farewell event in La Quinta '86 he managed to beat two good players (Guy Forget, **Matt Anger**, b. 1963) before having no chance against a powerful youngster Boris Becker. *"It's all much easier now. I really enjoyed playing today. To me, it was just a tennis match. I didn't have to worry about the points."* Higueras said after his victory no. 455, and the last one. He finished his career with a stunning 10-3 record in five-setters, I think he had not played enough to mention him among the greatest specialists of winning matches of this type though.

Highest ranking: No. 6 (June 1983)
Best GS results: Roland Garros (semifinalist 1982-83; quarterfinalist 1977 & 79)
Career record: 455-244 [235 events]
Career titles: 16

Raul Ramirez (Mexico)

Born: June 20, 1953 in Ensenada
Height: 1.82 m
Plays: Right-handed



The best Mexican player of the Open Era, and actually the only one who was regularly playing at the main-level. One of the best doubles players of the 70s (major titles along with Brian Gottfried), but in singles he also won a few very prestigious events (i.a. Rome '75 and Monte Carlo '78). In his best season (1976) he played as many as nine Grand-Prix finals and finished the season as the best player of that tour. That year he appeared in two major semifinals (Paris & London), in the former he led 2-1 in sets against Harold Solomon... Ramirez was born close to the Mexican-American border (*Baja California*) and tennis-wise he developed in the United States becoming the junior champion of that country in 1971. In the years 1974-78 he belonged to the best players of the world, in those times he knew how to beat the top dogs of his generation (Jimmy Connors & Bjorn Borg... Guillermo Vilas was tougher for Ramirez). Once he even destroyed the teenage, three years younger Swede (6-0, 6-1) in Teheran on clay (!) - Borg was a Roland Garros champion then. The downhill happened in 1979, that year Ramirez suffered a shoulder injury. He was no match-up for the rising star - John McEnroe (Ivan Lendl he faced just once); seven meetings and only one deciding set between them. Shortly before retirement he won his last title in a poorly seeded event in Caracas (Venezuela) - the city where his wife, 'Miss Universe' Maritza Sayalero, was born. Taking into account his skilfulness, he may regret not playing a major final; certainly it'd be easier if he was participating in the Australian Open, yet he never made a trip to the Down-Under.

Career record: 546-267 [265 events]
Career titles: 19
Highest ranking: No. 4 (November 1976)
Best GS results: Roland Garros (semifinals 1976-77; quarterfinal 1974-75 & 1978)
Wimbledon (semifinal 1976; quarterfinal 1975 & 1978)
US Open (quarterfinal 1978)

Hank Pfister (USA)

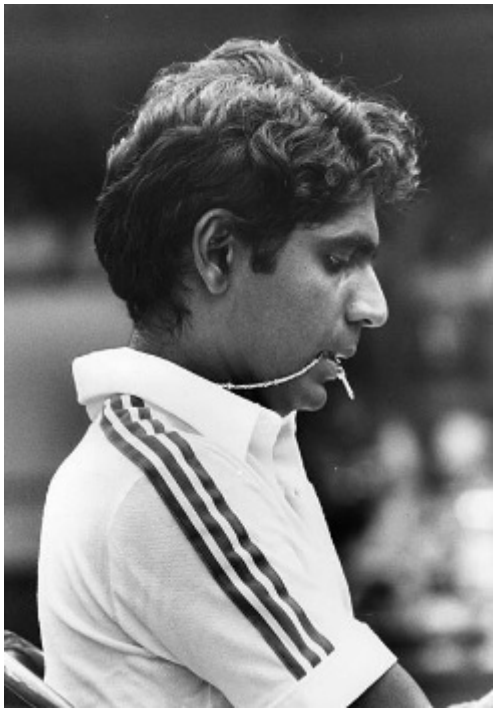
Born: October 9, 1953 in Bakersfield, California
Height: 1.93 m
Plays: Right-handed

Henry Pfister, one of the tallest players of the 70s and what is quite understandable known at the time as one of the best servers and a decent volleyer thanks to an exceptionally long reach. The weak Australian Open (until 1983) helped that lanky player to have much nicer resume - within five years he played as many as three Aussie Open semifinals (usually being beaten already in the first weeks of other majors); first being trashed by Guillermo Vilas, then losing two five-setters to other American big-server Steve Denton. In 1982 he actually should have advanced to the final because led 5:3 in the 5th set against Denton in an "all-serve" match of a simple pattern: who breaks - wins the set, Pfister choked in the 105-degree heat (40 Celcius) though, serving at 5:4, to lose 4-6, 6-3, 3-6, 6-3, 6-7. *"I know he's going to just come out there smoking,"* Pfister said analyzing what could happen against Denton. Pfister was no match up for the two best guys of the 70s (one win over Jimmy Connors in their first meeting!), but knew how to play against Vilas (except that abysmal AO defeat), ending up their rivalry at three apiece. The weakest three-time major semifinalist? Very likely... Quite surprising that in doubles he won his both majors on clay in Paris (partnering Gene Mayer in 1978 and Victor Amaya two years later). Along with Amaya he also played a US Open '82 final which he lost in five sets to Denton & Kevin Curren. Nothing particularly interesting except the fact that a rather unusual circumstance took place - four of the fastest serving players at the time were on the court.

Career record: 260-212 [215 events]
Career titles: 2
Highest ranking: No. 19 (May 1983)
Best GS results: Australian Open (semifinalist 1978, 1981-82)

Viyay Amritraj (India)

Born: December 14, 1953 in Madras
Height: 1.93 m
Plays: Right-handed



What is Madras famous for? The answer is: for tea and the Amritraj brothers. The history of tennis knows many brothers playing well, beginning with Renshaws and Dohertys, ending with Zverevs, but **Amritrajs** were three (!): **Anand** (born: 20 March 1951), **Ashok** (born: 22 February 1956) & Vijay. Admittedly the youngest of them (Ashok) never advanced to the Top 200, and never appeared in a major, yet he won four main-level matches, including two against famous names - Paul McNamee (7-6 7-5) &... Vijay Amritraj (6-2 6-1), so the second of those wins seems dodgy... Anad & Vijay introduced India to the Davis Cup final in 1974 losing it by a walkover to South Africa. Anad & Vijay created a very good doubles pair, having based the game on big serving and reliable volleys. Thirteen years later when they reached the Davis Cup final again (backed up by Ramesh Krishnan), they both were long time behind their best physical shape, and could rely only on great touch at the net as they faced Sweden in the final. Vijay means 'victory' in Indian. How many times though, being a step from a big victory Vijay couldn't handle the pressure showing signs of nikephobia (a fear of victory). The best example comes from the Wimbledon second round in 1979 against Bjorn Borg when Vijay led 2-1 in sets, built a *3:1 advantage in the 4th set, had a triple break point at 3:2, but lost it in a tie-break and the match 6-2, 4-6, 6-4, 6-7(2), 2-6. Well, it was Borg one may say... on the same Centre Court he had won a year before a similar match against another big server - Victor Amaya. But on the other hand the spectators could ask why Amritraj didn't finish the job having more weapons in his arsenal than the one-dimensional Amaya, why he didn't improvise something to surprise the great Swede. Some players don't have a "killer instinct", they seem to have all the tools to win at least one major title, but they never even reach a Grand Slam final. Every generation produces someone like that, first (as far as the Open Era is concerned) it was Vijay, then Tim Mayotte, Jason Stoltenberg, James Blake... Vijay "Maharaja of tennis", two years after the bitter defeat to Borg, almost stunned at Wimbledon the second best player of that era; having won their two previous matches, he grabbed the first two sets against Jimmy Connors in the quarterfinal, was 2:1* (30-all) in front in the 3rd when a long rally occurred - Vijay lost it, was broken afterwards, and left the court as a loser after the 3-hour 42-minute battle

winning one game less in each of the last three sets (4-3-2). This is how faded away that great technician, whose talent, repertoire of shots and eye-hand coordination were bigger and better than his results. He showed his great potential as a singles player the last time in August 1984 in Cincinnati. In the first round as No. 70 he faced John McEnroe, who was almost invincible at the time. It was very surprising that McEnroe needed a tight tie-break (8/6) to take the opener against the 30-year-old veteran. After that everyone could expect something like 6-2 for McEnroe, but it was the Indian who won the set 6-2, and broke McEnroe's serve also twice in the decider to take it 6-3! *"I can't take anything away from him,"* McEnroe said. *"He played very well. I was surprised at how well he played, particularly on his serve."* Vijay stated: *"This brought back memories of when I was 19 years old, playing Rod Laver at the US Open in 1973. After eleven years, there is still a little bit left."* Amritraj had defeated in that encounter the passing legend in five sets (second round). Curiosity: he is the only player to win a tournament saving match points in three different matches - did it in Bretton Woods 1973, withstanding match points in the first round (3 MPs vs Humphrey Hose), the quarterfinal (3 MPs vs Rod Laver) & the final (2 MPs vs the young Connors). The oldest of brothers - Anand - is a father of a former Indian-American player Stephen Amritraj (born March 28, 1984 in Los Angeles), who entered the ATP ranking in singles and won a couple main-level matches in doubles. The youngest of the Amritraj brothers, after retirement went into the film industry where as a producer was responsible for more than 120 films, earning worldwide revenues of more than $2 Billion.

Career record:	399–308 [302 events]
Career titles:	15
Highest ranking:	No. 16 (July 1980)
Best GS results:	Wimbledon (quarterfinalist (1973 & 1981) US Open (quarterfinalist (1973-74)

Balázs Taróczy (Hungary)

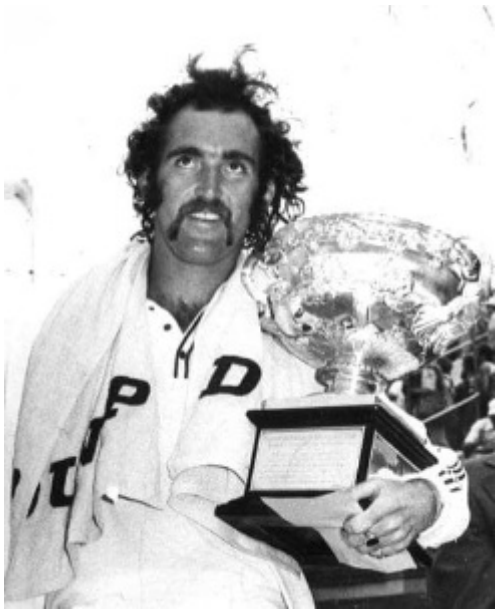
Born: May 9, 1954 in Budapest
Height: 1.82 m
Plays: Right-handed

Beyond doubt he is the best Hungarian player of the past fifty years, a king of a clay-court event in Hilversum - won it six times in the years 1976-1982. Journalist Peter Bodo - an ethnic Hungarian born in Austria - gave his thoughts about Taroczy's successes in the Netherlands, *"Taróczy is a long-time friend of mine; some of you may remember him as the prematurely balding Hungarian stylist with the sweeping, sweet, one-handed slice backhand and heavy serve… he collected almost half of those (singles titles) at one tournament – Hilversum, where he won at six times. What was the secret? Got me. Got him, too. He just liked it there, and after he won the title he was always welcomed back like a conquering hero."* He carried a 29 match win streak into the '83 final against Tomas Smid... Taroczy was a successor of Jozsef Asboth (1917-1986), the French Open '47 champion and **Istvan Gulyas** (1931-2000), the French Open '66 runner-up. As opposed to them, Taroczy never reached a major final in singles, but as far as the Open Era is concerned, no Hungarian player even modestly approached his results. In the years 1973-86 he took part in 33 Davis Cup ties producing a 76-19 record counting singles & doubles (the second on the list, Gulyas had a 34-27 record). Given his entire career, rather underachiever in majors, just two quarterfinals (both in Paris). His delicate style and posture didn't fit the hardcourts, all his twenty finals occurred on clay. Very good doubles player too (inter alia a Wimbledon champion of 1985 along with Heinz Gunthardt); in the quarterfinal they won one of the longest doubles matches in history, eliminating Paul Annacone / Christo van Rensburg 6-4, 2-6, 6-4, 6-7, 24-22. In his last season on the tour (the last four years he was playing just doubles), he was the first coach of a teenage Goran Ivanisevic.

Career record: 391-232 [242 events]
Career titles: 13
Highest ranking: No. 12 (April 1982)
Best GS results: Roland Garros (quarterfinal 1976, 1981)

Mark Edmondson (Australia)

Born: June 24, 1954 in Gosford
Height: 1.85 m
Plays: Right-handed



In the history of the Australian Open once happened that an unseeded player became the champion - "Mister Nobody", this way the Australian press called its new champion. He became the last major champion who wore a moustache, just like the beaten finalist, the ageing John Newcombe. Admittedly the 1976 event, like many others in Melbourne before and after, was deprived of the best Americans and Europeans, but all the most important Aussies participated. En route to the shocking title, Edmondson also notched valuable victories over Phil Dent and Ken Rosewall... Edmondson was growing up under the guidance of Charlie Hollis, known for polishing skills of gifted juniors, but his transition to adult tennis wasn't easy. He was just a casual 22-year-old Australian, at the time of the mid 70s there were plenty of them (when he went through the qualifying rounds to play at Wimbledon '75 he was merely one of 18 Aussies in the main-draw)... until he defeated Rosewall and Newcombe in back-to-back matches, people down under didn't recognize him. The unexpected triumph in his just fifth main-level event (!) allowed Edmondson advancement to the Top 100; he stayed there several years. His success could have been considered as a fluke if he had not reached the Wimbledon '82 semifinal with a quarterfinal win over Vitas Gerulaitis, avenging one of the most dramatic Davis Cup rubbers (1979) when blew a triple match point in the third set. No doubt that grass was his favorite surface; the potential to do some damage at Wimbledon he already displayed five years before reaching the semifinal as he had won the opening two sets to the king of the event - Bjorn Borg - in the round two (6-3, 9-7, 2-6, 4-6, 1-6).

Career record: 256-242 [236 events]
Career titles: 6
Highest ranking: No. 15 (May 1982)
Best GS results: Australian Open (champion 1976)
Wimbledon (semifinalist 1982)

Vitas Gerulaitis *(USA)*

Born: July 26, 1954 in Brooklyn, New York;
Died: September 17, 1994 (aged 40)
Height: 1.82 m
Plays: Right-handed

"Nobody beats Vitas Gerulaitis 17 times in a row." said a happy American of the Lithuanian heritage, after defeating Jimmy Connors in the Masters '79 (New York) semifinal. Even though Gerulaitis belonged to the strict tennis elite of the late 70s, he was regularly losing to the two best players (Bjorn Borg & Connors) and ironically finished his career with a 0-17 H2H against the Swede. In January '80 he turned the tables against Connors though, that shocking semifinal initiated a streak of his four consecutive wins over the fellow American whom he had beaten in their first meeting seven years before, also in New York. Gerulaitis was for tennis at the turn of 70s & 80s someone like Juan Martin del Potro at the turn of 00s and 10s. This is how I see the analogy: Connors (Roger Federer), Borg (Rafael Nadal) were established as the best guys of the decade when two new great rivals appeared - John McEnroe (Novak Djokovic) and Ivan Lendl (Andy Murray). Gerulaitis - like thirty years later - Del Potro, was the most dangerous player for the Big 4. Admittedly he never defeated Borg, but almost did it in the most important match of his career - a memorable Wimbledon '77 semifinal, by many pundits considered as the best match of the 70s. Gerulaitis had his issues with mental resistance, not only in that semifinal vs Borg the nerves got him, it also happened in his US Open '81 semifinal when he wasted nine breakpoints (in three different games) in the decider against McEnroe, tentatively playing all the most important points. His third famous five-set loss, comes from Masters '81 when he squandered a match point to beat Lendl in straight sets before losing in five. Taking into consideration his entire career, he deserved to win at least one major (like Del Potro) - and it happened in a bizarre 1977 season when two Australian Opens were held at Kooyong. Borg, Connors as well as Guillermo Vilas didn't play then, Gerulaitis was a top seed and confirmed it before the final winning all matches with relative ease. Given the status of Aus Open at the time, the US-playboy (as he was mentioned sometimes in the press because of his fondness to the night life) got the biggest title of his life at Foro Italico in Rome '79 when he survived a marathon

against Vilas (6-7, 7-6, 6-7, 6-4, 6-2). It lasted 4 hours 53 minutes, the longest main-level final of the 70s. *"I kept attacking throughout the match,"* said Gerulaitis, *"He seemed to be getting tired, but I felt good, not nearly as tired as I should have been after almost five hours of tennis. I changed strategy about four times during the match and played just about every way I know how to."* The amazingly tight match had a sudden twist at 2-all - up to that moment neither of the players had won three straight games, and Gerulaitis took the final four.

Comparison of Gerulaitis' & Del Potro's Head-to-Heads against the Big 4:
Gerulaitis vs Connors 5-18, Borg 0-17, McEnroe 3-11, Lendl 3-3
Del Potro vs Federer 7-18, Nadal 6-11, Djokovic 4-16, Murray 3-7

Career record:	535-232 [252 events]
Career titles:	26
Highest ranking:	No. 3 (February 1978)
Best GS results:	Australian Open (champion 1977) Roland Garros (runner-up 1980; semifinalist 1979; quarterfinalist 1982) Wimbledon (semifinalist 1977-78; quarterfinalist 1976 & 1982) US Open (runner-up 1979; semifinalist 1978 & 81)

Victor Amaya (USA)

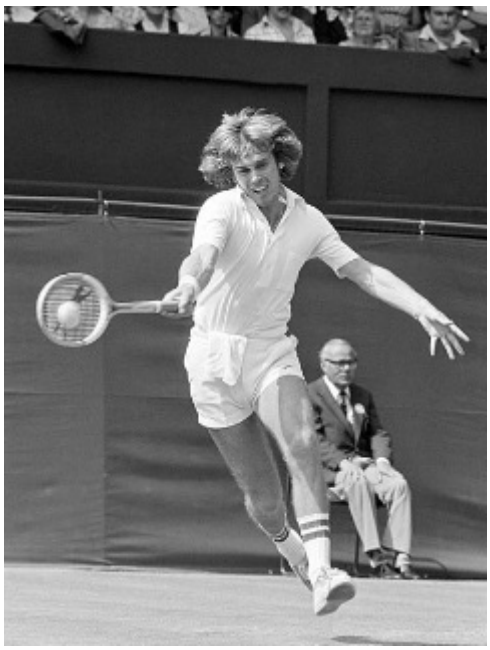
Born: July 2, 1954 in Denver, Colorado
Height: 2.00 m
Plays: Left-handed

An exceptionally tall player in the 70s, who was moving on the court with grace of "Chief" Bromden from the *"One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest"* movie. He early flew from Wimbledon '80 as one of the seeded players. As No. 14 lost a strange battle of big servers on Centre Court to Hank Pfister 6-3, 4-6, 0-6, 6-3, 3-6. The serve didn't properly function on that day for them both, especially for Amaya, how could he win then? An irony... in the first round met doubles partners who had won the French Open a couple of weeks before! Common thinking in the 70's: Amaya could be an NBA player. At the time he was competing in the most important tournaments, no-one was as tall as Amaya, he was 20 cm taller than the best players in the world like Connors, Borg, Vilas or McEnroe. Dark-skinned man wearing often a red bandana, which was holding his boisterous hair - a real Native American warrior, yet using a racket instead of a bow. Clumsy, but at times quite sufficient - big serve, a few huge steps towards the net to make a volley error or a winner, no "long conversations" with him. He was "Ivo Karlovic" thirty years earlier. That left-handed athlete belonged to a group of players who were dangerous for the best guys, because you never knew either his powerful serve would be working well or not. In 1978, in the Wimbledon first round he was fighting five sets against Bjorn Borg. The Swede needed to dig deep to avoid a four-set defeat (saved a break point at 1:3 in the 4th set) and finally won 8-9(7), 6-1, 1-6, 6-3, 6-3. Plenty of emotions out there, amazing upset could have happened if Amaya had been serving in the 4th set as well as in the set preceding... if... Among "all-serve players" in the 70s, the best results achieved Roscoe Tanner, but Amaya couldn't complain, despite his one-dimensional game-style he entered the Top 20 in 1980. That year he defeated a young & inexperienced Ivan Lendl in the Washington final, and with knowledge of further greatness of Lendl, we can say it's a highlight of Amaya's career.

Career record: 187-172 [176 events]
Career titles: 3
Highest ranking: No. 15 (August 1980)
Best GS result: Australian Open (semifinal 1979)

John Lloyd (Great Britain)

Born: August 27, 1954 in Leigh-on-Sea (England)
Height: 1.80 m
Plays: Right-handed



The best British player in the 70s with a career highlight at the Australian Open '77 - the second edition of the event that year. The 23-year-old Lloyd [66] took advantage of a great draw - he didn't face a Top 100 player en route to the final. Amazing, but it was the reality of that Slam at the time. Nonetheless Lloyd's success has its additional value considering a quarterfinal victory over the Aussie legend - John Newcombe, admittedly semi retired & 33-year-old in his next to last major, but an Aussie Open runner-up a year before and a champion two years earlier! No other British player reached a Grand Slam final for twenty years, until British-Canadian Greg Rusedski advanced to the US Open final in 1997. Grass-court final in Australia didn't give Lloyd enough confidence to play at least once in the fourth round at Wimbledon. In the mid 80s Jeremy Bates replaced him as the top British player, twenty years later Lloyd replaced Bates as a Davis Cup captain of Great Britain. Lloyd never even won a set against Jimmy Connors in their five meetings, but won over Connors a heart of great Chris Evert, Connors' former girlfriend. Lloyd and Evert got married in 1979; until divorce in 1987 she was using a double surname Evert-Lloyd. Before the Andre Agassi-Steffi Graf couple, the British man and the American woman were the most successful formalized pair in tennis. Trivia: in 1975 (Monte Carlo) Lloyd defeated the teenage Bjorn Borg (6-0, 5-7, 6-4), who was already a French Open champion. It's Lloyd's lone win over the best players of the world who played in the 70s & 80s. Lloyd was two points away from much more impressive victory in San Francisco '85 over an almost invincible at the time John McEnroe. Lloyd saved two match points at 5:6 in the 3rd set, came back from 1:5 in the deciding tie-break, but ultimately lost 1-6, 7-6, 6-7(6).

Career record: 210-259 [246 events]
Career titles: 1
Highest ranking: No. 23 (July 1978)
Best GS results: Australian Open (runner-up 1977)
US Open (quarterfinalist 1984)

Paul McNamee (Australia)

Born: November 12, 1954 in Melbourne
Height: 1.78 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

He's mainly known as a doubles specialist, winner of 23 titles (majority with Peter McNamara - three majors with him, the fourth and last with Mark Edmondson), but had his big moments as a singles player too. The first of them when eliminated John McEnroe in Paris '80 fourth round after the first all-tie-break battle at Roland Garros (7-6, 6-7, 7-6, 7-6) saving seven set points in the 4th set. The match lasted 4 hours 18 minutes. *"I was physically ready for a fifth set"* he said, *"I'm fairly fit player. I was able to hit a heavy topspin into his backhand. I think that's why I won the match. I had a feeling that I was a little bit stronger than him."* In 1984 when McEnroe with incomparable ease won the title at Wimbledon, McNamee was the only guy taking a set off him (saving three match points). In the Baltimore '82 final, McNamee prevailed in five sets over much higher ranked Guillermo Vilas. A few months later he was a point away from the biggest success of his career holding a semifinal match point against Johan Kriek at the Australian Open. As opposed to all other best Australian players of the 70s & 80s, he was playing double-handed backhand and it's very peculiar that he is the only professional player who switched during his career from one-handed to double-handed backhand; it happened in 1979 when Jimmy Connors & Bjorn Borg had already ruled for a couple of years, and McNamee sensed that using two hands was more efficient in then-modern equipment. After retirement McNamee played a key role in the founding of the Hopman Cup in 1988. He served as tournament director of the Hopman Cup and CEO of the Australian Open until 2006.

Career record: 247-231 [219 events]
Career titles: 2
Highest ranking: No. 24 (May 1986)
Best GS result: Australian Open (semifinalist 1982)

Brian Teacher (USA)

Born: December 23, 1954 in San Diego
Height: 1.91 m
Plays: Right-handed

The only Grand Slam champion in the Open Era of the Jewish heritage. The tall serve-and-volley American enjoyed the most fruitful period of his career in the last quarter of 1980. In the second round of Tokyo he almost defeated the virtually unbeatable at the time Bjorn Borg (6-3, 6-7, 4-6), and believed in his abilities more than ever. In the aftermath off that loss, he was the hottest player at the end of the year winning 23 out of 27 matches (lost finals in Hong Kong & Taipei to Ivan Lendl, and two other finals in Bangkok & Sydney). There was a lot of tennis fatigue, some problems with his wife (fellow tennis player Kathy May) and he was wondering about pulling out of the season ending Australian Open, while he was spending his vacation in Hawaii. Teacher, seeded No. 8, ultimately decided to participate in the event, and won six matches in a row, defeating in the last three the seeded Aussie guys, with an unexpected finalist Kim Warwick (7-5, 7-6, 6-3) in the end, earning the biggest paycheck of his career - $50,000. *"Until today, I didn't think I would ever win a Grand Slam tournament,"* he said. *"It feels great. 'Possibly I felt I really would like to win the tournament and I was pretty determined to fight the whole way. Winning now will give me a lot of confidence."* By age 5, Brian Teacher was already playing tennis and swimming competitively. Be glad he got out of the water. After retiring from tennis, he returned to UCLA to earn his Bachelor of Science in Economics and then pursued his MBA from the USC School of Business. He was Greg Rusedski's coach in the mid 90s.

Career record: 333-236 [246 events]
Career titles: 8
Highest ranking: No. 7 (October 1981)
Best GS results: Australian Open (champion 1980)
Wimbledon (quarterfinalist 1982)

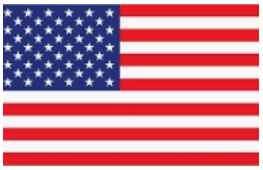
Peter Fleming (USA)

Born: January 21, 1955 in C.Borough, New Jersey
Height: 1.96 m
Plays: Right-handed

"A club player finds himself in such a tough situation facing a professional player, like I'd find myself talking to Albert Einstein about the theory of relativity. The best players in the world are like geniuses" Fleming said in 1980, the year in which he advanced to the Top 10. No longer he was only John McEnroe's partner in doubles, he was a notable singles player since then. Nevertheless, he couldn't be considered as a tennis virtuoso. Due to his height, he was obviously limited in moving around the court (the second tallest player of the times, ~5 cm shorter than Victor Amaya). He was a reminiscence of his older (and better compatriot) **Stan Smith** (b. 1946): big serve, efficient volley and excellent top-spin backhand off the return, improved over the years playing doubles alongside McEnroe. Fleming never tried to hide the fact that playing along with McEnroe helped a lot: *"Without him, I could play much worse. John always analyzes my singles game and tells me about it, and I think when we face each other, he subconsciously wants my victory and that's why he plays below his standards then!"* In Autumn 1979, freshly after McEnroe claimed his first Grand Slam title, Fleming almost beat him in back-to-back finals, with the same scoreline! Fleming won 6-4, 6-4 in Los Angeles, and one week later was serving at 5:4 in the 2nd set, but lost 6-4, 5-7, 2-6. It was a decisive moment in their confrontations, could have been 3-all then in their H2H, but ended up at 10-2 for McEnroe, who was already too mature & too hungry in 1980 and afterwards, to give his doubles partner a chance. In their last 14 sets, including the 3rd set in San Francisco, despite powerful serve Fleming wasn't able to win even five games in a set. On the other hand, Fleming experienced downhill in singles after he reached the Top 10; in doubles his simple game (serving big, don't make silly errors at the net) was still good enough to help McEnroe in winning major titles.

Career record: 222–210 [209 events]
Career titles: 3
Highest ranking: No. 8 (July 7, 1980)
Best GS result: Wimbledon (quarterfinal 1980)

Butch Walts (USA)



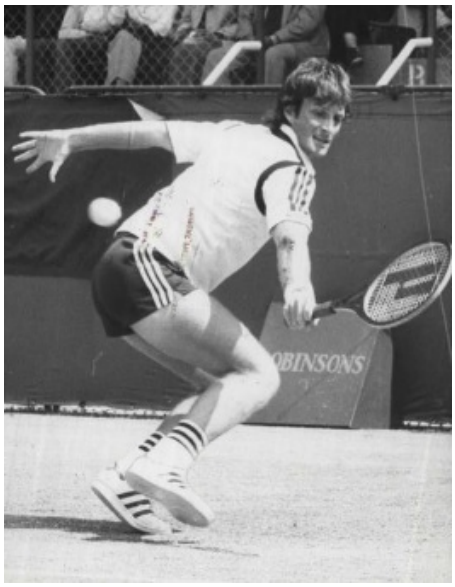
Born: June 4, 1955 in Modesto, California
Height: 1.93 m
Plays: Right-handed

Full name: Kenneth B. Walts. There were so many good players from the United States in the 70s and 80s, that the tall Walts belong to the most forgotten. In his relatively short career, he managed to win four titles and reach the US Open quarterfinal in 1978 after a stunning 6-4, 7-6, 4-6, 6-7, 6-2 win over the defending champion Guillermo Vilas after 4 hours 11 minutes, featured by a quarrel between Walts' father and Vilas' manager (Ion Tiriac) over the new implemented "no coaching" rule. Vilas saved a 4th set match point with an extraordinary lunging backhand volley winner, but ultimately couldn't handle Walts' great service disposal (11 aces, 35 service winners). It's strange that Walts somehow knew how to play against Vilas - they faced each other six times, and the American left the court as many as four times as a victor, even when he was ranked no. 425 while Vilas was No. 4! Walts never even won a set against the other great left-hander Jimmy Connors in their five confrontations. In October of 1981, Walts was diagnosed as having testicular cancer, and subsequently underwent two operations, six months of chemotherapy and a thirty pound weight loss (14 kg). *"I was 26, in top physical condition and never imagined something like this could happen to me,"* Walts said in 1985. *"But 87 percent of those diagnosed make it through the five-year survival period, and chances are if you make it through that stretch the cancer will not recur."* After the comeback he wasn't the same, anyway in a small event in Ferrara '83 he played his last main-level final (four years after the previous one).

Career record: 140-134 [139 events]
Career titles: 4
Highest ranking: No. 32 (April 1979)
Best GS result: US Open (quarterfinal 1978)

Peter McNamara *(Australia)*

Born: July 5, 1955 in Melbourne;
Died: July 20, 2019 in Sonthofen (Germany)
Height: 1.85 m
Plays: Right-handed



McNamara coached professionals (Mark Philippoussis, Grigor Dimitrov and Matthew Ebden) many years after retiring as a player. Two years ago he died from prostate cancer, joining Vitas Gerulaitis and Tim Gullikson among players born in the 50s included in this book, who passed away... Above all, McNamara was known as a doubles specialist, partner of Paul McNamee - they won three majors together as well as Masters '81 in London. In the year 1983 McNamara/McNamee weren't as effective as a few years before, and McNamara was not included to the Australian Davis Cup team which won the title that year (McNamee was playing doubles along with Mark Edmondson - they won all four rubbers). As a singles player, McNamara could rise his level facing the best players in the world; just five titles under his belt, but in the Hamburg '81 final he stunned Jimmy Connors (in four sets which has additional value), and in the Brussels '83 final he survived a tight match against Ivan Lendl (6-4, 4-6, 7-6). Shortly after the Brussels triumph, he suffered a serious injury (tore ligaments in his knee) facing an unknown Czechoslovak **Jiri Granat** (b. 1955) and was sidelined for twenty-one months. In the years 1985-87 he was continuing his career, but the chronic injury caused that he could play similarly to his previous level only in doubles; in singles he was appearing only from time to time, usually losing the first round matches. *"What he did in Hamburg that year when he beat Connors in the final was unbelievable, I mean the week after beating Lendl in the Nations Cup in Dusseldorf,"* said McNamee. *"He just played unbelievably."* The advancement in both singles and doubles to the Top 10 in the early 80s was a testament to McNamara's stunning all-court style. *"His backhand, you know, you should make postcards out of his backhand – it was just an incredibly aesthetic shot. There wasn't a better backhand going around, certainly in terms of its beauty,"* McNamee recalled memories of his friend who died at the age of 64.

Career record: 205-137 [131 events]
Career titles: 5
Highest ranking: No. 7 (March 1983)
Best GS results: Australian Open (semifinalist 1980)
Roland Garros (quarterfinalist 1982)
Wimbledon (quarterfinalist 1981)

Victor Pecci (Paraguay)

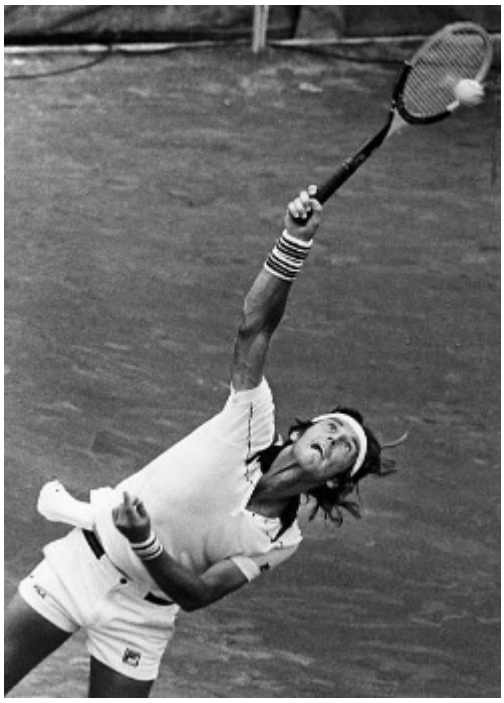
Born: October 15, 1955 in Asuncion
Height: 1.94 m
Plays: Right-handed

A player of one tournament? There's a group of guys who managed to do something above that what could be expected from them based on their whole careers, I mean advancing to a Grand Slam final (I exclude here the Ausralian Open of the years 1968-82) which automatically moves a player from one discipline (tennis in this case) to the entire history of sport. Pecci was the Open Era first as he reached the French Open '79 final; Mikael Pernfors, Alberto Berasategui, MaliVai Washington, Arnaud Clement, Rainer Schuettler, Martin Verkerk, Mariano Puerta & Marcos Baghdatis followed suite. The 24-year-old Pecci created a lot of attention around himself in Paris that year in the second week of the event as he defeated in back-to-back matches three Top 10 opponents (Harold Solomon, Gullermo Vilas - dismantled them both (!) & Jimmy Connors) - he was the second tallest player in the draw (194 cm... nothing impressive currently) & the only one with an earring in the ear, his right. No doubt he was exotic with his facial features suggesting Meso-American roots. His amazing form was verified by Bjorn Borg in the final, but Pecci could be proud of himself for the effort he put in the sets three and four. That success largely contributed to his financial status. He always liked fast cars & easy girls, being the Roland Garros runner-up allowed him to get more of both... Pecci was representing Paraguay in the Davis Cup for many years, and after retirement he became a team captain. The biggest team successes as a player he enjoyed in 1983 when Paraguay ousted Czechoslovakia on a super fast (carpet-wood) surface in Asuncion. Four years later in the same city, but on clay, Paraguay stunned USA as Pecci won the clincher over Aaron Krickstein.

Career record: 365-249 [252 events]
Career titles: 10
Highest ranking: No. 9 (April 1980)
Best GS result: Roland Garros (runner-up 1979; semifinalist 1981)

Hans Gildemeister (Chile)

Born: February 9, 1956 in Lima (Peru)
Height: 1.83 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed both sides)



He has a German ancestry, both parents lived in Peru; born as Juan Pedro Gildemeister Bohner (grandmother surnames: Riemann & Schertler). He was one of the pioneers of playing with top-spin, the best Chilean of the 70s, the successor of **Jaime Fillol** (b. 1949). As a child he decided to use both hands hitting the ball off both wings. Thanks to that the 70s marked three top players using both-handed forehand and backhand: Frew McMillan, Gene Mayer and Gildemeister. Not only ambidexterity featured him, also amazing rotation. The South America players grew up on clay, and had difficulties to adapt to the faster surfaces; Fillol and Victor Pecci were rather exceptions. Gildemeister trained a lot in the United States on the hardcourts, it allowed him to get some good results also indoors, for example in December '79 he participated in a balanced match against Jimmy Connors having defeated Johan Kriek. Gildemeister was a solid "quarterfinal" player (thrice in Paris), worth watching on the turn of 70s and 80s thanks to those unprecedented rotations. Apart from majors, very successful in doubles with the best South American player of the 80s - Andres Gomez. Gildemeister represented Chile in the Davis Cup for thirteen years, allegedly became the first inspiration for Fernando Gonzalez. He was a team captain from 2005 to 2011. Probably his career could have been more fruitiful if he hadn't suffered many injuries. He missed the initial segment of the 1984 campaign while recovering from appendicitis, that struck just as he was rebounding from a five-month layoff with a back injury so severe one doctor suggested his retirement before doing a permanent damage. Gildemeister's activity off court was a bit doubtful as he was a member of the inner circle of Chilean dictator - Augusto Pinochet.

Career record: 218-151 [145 events]
Career titles: 4
Highest ranking: No. 12 (February 1980)
Best GS results: Roland Garros (quarterfinalist 1978-80)

Tomáš Šmíd (Czechia)

Born: May 20, 1956 in Plzen
Height: 1.91 m
Plays: Right-handed

The best Czechoslovak player for a few years at the end of 70s (between the reigns of Jan Kodes & Ivan Lendl). With more than 500 wins at the main-level. A distinctive feature of Smid's career is the lack of at least one Grand Slam semifinal; he played just two major quarterfinals (lost them both to Lendl). Without the Davis Cup 1980 triumph, Smid could be considered as an underachiever. In the DC '80 final he defeated in the opening rubber Adriano Panatta 3-6, 3-6, 6-3, 6-4, 6-4 and it was the key to the Czechoslovak triumph that year. Very solid Smid throughout his quite long career, generally dealt badly with the best players at his prime (0-7 record vs Jimmy Connors, 0-11 vs John McEnroe - always beaten badly by BigMac and 1-10 vs Lendl; the only win against 21-year-old Lendl in Frankfurt after saving two match points). In doubles Smid won two majors (both with John Fitzgerald) and Masters '87 (with Miloslav Mecir) - en route to the French Open & Masters (London) titles, Smid had defeated the Edberg/Jarryd pair after amazingly dramatic matches, especially the London '87 'round robin' match was sensational: Smid along with Mecir came back from 0:4 in the 4th set & 3:5 (two match points) in the 5th before surviving 2-6, 7-6, 1-6, 7-6, 7-5! Mecir/Smid defeated Edberg/Jarryd a few days later again in the semifinal - it was the only edition when the officials used a random method to make the semifinal pairings. Two years after retirement from singles (played another three years in doubles), Smid was coaching Boris Becker, who was the best player in the world then. Trivia: Smid is a record holder in number of games (85) played in a Davis Cup rubber (World Group). In the 1985 semifinali Frankfurt he lost to **Michael Westphal** (1965-1991, died due to AIDS) after 5 hours 29 minutes 8-6, 6-1, 5-7, 9-11, 15-17! The extraordinary scoreline could be a consequence of one of the most bizarre incidents - at 5-all in the 3rd set the carpet was destroyed at the level of a service box after Westphal's volley!

Career record: 522-334 [325 events]
Career titles: 9
Highest ranking: No. 11 (July 1984)
Best GS results: Australian Open (quarterfinalist 1983)
Wimbledon (quarterfinalist 1984)

Davis Cup champion 1980

Björn Borg (Sweden)

Born: June 6, 1956 in Stockholm
Height: 1.80 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

The first superstar of modern tennis. I use the word 'modern', even though Borg played his entire career with a wooden racquet (Dunlop), because during his years on the top, tennis became a worldwide sport while Borg was signing advertising contracts. When I think about the 70s, two names come to my mind immediately: Jimmy Connors & Borg - these two guys defined the decade not only as the most successful players, but also the two who were playing in a different way than the great champions from the previous decades. They were the first great champions who were using double handed backhands, and as opposed to the previous tennis icons, both Borg & Connors, they weren't natural serve-and-volley players, albeit both were applying that game-style on grass, especially behind the first serves. Connors played the entire decade of the 70s, the four years younger Borg made his debut in 1971, but already in 1973 when he was only a 17-year-old boy with long golden hair, he was recognized as a potential future world's best player. He came to prominence that year at majors, reaching the fourth round in Paris and quarterfinal in London debuting in both events; not only the fact he was able to win three or four consecutive matches on two different surfaces was impressive, also the way in which he did it - at Roland Garros he ousted five years older Dick Stockton in the third round 3-1, surviving the 4th set in an 11/9 tie-break; at Wimbledon he won the longest tie-break in history as he defeated **Premjit Lall** 20/18 in round one (the Indian player lived 1940-2008). It's amazing that almost 50 years later the record hasn't been overcome (on the main-level in singles)... given the set was concluded 9-8 (not 7-6 because the tie-break was introduced at 6-all at Wimbledon in 1979), I praise it a bit more than all other '20/18' tie-breaks. Borg won rounds 3 & 4 at Wimbledon '73 in five-setters, and only two games separated him from another 5-set win when he came back against **Roger Taylor** (b. 1941) from a *1:5 (15/40) deficit in the decider! So it was quite obvious that the boy not only possessed a brilliant game, his mentality was also great. Over the years, when he became the best player in the world, he was always giving an impression that his opponents had to play their best tennis to finish him, a moment of hesitation leading to tight situation was favouring the Swede - he was winning

majority of five-setters (27-6 record) as well as deciding third set tie-breaks (12-4 record before withdrawing). He was known as "Ice-Man", never showing any emotion, regardless of the situation - he could have a bad day being on the verge of defeat, he could lose a game serving for the match, it didn't matter - he was acting always in the same way like the past was meaningless, he was focused only on the future, only on winning the match point, sooner or later. Admittedly he finished only two seasons as the best player in the world (1979-80), but actually between Summer of 1977 and Summer of 1981, so four non-calendar years, no-one could match him in terms of winning the most important events - in those years he claimed four times Roland Garros and four times Wimbledon, in the years 1978-80 he achieved something absolutely unprecedented triumphing in both majors, moreover he won 'Masters' 1979-80 (didn't play in 1978). It was the time when gradually more and more players were applying diversified tactics, so in theory that feat seemed more unlikely than in the previous decades. Borg somehow found a way to be unbeaten within six weeks displaying two completely different game-styles: in Paris he was outplaying all opponents from the back of the court with staggering patience and perseverance while in London, he was playing like almost all other players on grass, so serve-and-volley, albeit as opposed to his first professional years, he developed more complex grass-court game-style, and it was natural for him to charge the net behind the first serve, but behind the 2nd serve he was usually staying back believing in his pinpoint accurate passing-shots. During those phenomenal years, there was only one career flaw - Borg never won the US Open: he lost as many as four finals in New York within six years, even when the tournament was held on clay - it was a faster clay than in Europe or South America, anyway it was still clay, so Borg was supposed to overcome his arch-rival Connors in 1976, but it was a time when the American was usually beating his four years younger opponent... also two years later Borg was a slight favorite facing Connors in the final, the Swede had an aura of invincibility, no-one had defeated him when the Swede entered the court in 49 consecutive matches (in the meantime Borg was eliminated from two events because of injury, he gave walkovers), he had under his belt the first of his three back-to-back Paris-London titles, yet Connors played arguably the best match in his life and stunned the Swede in three-sets! At the end of the 70s it seemed Borg would completely dominate the first half of the 80s, but two great champions appeared on the scene - Ivan Lendl & John McEnroe. The Czechoslovak defeated the Swede twice in eight meetings, the second time was more valuable - in five sets in Basel, but it was McEnroe, who perhaps, not intentionally contributed to a sudden twist in Borg's career. In retrospect twelve months between US Opens of 1980 and 1981 may be considered as the most important period for the entire decade. One year after their epic five-setter with the most celebrated tie-break in history when Borg triumphed at Wimbledon '80 for the fifth straight time, he faced McEnroe in the final again - that time perhaps the American played better than anytime before or later, and survived a tight four-setters snapping Borg's 41 match-winning streak. It was their second consecutive major finals behind the US

Open '80, which was won by McEnroe, who in New York had outlasted Borg snapping his 12 match-winning streak as far as five-setters are concerned. The US Open '81 final meant Borg's fourth and last final loss in New York, McEnroe was better again, that time decisively. Did the American steal Borg's soul, snapping his records and taking away from him the position of the best player in the world? Three consecutive defeats to McEnroe within four majors must have hurt Borg a lot, nevertheless, following the US Open '81 loss, Borg won his 66th title, the last one, at the age of only 25. The rest of Borg's career is stranger than of any other player. One month after the Geneva title, Borg sensationally lost 3-6, 1-6 to Tim Gullikson. The shocking scoreline, yet Borg was still young and hundreds of his wins potentially ahead of him, it seemed that all he needed was to rest for a few months, and began his title defence at Masters '81 in January 1982... it was not meant to be. With the loss to Gullikson, Borg initiated the lingering end marked by a 14 match losing streak, and 16 defeats in 19 matches! In short: in 1982 Borg plays just one event, wins two matches then is destroyed by another youngster who would soon become a Grand Slam champion - Yannick Noah. One year break, Monte Carlo again, that time one win, then loss to another young French guy - 19 y.o. Henri Leconte, but after a dramatic match (6-4, 5-7, 6-7). Before the event, Borg announced it would be the last tournament in his career. *"I tried my best and everything, and now it's over,*" Borg said. *"I feel good. When I wake up in the morning now, I know I don't have to go out and practice for four or five hours."* Borg changed his mind, and decided to get 'wild card' one year later in Stuttgart, funny that he faced Leconte again, but that time the Frenchman gave him no chance dropping just four games in 49 minutes. *"I didn't expect that he would play so strongly,"* said Borg. *"After being at 3-all in the first set, I thought I still had my chance, but then my lack of match practice began to show. I lacked aggression. It was really tough for me to match him, and he has the stuff to be No. 1 in the world, if he can perform consistently."* In the years 1985-90 Borg was 'frozen', he didn't show up in exhibition events, he didn't take a position of a Swedish team captain which would give him another successes because he had plenty of followers in Sweden and the Scandinavian country was the main tennis force of those years. All of a sudden, in April '91 Borg made his third Monte Carlo comeback - lost quickly to Jordi Arrese. His defeat was rather expected, especially that he decided to play with his old-wooden racquet in the time when all professional players were already using the graphite ones. Between the Arrese loss, and the loss in Moscow '93, which ultimately finished his tormented career twenty years after sensational first full main-level season, the 37-year-old Borg experienced 12 consecutive defeats. It was sad, the man who in his prime didn't lose three successive matches, wasn't able to win even a set - in 1992 he lost eight times, always in straight-setters, even when the draw was beneficial like it happened in Los Angeles he faced **Chris Pridham** [112], a man who collected just 54 wins in his career and had the best times of his career behind (no. 78 in 1988). That ended hopes for a first official match between Connors (39 y.o.) and Borg (36 y.o) in eleven years - they hadn't played each other since the US Open semifinals in 1981. *"It would have been nice to play him, we would have had a lot of fun,"*

Connors said. *"He seems to be playing better. He'll be around."* Connors defeated Pridham 2-6, 6-3, 6-4, while Borg improved indeed. In 1993 he finally played his last three events, losing 1-2 on each occasion. Quite balanced defeats to Portuguese speakers, **Jaime Oncins** (b. 1970) and **Joao Cunha-Silva** (b. 1967) surprised; against Oncins, Borg showed to some degree his old self winning the first set after 24 consecutive sets lost (!) saving a match point in a tie-break, but the last Borg's defeat it was a stunner. In Moscow he faced Alexander Volkov, a Top 20 player while Borg had at the time ranking 1148. Something like 3-4 games for the legendary Swede could be expected, instead of this, Borg almost won! Volkov barely survived in front of the home crowd 4-6, 6-3, 7-6 saving a match point in the deciding tie-break. Despite the loss, Borg was satisfied after all, he said it would be his last match, and indeed - it was. In May 1993 Borg had relinquished his desire to play the Grand Slams again. But he had found a new way to enjoy tennis - by joining the senior circuit. "Senior" meant people over 35 years old, and the new Nuveen Tour, created by Connors, was attracting large crowds. Borg happily revived his rivalry with both Connors and McEnroe, and the threesome attracted hordes of fans nostalgic for tennis stars of the 1970s and '80s. Curiosity: in the years 1982-83 Borg played just two main-level events (both in Monte Carlo), but he was regularly participating in exhibition matches against Connors losing eight times, winning just once. Moreover Borg took part in a few exhibition events and even won one, quite prestigious because he defeated in back-to-back matches three quality opponents (Vitas Gerulaitis, Lendl & McEnroe) in Sydney - it was a format when everyone faced each other in the "best of five" matches.

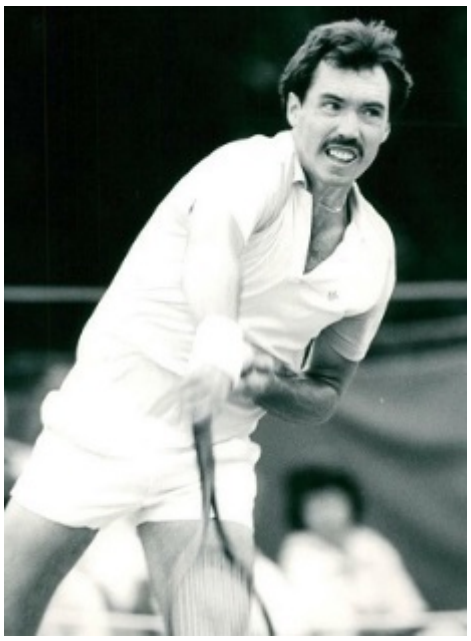
Career record: 654-140 [204 events]
Career titles: 66
Highest ranking: No. 1 (August 1977)
Best GS results:
Roland Garros (champion 1974-75, 1978, 1979-81; quarterfinalist 1976)
Wimbledon (champion 1976-80; runner-up 1981; quarterfinalist 1973 & 1975)
US Open (runner-up (1976, 1978, 1980-81; semifinalist 1975)

Davis Cup champion in 1976
Masters champion 1979-80

Year-end ranking 1973-81... 18-3-3-2-3-2-1-1-4

Steve Denton (USA)

Born: September 5, 1956 in Kingsville, Texas
Height: 1.87 m
Plays: Right-handed



One of the hardest servers in the early 80s (he employed a two-step technique which is currently prohibited). The Texan never won a main-level title, but reached the Australian Open final twice, back to back, and in both finals he lost to Johan Kriek.. a bizarre story connected to the fact that Australian Open didn't mean "equal major" in those years. The grass courts at Kooyong had an opinion of rough, quite unpredictable. Denton took advantage of his powerful serve and good physical preparation, advancing to the final in 1981 winning four out of five matches in five-setters, including a titanic 6-7, 4-6, 7-6, 7-5, 7-6 battle over John Alexander in the fourth round. One year later when he needed to play six matches en route to the final (no 'bye' like a year before), he survived two five-setters, winning the 5th set tie-break again, that time against Hank Pfister (they played a 5-set semifinal also in 1981). A 6-0 record in five-setters in those two best tournaments of Denton's career ultimately contributed to his impressive 10-4 record. Denton's biggest win comes from Cincinnati '82 when he ousted John McEnroe 7-6, 6-4 in their first meeting (Big Mac won easily their other six matches). At the turn of decades the 24 year-old Denton was known as a good doubles player partnering Kevin Curren, but his singles ranking oscillated around the Top 100. In the years 1981-82 he managed to drop 11 kilograms (25 pounds) and much better movement allowed him to enjoy twelve impressive months highlighted by three big finals (Australian Open twice and Cincinnati) that elevated him to No. 12 – to this day he's the only two-time Grand Slam runner-up and highest ranked player without a main-level title. After retirement he gained something like 30 kg...

Career record: 108–116 [116 events]
Career titles: -
Highest ranking: No. 12 (April 1983)
Best GS resulst: Australian Open (runner-up 1981-82)

John Sadri (USA)

Born: September 19, 1956 in Charlotte, North Carolina
Height: 1.88 m
Plays: Right-handed

Fast server from the United States, just like 14 days older compatriot Steve Denton, Sadri enlisted himself to the Grand Slam runners-up thanks to poorly seeded Australian Open. Sadri took advantage of a weak draw in Melbourne '79 as a player ranked 84. En route to the final he ousted three players outside the Top 100, including a semifinal win over **Colin Dibley** [115]. It was his first main-level final at the age of 23. He finished his career with six finals, two of them he won - the second title in Denver '82 was quite impressive; Sadri defeated top seeded Jose-Luis Clerc in the first round, and a few good guys later on. Sadri didn't beat anyone off the finest players born in the 50s; the worst (0-12) Head-to-Head record vs John McEnroe. Sadri's best victory comes from the Tokyo '80 quarterfinal - he snapped Ivan Lendl's 19-match winning streak after a 7-6, 6-7, 7-6 thriller... Within two months of '56, three Americans were born whose game-styles (mainly based on powerful serves) and careers were very similar. Australian Open meant a lucky event for Sadri also in doubles, in the years 1981-82 he reached two finals, partnering Hank Pfister & **Andy Andrews** (b. 1959, briefly a Top 100 player, deprived of any interesting results in singles). Trivia: in the final of 1978 NCAA singles championship, Sadri lost to McEnroe 6-7, 6-7, 7-5, 6-7 after 4 hours 13 minutes (143-144 in total points). *"I really felt I was going to win; I felt I could overpower him,"* Sadri, recalled that final many years later, *"If I had been just a little bit better off the ground, I believe I would have won."*

Career record: 210-188 [190 events]
Career titles: 2
Highest ranking: No. 14 (September 1980)
Best GS results: Australian Open (runner-up 1979; quarterfinalist 1980)
Wimbledon (quarterfinalist 1984)

Bill Scanlon (USA)

Born: November 13, 1956 in Dallas, Texas
Height: 1.85 m
Plays: Right-handed

"Sometimes looking at his game, I think I look at myself a couple of years ago" - Ilie Nastase complimented Scanlon. Indeed, Scanlon could remind the great Romanian with the ease of hitting volleys, but only during his good days, which didn't happen too often. Fast & light with his movement on the court, Scanlon didn't fulfill his expectations after winning the University championship in 1976 (Peter Fleming in the final). Advanced to no. 52 that year, he was ranked no. 37 the following year, but dropped to 95 in 1978. For a long time he was struggling to go beyond the second round, but finally he made a surprise reaching the Wimbledon '79 quarterfinal. He felt himself the best in Hawaii where he triumphed twice. Fanatic of water sports: swimming, sailing, water ski, he didn't like to train hard. He took a lot from training with Martina Navratilova in Dallas. *"She was forcing me to work, finally I adapted to the training regime."* - he said, the player with an afro hair, one of the biggest seen on the courts in the 70s. In 1983, when his haircut wasn't so impressive anymore, he shocked the tennis world by eliminating John McEnroe in the US Open fourth round 7-6(2), 7-6(2), 4-6, 6-3 in 3 hours, 44 minutes. *"It's very satisfying,"* Scanlon said. *"If you're going to have a big win, what better than beating the No. 1 player in New York in the U.S. Open? It's awfully satisfying."* There were three powerfully serving Americans born in 1956: Steve Denton, John Sadri and Scanlon. The first two reached Australian Open finals, the third US Open semifinal, but it's debatable whose results are the most valuable. Trivia: Scanlon won a golden set (twenty-four points in a row) in his 6-2, 6-0 win over **Marcos Hocevar** (b. 1955) at Delray Beach '83.

Career record: 305-259 [266 events]
Career titles: 6
Highest ranking: No. 9 (January 1984)
Best GS results: Australian Open (quarterfinal 1980)
Wimbledon (quarterfinal 1979)
US Open (semifinal 1983)

Chris Lewis (New Zealand)

Born: March 9, 1957 in Auckland
Height: 1.80 m
Plays: Right-handed

There were so many excellent players from Australia, but only one guy from New Zealand managed to put his name on the list of the most important sport achievements - Lewis, as he reached the Wimbledon final in 1983. It was a shocking result because the New-Zealander never played even a major fourth round before or after in his 34 Grand Slam appearances. Lewis [57] enjoyed quite favorable draw, but luck was on his side too - in the first round (Steve Denton) and the semifinal (Kevin Curren) he ousted two best servers at the time after five-setters, his semifinal vs Curren to this day remains as one of the most tight major semifinals in history. Lewis survived 6-7, 6-4, 7-6, 6-7, 8-6 after 3 hours 45 minutes, being three points away from defeat & winning four points more (194-190). *"He was cutting off my volleys, which no one had done all week,"* Curren said. *"He made me hit a lot of balls. I'm a very tired man."* Lewis manufactured a very tough route to the final including three five-setters & eight tie-breaks, and paid the price in the final being trashed by the undoubtedly best grass-court player at the time – John McEnroe. *"His returns were so well placed,"* said the beaten runner-up after the humiliating final. *"I was always scrambling for my first volley. I wasn't able to do much with them because I was stretched out as far as I could most of the time. I couldn't volley how I was used to volleying. That's the pressure he puts on you, because not only does he return it, but he seems to be able to direct it incredibly well at the same time."* Counter intuitevely, Lewis was a good clay-courter, three out of his ten finals played on that surface, capturing two titles. Curiosity: Chris' younger brother Mark, was Michael Stich's coach in the years 1991-92.

Career record: 237-196 [191 events]
Career titles: 3
Highest ranking: No. 19 (April 1984)
Best GS result: Wimbledon (runner-up 1983)

Kevin Curren (South Africa)

Born: March 2, 1958 in Durban
Height: 1.85 m
Plays: Right-handed

Who said that at the turn of 70s and 80s playing doubles would prevent from achieving good results in doubles? After the transition from wooden to metal rackets the game became more physically demanding, but still allowed to play regularly good events in doubles & singles at the same time. Curren and Steve Denton met at the university of Texas, and began playing together as doubles partners, but after some time they improved their singles skills and while they belonged to the doubles elite, each of them reached two major finals in singles; Denton's case is different though, and I write about this in his biography in the book. Both were serving great, Top 5 servers in the first half of the 80s. Obviously great serve, especially the second one is extremely important in doubles, but it helps a lot in singles too, when a player doesn't possess distinctive skills as a receiver; then he is supposed to play many tie-breaks and a lot depends how he deals with tight situations. They both were dealing well. In the fourth round of Wimbledon '83 Curren stunned Jimmy Connors thanks to his great service. He fired 32 aces and kept his composure in the 4th set tie-break because his chances in the potential five-setter could decrease significantly. Until the quarterfinal against Tim Mayotte, Curren didn't drop his serve. Something what Roscoe Tanner had done for tennis in terms of serving in the 70s, Currren did in the following decade, actually reaching another level - he helped to imagine what the 90s would bring to tennis as far as the serve was concerned. Before Wimbledon '83 the best servers couldn't hold 50 times in a row (Curren held 80), also serving more than 30 aces was an unknown territory - Curren did it, and what was more impressive against the undoubtedly best receiver at the time. Curren's best moments came at Wimbledon '85. That year not only his serve, but his return worked perfectly as well. In back-to-back matches he destroyed John McEnroe (1 hour 49 minutes) and Connors (1 hour 32 minutes) - the two most successful players at Wimbledon at the time among the active guys. Curren was a favorite in the final against a 17-year-old Boris Becker, but the young West German was serving much faster than McEnroe & Connors, and Curren's return came back to its normal. The South African (three months before he had become a naturalized American citizen) served well, but just like in his Australian Open '84 final, inability to win a tie-break at one set apiece was decisive. Since retiring from the tour, Curren served as a captain of the South Africa Davis Cup team.

Career record: 339-234 [243 events]
Career titles: 5
Highest ranking: No. 5 (July 1985)
Best GS results: Australian Opn (runner-up 1984)
Wimbledon (runner-up 1985; semifinalist 1983; quarterfinalist 1990)

Johan Kriek (South Africa)

Born: April 5, 1958 in Pongola
Height: 1.75 m
Plays: Right-handed

Remarkable that two best South African players (Kriek & Kevin Curren) of the 80s were born within a month, each of them played two major finals (Kriek won both, Curren lost both) and they both became the U.S. citizens. As a 16-year-old boy Kriek was the South African champion in running and three-jump. Not surprising that with this athletic background - he was considered in the 80s (until he turned 30 which was coincidental with the appearance of Michael Chang) as the fastest player on the tour. Very energetic, vivid, quicksilver, the most dangerous on fast surfaces despite his short height. The two-time Australian Open champion after two final wins over Steve Denton. Kriek must be proud that he won (even twice!) one of the four most important tennis events, but the truth is that in the early 80s the best players didn't participate in it. Anyway, in retrospect it's fair to say he deserved it much more than one-dimensional Denton. Kriek reached two major semifinals and he is written in the history books as one of the best specialists of winning five-setters (an impressive 18-4 record). He defeated the icons like Jimmy Connors & John McEnroe (five times!). Versatile player with very quick hands, the owner of the fastest backhand slice I've ever seen. Confirmed his talent at Roland Garros '86 - he skipped the event in six consecutive editions because didn't like to play on clay, and advanced to the semis ousting one of the even legends - Guillermo Vilas after a memorable four-set thriller.

Career record: 376-222 [236 events]
Career titles: 14
Highest ranking: No. 7 (September 1984)
Best GS results: Australian Open (champion 1981-82; semifinal 1984; quarterfinal 1983 & 85)
Roland Garros (semifinalist 1986)
Wimbledon (quarterfinalist 1981-82)
US Open (semifinalist 1980; quarterfinalist 1978-79)

Jose-Luis Clerc (Argentina)

Born: August 16, 1958 in Buenos Aires
Height: 1.85 m
Plays: Right-handed

The final in the Spanish capital, but two Argentinians play against each other. They both speak Spanish, so the title will stay at home to some degree. Guillermo Vilas wins sets 2 and 3 without any problems against Jose-Luis Clerc, and leads 4:1 in the 4th set having a breakpoint, mini-match point in my personal terminology. An ace

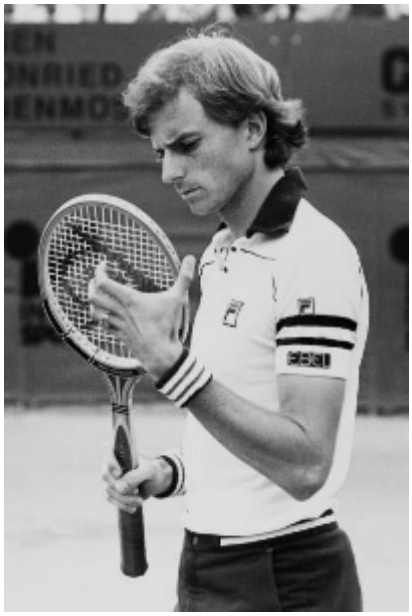
off the second serve! However, the linesman says the ball was out, thus the referee announces "Game to Vilas, he leads 5:1" (at the times the chair-umpires didn't bother to check the mark on clay!). Clerc ferociously questions this decision. Who knows what Vilas is thinking, maybe that his lead is big enough to give the point away, especially that he'd won all six previous meetings against Clerc, maybe he feels some sort of compassion for his Davis Cup teammate? Anyway he concedes the point to Clerc, and starts playing poorly, in turn Clerc comes back to his standard, very solid clay-court game. Ultimately Clerc wins the match 6-3, 1-6, 1-6, 6-4, 6-2. They say philosophically, yet quite simply "This... is tennis!' Vilas should have known better than anyone that leading two-sets-to-one and 4:1 on clay didn't mean automatic victory; five years before he'd lost an unbelievable match to Manuel Orantes in the US Open semifinal despite match points at 5:0 in the 4th set! Well, some people cannot learn from their own mistakes... When Vilas began to achieve his first very good results in the early 70s, Julian Ganzabal (b. 1946) was a local star of the Argentinian courts, but he couldn't emulate his charm at the international level, thus Vilas had to wait a couple of years for the appearance of six years younger Clerc, to seriously think about winning the Davis Cup title. They led the Argentinian team to the final in 1981, but had to face the genius of John McEnroe, who destroyed Vilas on day one, then backed up by Peter Fleming defeated Clerc/Vilas after almost five hours 11-9 in the 5th set (Vilas was serving at 7:6), and finally outplay Clerc in five sets after 4 hours 8 minutes, having lost to the Argentinian four out of their five previous meetings. Clerc based his game-style on heavy top-spins off both sides, nevertheless he knew how to attack the net to obtain the points with gentle volleys, his serve couldn't be considered as a weakness. Without any doubts he belongs to a narrow group of players who should have advanced to one Grand Slam final at least. Clerc was half-way there - he had a match

point against young Ivan Lendl in the French Open semifinal '81 to lose it 6-3, 4-6, 6-4, 6-7(7), 2-6. That bitter loss didn't drag him down, on the contrary - it motivated him to the harder work, and he notched an impressive streak of 28 wins, including two over Lendl in the American finals. Even though hardcourts weren't his favorite surface, he was considered as a final contender due to his astonishing form. Already the second round of the tournament showed that he was running out of gas, barely surviving in the fifth set tie-break (Tim Wilkison). In the third round he was so tired that bageled him in the middle sets another inferior opponent - Mel Purcell. Too much for the ambitious Clerc, in the fourth round he lost in straights to Bruce Manson (b. 1956) for whom the last 16 was already the career-best achievement. In 1982, Clerc advanced to the semifinals in Paris again, and once again lost as a favorite to a younger & less experienced player, 17 y.o. Mats Wilander. That time it didn't help a situation similar to earlier mentioned when Vilas conceded a point at the crucial moment of the Madrid '80 final. Wilander did the same, and he did it on match point! It followed Clerc's forehand winner which was called 'out' by the linesman with automatic approval of the chair-umpire. When you look at today's perspective you can say the situation was really bizarre - because Wilander said the ball was good and it was beyond his reach, Clerc should have won the point to get back to 'deuce'. They repeated the point though, and the Argentinian made a backhand error. Did he forget what exactly he'd played on the match point before its repetition? Three times lucky didn't work in Clerc's case. One year later he was eliminated, actually humiliated already in the second round by Fernando Luna [69], who never won an ATP tournament, and after defeating Clerc, he reached the fourth round which is his career-highlight. Following that shocker, Clerc experienced downhill, suffering chronic problems with his backbone. He was only 27 when decided to quit. He made his comeback four years later, but after a series of defeats on beloved clay (the last one 3-6, 1-6 to an unknown **Christer Allgardh** of Sweden), he understood that the best years irretrievably went away. He enjoyed a very nice, suddenly interrupted career; on the other hand this career couldn't exist at all. As a 15-year-old boy he fell from a balcony; the first diagnosis was that he would be paralyzed. He slowly recovered and five years later played his first Grand Slam tournaments. Curiosity: in his first major match - Paris '78 - he destroyed 6-3, 6-0, 6-3 Lendl, for whom it was a debut at the main-level...

Career record: 378-152 [160 events]
Career titles: 25
Highest ranking: No. 4 (August '81)
Best GS results: Roland Garros (semifinals 1981-82)

Heinz Günthardt (Switzerland)

Born: February 8, 1959 in Zürich
Height: 1.80 m
Plays: Right-handed



The first man to win an event as a 'lucky loser'. So lucky Gunthardt was in February '78 when he triumphed in Springfield as a 19-year-old (eight days older than John McEnroe who was already a star), ranked 221, defeating inter alia Brian Teacher, the descending **Jan Kodes** (b. 1946) and Harold Solomon in the final. This success, out of nowhere catapulted him to a new tennis orbit, but it wasn't the beginning of a great career as it could be expected. Two years before he had won French Open and Wimbledon as a junior, so in Springfield he simply confirmed his talent. The Swiss waited another seven years to finally play a Grand Slam quarterfinal. Despite not fulfilling expectations, he was assuredly the best player from Switzerland until the appearance of Jakob Hlasek in the late 80s. Gunthardt was moving on the court quickly, could serve with impressive speed for his height, he had great touch at the net - all these ingredients made him a doubles specialist, mainly as a partner of more stylish Balazs Taroczy. In doubles you don't need such physical preparation, in the 80s the difference between singles and doubles wasn't huge, but Gunthardt belonged to those guys who felt what was coming. Quite often after more demanding doubles matches, he couldn't deliver his best tennis in singles, probably it was one of the reasons he can be considered as an underachiever. In doubles he won two majors (US Open '81 w/Peter McNamara & Wimbledon '85 w/Taroczy), in mixed-doubles also two major titles (both in 1985 with Martina Navratilova). After retirement he worked for seven years (1992-99) with the best female player of the 90s, Steffi Graf; after her retirement, Gunthardt briefly worked with other stars of the WTA.

Career record: 229-196 [195 events]
Career titles: 5
Highest ranking: No. 22 (April 1986)
Best GS results: Wimbledon (quarterfinal 1985)
US Open (quarterfinal 1985)

John McEnroe (USA)

Born: February 16, 1959 in Wiesbaden (West Germany)
Height: 1.81 m
Played: Left-handed

If someone compiled both singles and doubles, looking for the best tennis player in the history of modern tennis, it would be John Patrick McEnroe. The American of Irish origin born in Germany (after one year he moved to New York with his parents), has gone down in the history of sport not only as an outstanding player with unconventional technique, but also as someone completely unpredictable in his behavior on the court. McEnroe first caught the attention of a wider audience in 1977. He went through the qualifying rounds of Wimbledon and there he advanced to the semi-finals. Nobody had done it before, and no one has reached the Wimbledon semi-finals having so little experience - McEnroe played only the sixth main-level tournament in his career! A year later, as a 19-year-old, he made his way

to the world's top, winning four events in the fall. His position in the world of tennis was established at the turn of the 70's and 80's, when he co-created excellent duels with the best tennis players in the world at that time, Jimmy Connors & Bjorn Borg. Especially the rivarly with the Swede captured the imagination of the fans. McEnroe & Borg met nine times in the finals, and their final skirmish at Wimbledon '80 featured the sport history. Borg was leading 2-1 in sets, 5:4 (40/15) and serving, yet he lost the set after the most famous tennis tie-break lasting 20 minutes! In the fifth set they were holding up to 7:6, when Borg passed McEnroe on the eighth match point and fell on his knees in a triumphant gesture. The meeting lasted 3 hours 53 minutes. A year later, McEnroe had repaid Borg in the Wimbledon final, snapping a 41-match winning streak of the Swede at the All England Club courts. A few months later, McEnroe won the US Open final against Borg and became the first tennis player since the 1920s to win three consecutive titles in New York. Soon afterwards Borg ended/suspended his career prematurely, but BigMac's new, exceptionally challenging rival, Ivan Lendl, emerged. It was at the hands of the

Czech that McEnroe suffered perhaps the saddest defeat in his career at Roland Garros '84 when there was a great opportunity to do one of the toughest tasks in tennis - triumphing in Paris constantly attacking the net (Stefan Edberg was also quite close five years later). A few words about McEnroe's devastating loss... June 1984, after a series of 39 victories in a row, in the Roland Garros final McEnroe met Lendl, whom he had defeated in that season before the Parisian final as many as four times, including "a piece of cake" on three occasions. And in the memorable final, it looked like another smooth win through two and a half sets. Lendl, however, managed to win that meeting, although in each of the last three sets, McEnroe was only two games away from the victory. Never again has an offensive tennis player been so close to winning the French Open. A few months after that painful defeat, McEnroe took his revenge on Lendl, outclassing him in the US Open final. BigMac was 25 years old and already had seven Grand Slam titles on his account, and probably no one thought that he would not improve his achievements in majors. At the end of 1984 he was still young and almost unbeatable - his win/loss record of the season extraordinary, 82-3! The year 1985 was pivotal in McEnroe's career though - he failed to win any Grand Slam event and felt weary of tennis, at the same time two great youngsters emerged, Boris Becker & Stefan Edberg. After a sensational defeat to Brad Gilbert at Masters '85, but played in January 1986, McEnroe suspended his career for seven months. During that time, he married an actress Tatum O'Neal, with whom he has three children (Kevin, Sean and Emily). After his return, he did not manage to regain his former glory, although he was still dangerous, claiming a few quite big titles (Dallas '89 - the biggest after the sabbatical period). After the 1987 US Open, he again had a seven-month hiatus - that time, however, partly not voluntarily - he was disqualified for two months and fined 17.5 thousand dollars. Offended by the tennis authorities, he extended his absence for five more months and immediately after his return he won the tournament in Tokyo (April 1988)! McEnroe was losing more and more often and with higher frequency he was displaying unsportsmanlike behavior. At the Australian Open '90, he was finally disqualified against Mikael Pernfors after he'd offended line judge, head judge and supervisor. During the tournament in the Paris hall, Bercy (1990) he did not even shake the hand of Jakob Hlasek with whom had won a title in doubles a year before. Usually players calm down the older they are, not McEnroe, his behaviour was more controversial over the years. He announced the year 1992 as the last season of his turbulent, yet beautiful tennis career. As a farewell, he once again flashed a wonderful game at Wimbledon. He reached the semi-finals in singles and triumphed in doubles along with other serve-and-volley artist Michael Stich after the longest doubles final in history (5-7, 7-6, 3-6, 7-6, 19-17 against **Jim Grabb** / Richey Reneberg), lasting 5 hours and 1 minute. Officially played his last singles match in Munich '92 (Compac Grand Slam Cup), but more than a year later, he made his cameo in Rotterdam losing to a very solid Magnus Gustafsson 2-6, 6-7. McEnroe began the match trailing 0:4, since then to the end of the match he was playing like he didn't finish his career. In the same tournament, along with Boris Becker,

McEnroe won two matches advancing to the semifinals where he was beaten by Jeremy Bates, and... Jonas Bjorkman, who will become McEnroe's partner twelve (!) years later during two tournaments. Bjorkman & McEnroe played two events together in 2006, the Swede was already at the end of his career then, but still considered as one of the best doubles players in the world. They triumphed in San Jose (February) but lost in the Stockholm quarterfinals eight months later. *"I'm surprised that it went to the final tiebreaker, but the right team won,"* the 47-year-old, with a head full of grey, McEnroe told reporters after the San Jose final. *"Jonas carried the weight. When I came here, I thought we could either lose in the first round or win the whole thing."* In 1999, he joined the elite International Tennis Hall of Fame in Newport. That same year, he became a US Davis Cup coach. He led the team to the 2000 Davis Cup semi-finals, but after a miserable 0-5 defeat to Spain, he resigned and his function was taken over by his younger brother Patrick.

Career record: 883-198 [263 events]
Career titles: 77
Highest ranking: No. 1 (March 1980)
Best GS results:
Australian Open (semifinalist 1983; quarterfinalist 1985, 89 & 92)
Roland Garros (runner-up 1984; semifinalist 1985; quarterfinalist 1981, 83)
Wimbledon (champion 1981, 1983-84; runner-up 1980, 82; semifinal 1977, 89, 92; quarterfinal 1985)
US Open (champion 1979-81, 1984; runner-up 1985; semifinalist 1978, 82 & 90; quarterfinalist 1987)

Davis Cup champion 1978-79, 81-82 & 92 (the last time only as a doubles player)

Year-end ranking 1977-92... 21-4-3-2-1-1-1-1-2-14-10-11-4-13-28-20

Eliot Teltscher (USA)

Born: March 15, 1959 in R.P.Verdes, California
Height: 1.75 m
Plays: Right-handed

Very solid American player of the Jewish origin, peer of John McEnroe. He was a typical player of the 80s, ranked among the top 15 from 1980 to 1984. In those years he reached four Grand Slam quarterfinals, three of them in New York (always losing to Jimmy Connors); in the United States on hardcourts he was playing his best tennis. The major semifinal was within his grasp, but in Summer of '85 pain from recurring nerve problems in his serving arm became unbearable. He didn't play for six months, when returned to the tour he significantly dropped in the ranking, yet at the turn of 1987 and 1988 he seemingly regained his form as he won 13 out of 14 matches and a title in Hong Kong after a dramatic 3.5 hour final over John Fitzgerald (6-7, 3-6, 6-1, 6-2, 7-5). *"It's great to end the year with a victory,"* said Teltscher, who collected a check for $40,000. *"I'm now going home for a rest but will be playing a full schedule in 1988."* It wasn't meant to be, at the age of 29 he was burnt-out, skipped Grand Slam events and finished his career being seeded in his last appearance (Stratton Mountain) which wasn't ultimately the last one. Two years after the retirement he played two US events as a "wild card", and ended up with a 1-2 record. Trivia: Teltscher held a record for the longest three-set win for five years after he'd defeated **Sean Sorensen** 14-16, 10-8, 8-6 (Davis Cup '83: USA d. Ireland 4-1) after 4 hours 1 minute.

Career record: 399-217 [215 events]
Career titles: 10
Highest ranking: No. 6 (May 1982)
Best GS results: Australian Open (quarterfinalist 1983)
US Open (quarterfinalist 1980-81, 83)

Mel Purcell (USA)

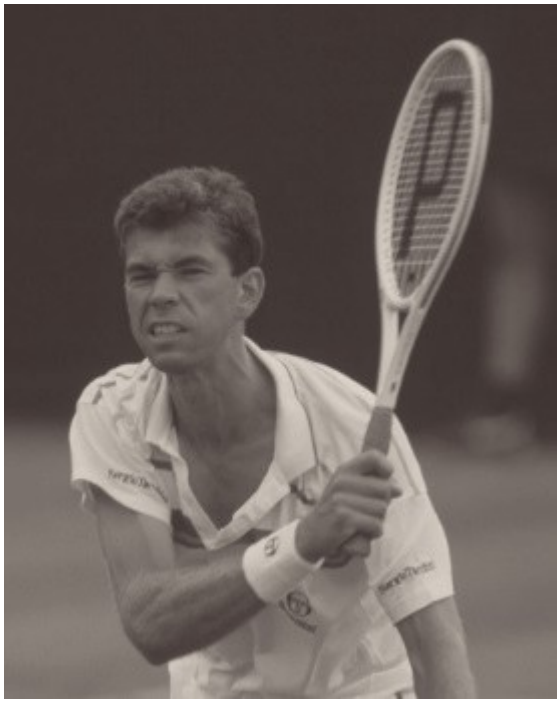
Born: July 18, 1959 in Joplin, Missouri
Height: 1.77 m
Plays: Right-handed

The light blonde Purcell enjoyed his best season in 1981 - that year he won all his main-level titles (three small events). Nonetheless the highlight of his career came in the third round match at the US Open '81 - he was in the form of his life as well his opponent Jose-Luis Clerc, who'd been playing with a crazy frequency that Summer. Between North Conway in July and Tokyo in October, Purcell manufactured a 20-3 record losing all those three matches in Clerc. The closest he was in their bizarre New York encounter - the American, being supported by the partisan crowd on the main arena, took the sets two & three not dropping a game (!) against the exhausted, yet red-hot opponent (due to bad weather the Argentinain played day-by-day cause he failed to persuade the officials to reschedule his match). Clerc looked like someone on the verge of retirement, he somehow saved his last energy for the most important moments and prevailed 6-3, 0-6, 0-6, 6-4, 6-3 withstanding a mini-match point at 3:4 in the 4th set. *"I guess I wanted him to give it to me, rather than to take it from him,"* said Purcell. Injuries to his elbow from a car accident and a pulled stomach muscle slowed his career in 1985 but a year later, he beat the teenage sensation Boris Becker in the German Open to get his last valuable victory. One of the quickest players in the early 80s, even though his style suited to slower surfaces more, he enjoyed his best major appearence at Wimbledon '83 when reached the quarterfinal, and played an equal match with the sensation of the event - Chris Lewis.

Career record: 190–164 [167 events]
Career titles: 3
Highest ranking: No. 21 (November 1980)
Best GS result: Wimbledon (quarterfinal 1983)

Michiel Schapers (Netherlands)

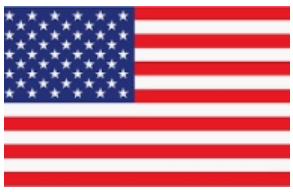
Born: October 11, 1959 in Rotterdam
Height: 1.98 m
Plays: Right-handed



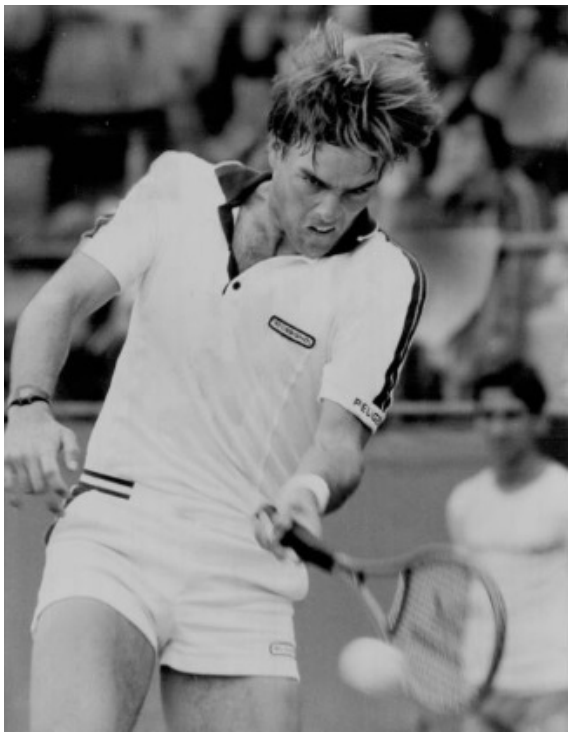
The best Dutch player after **Tom Okker**'s (b. 1944) retirement and before the emergence of three youngsters (Jacco Eltingh, Jan Siemerink, Richard Krajicek) at the beginning of the 90s. Along with **Milan Srejber** (b. 1963, 203 cm), he was the tallest guy on the tour in the 80s, taking that status from Victory Amaya (201 cm), who'd retired in 1983 so the American was more affiliated to the 70s. Schapers didn't win a title, his career is similar to Thierry Champion's, as they played two Grand Slam quarterfinals. Of course Aussie Open '85 it's not equal Aussie Open '88, anyway Schapers also played the quarterfinal at the Olympics in Seoul losing to the eventual champion Milosav Mecir being close to lead 2-1 in sets. His most famous victory was over reigning Wimbledon champion Boris Becker 3-6, 6-4, 7-6, 4-6, 6-3 in the second round of the 1985 Australian Open. *"It's unbelievable, the best win of my career,"* said Schapers [188], who was playing only the second grass-court tournament of his career. *"I've been playing well for the last couple of months without getting any rewards, so I feel I deserve this."* He lost four finals, the closest to raising a trophy he was at the end of his career, in Rosmalen '91 - in the semifinal as a player ranked 232 he ousted Michael Stich, who became the Wimbledon champion a few weeks later! In the final Schapers lost 1-6, 6-3, 5-7 to **Christian Saceanu** (b. 1968), a German of Romanian origin. Schapers defeated Saceanu in their three other meetings (deciding set always required). The following year Schapers made another huge upset on the same court trashing Krajicek.
Trivia: Schapers co-created the longest set in the Davis Cup history as he lost to Andrei Chesnokov 22-24, 6-1, 2-6, 2-6. The opener lasted 2 hours 57 minutes!

Career record: 160–183 [177 events]
Career titles: 0
Highest ranking: No. 25 (April 1988)
Best GS results: Australian Open (quarterfinal 1985, 88)

Tim Wilkison (USA)



Born: November 23, 1959 in Shelby, North Carolina
Height: 1.80 m
Plays: Left-handed



A solid forgotten player, for a long time no footage of him on YouTube despite winning almost 300 main-level matches. He was making his first professional steps in the shadow of his peer & fellow left-hander - John McEnroe. He was known for his diving volleys on grass (nickname "Dr. Dirt"), but it didn't help him to reach the second week of Wimbledon (lost twice in the third round). He had his "five minutes" in the United States in 1986 when McEnroe & Jimmy Connors were early ousted during the US Open. Wilkison became one of seven local players who advanced to the fourth round, and the only one of them who managed to win his match - the victory was sweeter because he destroyed a Russian (Andrei Chesnokov) 6-0, 6-2, 6-3 in the atmosphere of "Cold War" between USA & the Soviet Union when the boxing drama "Rocky IV" was one of the most popular films in the world. *"It was pretty obvious the crowd was on my side,"* said Wilkison, *"I think I'm fairly exciting to watch; you know, I fall down sometimes. But it's rather obvious that there aren't too many Americans left in this tournament. I think that had a lot to do with it. Obviously, the fact that I was playing a guy from Russia… the circumstances were definitely in my favor today."* Chesnokov joked *"It's just like Rocky against Drago,"* referring to "Rocky IV", *"[The outcome] was the same."*

Career record: 291-296 [303 events]
Career titles: 6
Highest ranking: No. 23 (September 29, 1986)
Best GS result: US Open (quarterfinalist 1986)

...Born in the 60s...

Andrés Gómez (Ecuador)

Born: February 27, 1960 in Guayaquil
Height: 1.93 m
Plays: Left-handed

Full name: Andrés Gómez Santos... It was Paris '90 when Gomez, as one of the best players of the 80s, unexpectedly fulfilled himself triumphing at Roland Garros. Admittedly he was in great form because of winning two big clay-court Spanish events (Barcelona & Madrid) that year, but he had won similar titles in the previous decade (Rome '84 was the biggest). Roland Garros '90 it was a very specific event; Gomez's peer & the three-time champion of the event, Ivan Lendl, who had defeated Gomez (each time in four-setters) in all three Parisian quarterfinals of the Ecuadorian, withdrew from the event preparing himself to claim his first Wimbledon title (it didn't happen by the way) while two other best players at the time, who faced each other a year before in the semifinal (Boris Becker & Stefan Edberg), lost already in the first round, to the future major champions incidentally... The main-draw was unlocked, and Gomez took advantage of it - until the semifinal he was a big favorite to win all the matches, and saved a lot of energy because the potentially toughest opponent (Magnus Gustafsson) gave him a walkover in the fourth round. The semifinal against Thomas Muster was open for different outcomes because they were fresh after their Roman semifinal which Muster barely survived. In Paris though, Gomez was clearly better; in the championship match, he wasn't finally a favorite against the 20-year-old, but already every experienced & super-gifted Andre Agassi. It was quite a strange match looking deeper inside because Gomez won one point fewer, it would be very tough to guess judging by the scoreline (6-3, 2-6, 6-4, 6-4), so on that day he was able to win all the most important points in tighter games. All of a sudden, at the age of 30 he became a Grand Slam champion in singles (two doubles titles - US Open '86 w/Bobo Zivojinovic & French Open '88 w/Emilio Sanchez). After the final, Gomez said about his lack of mobility: *"I am not a Wilander. I don't have a great pair of legs to keep me going for six hours. I can't do that. What is important is not how many errors I make, but how many winners I make. Some people don't like that. I like it."* It was a very good description of his game-style, serve & forehand were his main weapons, he could economically dictate the pace with these two strokes. Even though he belonged to the tallest players of the 80s, and was very successful in doubles, similarly to

Yannick Noah, he didn't feel grass, never won a tournament on that surface, and reached just one quarterfinal at Wimbledon, facing in four consecutive matches much lower ranked opponents (including 18 y.o. Guy Forget). Following his sensational triumph in Paris, Gomez was never the same, but the great Spring of '90 on clay-courts allowed him to appear in the first edition of Masters in Germany (he didn't play in that tournament in three previous editions) as well as in the first edition of Grand Slam Cup in Munich - counting those events, Gomez suffered twelve straight defeats, something unseen before or later in a case of a Top 10 player. Gomez' days were counted, but in 1991, with a ranking no. 142 (!), he claimed his last title playing with 'wild card' in Brasilia, and the following year at Key Biscayne, for 2 hours 20 minutes he'd been dealing on equal terms with Jim Courier, a freshly crowned best player in the world (!) before retired due to ankle injury at the open scoreline (4-6, 7-6, 3-4 ret.)... One year later, against one of the best clay-courters at the time - Carlos Costa - Gomez spent 2:30 hrs on the court, losing 4-6, 7-6, 6-7 in Mexico City. It was the end of his physical abilities, soon afterwards Gomez made an exit, and to this day he remains the best Ecuadorian player of the Open Era. His son, Emilio Gómez, is a professional tennis player and quite recently (Roland Garros '20) notched his major debut at the age of 29, while his nephew Nicolás Lapentti reached a world ranking of No. 6.

Career record: 531–273 [279 events]
Career titles: 21
Highest ranking: No. 4 (June 1990)
Best GS results: Roland Garros (champion 1990; quarterfinalist 1984, 86-87)
Wimbledon (quarterfinalist 1984)
US Open (quarterfinalist 1984)

Ivan Lendl (Czechia)

Born: March 7, 1960 in Ostrava (Czechoslovakia)
Height: 1.88 m
Plays: Right-handed

Career record: 1068–242 [320 events]
Career titles: 94
Highest ranking: No. 1 (February 1983)
Best GS results:
Australian Open (champion 1989-90; runner-up 1983 & 91; semifinalist 1985, 1987-88; quarterfinalist 1992)
Roland Garros (champion 1984, 86-87; runner-up 1981 & 85; quarterfinalist 1983 & 88)
Wimbledon (runner-up 1986-87; semifinalist 1983-84, 1988-90)
US Open (champion 1985-87; runner-up 1982-84, 88-89; semifinalist 1991; quarterfinalist 1980, 90 & 92)

Masters champion 1981-82, 1985-87
WTC champion 1982 & 1985
Davis Cup champion 1980 (contributed in singles & doubles)

Year-end rankings 1978-94: 74-20-6-2-3-2-3-1-1-1-2-1-3-5-8-19-54

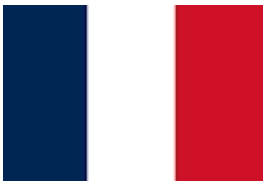
Definitely the best player of the 80s, an icon of that decade, although in the early 80s it wasn't certain that Lendl would establish himself as the king of tennis. Admittedly he was branded a top player at the turn of the 70s and 80s, but he had a problem to confirm his tremendous potential at majors while no one knew that the king of the times - Bjorn Borg - would quit soon. Lendl had obtained two important titles before the end of January '82 (Davis Cup '80 & Masters '81), but each young player who advances to the Top 5 not having won a major title, knows he should do it for his legacy. Lendl waited a few years longer than ten years younger Andre Agassi, who at similar age will have comparable successes a decade later. Lendl succumbed in his first four major finals, especially the fourth defeat was odd because he lost the Australian Open final to Mats Wilander, whose appearance in that final wasn't expected since he had been labelled as a clay-court specialist. Lendl was on his way

to suffer a 0-5 record when faced his biggest nemesis of the 80s - John McEnroe. The American was in a terrific form that year, he had defeated Lendl a few times (also on clay) prior to their final in Paris, and easily took the first two sets. The 24-year-old Lendl was already very experienced at the time, and did exactly what seemed his destiny already at the beginning of 1982 when he had won 44 consecutive matches, majority of them indoors. Lendl reached the top of the tennis pyramide in 1985 when he defeated McEnroe again, that time in the US Open final. It marked a moment when just one year older American, who was more successful in the mid 80s, suffered some mental problems and shockingly withdrew from the circuit for seven months without being injured - he never came back to the form he had displayed in the years 1984-85. Lendl lost his arch rival, Borg was already sidelined three years and his comeback highly unlikely, yet two new challengers appeared on the horizon - teenage serve-and-volleyers from Northern Europe - Stefan Edberg & Boris Becker. These two fair-headed guys and a bit older Mats Wilander, were Lendl's toughest opponents in the late 80s, replacing McEnroe & Jimmy Connors, who had been Lendl's most demanding adversaries in the first few years on the tour. Jimbo won their first eight encounters (not dropping even a set!), yet he stopped to be a threat for Lendl in 1984 - the final in Tokyo it was the last time when the man from Illinois defeated the Czechoslovak. At the time Connors led 13-5 in their H2H, after Tokyo only Lendl was leaving the courts as a winner, as many as 17 times (!) and during that astonishing streak, he was close to losing just once (Masters '84)... Lendl was the

first great champion who put enormous emphasis on physical preparation. First of all, under the guidance of dr. Robert Haas, he changed his diet in the early 80s. *"I started having enough energy to get my feet in position for shots I was always lunging at before,"* said Lendl at the time. He included more pasta, soup, vegetables, fruit and water to his diet - and scarcely an ounce of red meat. To combat his mental issues, Lendl began working with psychologist Alexis Castorri, who suggested taking ballet and aerobics classes. Even though Lendl won his first major with the help of Wojtek Fibak (still an active player then), who'd encouraged Lendl to use much more often top-spin backhands instead of keeping the ball in play with slices, he replaced the Pole with a former great Aussie player - **Tony Roche** (b. 1945) - they had something in common (poor record in Grand Slam finals: Roche finished with 1-5 while Lendl had a 1-4 record at the time), furthermore Roche was a left-hander, and it helped Lendl to better understand the game of his biggest rivals at the time (Connors & McEnroe). *"With Tony I had someone who could help me see how a left-hander saw the court,"* Lendl said years later. He finished four seasons as the best player in the world, but the years 1985-87 it was a period when his reign couldn't be questioned. He also finished the year 1989 as No. 1, but in my mind that year belonged to Becker - the German won two majors (he defeated Lendl en route to his Wimbledon & US Open titles) and led his nation to the title defense in the Davis Cup - he won many vital rubbers during the '89 edition, thus if the points had been awarded for those matches (like it was in the years 2009-15), he would have finished the season at the top. Lendl's domination was most emphasized at the US Open '87 when he claimed the title defeating in back-to-back matches his three toughest opponents of the first half of the 80s (McEnroe-Connors-Wilander). Just like the king of the 70s (Borg), Lendl based his tennis on powerful serves and forehands, but as opposed to the Swede, the Czech was using modern equipment allowing him to hit the balls flatter and faster. Lendl's serve was quite intriguing, very tactical shot - he was changing the pace of it constantly depending on the situation, also Lendl's slow getting into the match was his trademark. He didn't care too much in the first 3-4 games, playing in just 70-80% mode; it was enough to usually control the rest of the set from '3:1' or '2-all' scores. When I watch Lendl's archive matches, his forehand on the run down the line gets my special attention; I think he was able to play that particular shot better than anyone in history. He had plenty of opportunities to play it time and time again because until Lendl's retirement, all players were attacking him, either because of their natural serve-and-volley gamesyles or because they couldn't stay with him on equal terms from the baseline. Lendl, as a player who grew up in the 70s, treated attacking the net on faster surfaces as something obvious. But there was a big difference between playing on carpet and grass. Indoors, Lendl could attack the net on his terms, but on grass he was applying regular serve-and-volley tactics because if he hadn't done that, his opponents would have attacked him with cheap-and-charge, and passing them wasn't as easy as on carpet due to irregular bounces. According to today's standards, Lendl was a very good volley player, but his skills in the 80s weren't good enough to conquer the most prestigious title. He

was very dedicated to do that someday, especially towards the end of his career; for instance in 1990 he skipped the entire clay-court season preparing for grass, and almost succeeded - he won the preceding event at Queens Club, easily defeating the three-time Wimbledon champion (Becker), and took advantage of a beneficial draw to reach the semifinal easier than ever in the past. Unfortunately for him, being two matches away from the coveted title, he faced Edberg, who just entered the best period of his career, and as a natural grass-court player, eliminated Lendl without serious troubles... Thanks to his great physical preparation, Lendl was still dangerous when he turned 30, but he was gradually losing with higher frequency and the season 1992 clearly indicated the fall down in tennis hierarchy: his biggest rivals of the late 80s (Edberg & Becker) were still relatively young while a new generation of American youngsters (Pete Sampras, Agassi & Jim Courier - he never won a set against Lendl in four meetings) took the reins of government; there were also other young players born in the 70s, who could harm Lendl with their fast serves & forehands unseen a decade before. The Czech (became an American citizen in July '92) was trying everything he could to stay in touch, but his major appearances of the years 1993-94 were rather abysmal. Lendl lost in the second round of the US Open '94 to Bernd Karbacher (4-6, 6-7, 0-1 ret.) despite a 5:0 lead in the 2nd set and nine set points in the process. *"It got stiff fairly early,"* Lendl said about the problems with his back. *"It's the same thing. It has been going on for a while."* The man, whose career was characterized by fantastic results in New York (he continuously played the US Open finals in the years 1982-89 and Masters finals in the years 1980-88), soon afterwards decided that it was the best place to finish his career. Lendl didn't announce official retirement, but never appeared again as a professional player, in fact he disappeared in the public eye for many years, enjoying time outside the courts, not caring too much about the diet anymore. After almost two decades in the shadow, Lendl came back to the tour as a coach of Andy Murray in 2011 - and kept this position until 2017 with a break in 2015. Thanks to the Scot, Lendl partially fulfilled his dream of winning the Wimbledon title (Murray triumphed there in 2013, also three years later for the second time). I assume that titles + junior Wimbledon title of 1978, cannot compensate the 80s when he was fully fit & dedicated, yet didn't win the title with his own hands; Becker (defeated Lendl three times) and Edberg (defeated Lendl once) were great, but Pat Cash - looking in retrospect - was beatable, maybe he played a match of his life in 1987 when he faced Lendl in the final...

Yannick Noah (France)



Born: May 18, 1960 in Sedan
Height: 1.93 m
Plays: Right-handed

The only French champion in the Open Era, one of the best players of the 80s so I want to look closer at his game-style which was quite peculiar. In some sense Noah was like a hybrid of Pete Sampras, Stefan Edberg & Rafael Nadal (!); if he had all their ingredients within his game we would perhaps talk about the best player in history! Let's put the things in order:

- in the 80s, Noah belonged to the Top 5 best servers in the world, his offensive overhead, played in the service boxes was exquisite, I'd juxtapose this stroke only with Sampras & Roger Federer, Noah introduced to tennis a slam-dunk smash, so beloved by Sampras... the Frenchman was much taller than Sampras & Federer which made him even tougher to lobbing with top-spins
- Noah was a serve-and-volleyer, his offensive backhand was better than forehand, he used to play chip-and-charge a lot... natural associations with Edberg
- Noah was a phenomenal athlete, his court-coverage was excellent all over the place & he was very emotional, it reminds me of Nadal

Sometimes I think about the value of specific players if the rules were slightly changed, for instance "how dangerous Noah would be if he could play only ground-strokes with just one serve?" I suppose he could easily disappear in mediocrity. His ground-strokes couldn't hurt anyone in basic exchanges, but he was like a jazz-man, he could improvise a lot, in positive sense of this word as opposed to Gael Monfils' jazzy style (both the sons of French immigrants: Cameroon and Guadeloupe/Martinique respectively). Noah could successfully attack the net behind a semi-lob forehand or behind a sloppy backhand dropshot because his net-coverage was so impressive (he wasn't afraid of diving on any surface). One question which bothered me for some time: why Noah - as a serve-and-volleyer - didn't play even once in a quarterfinal at Wimbledon (just 6-6 record, skipped the event many times). I guess there are two major issues: one is the movement (Noah loved to slide on clay, he couldn't emulate his natural movement on grass), the other one is Noah's backhand; as I mentioned earlier, in my opinion his backhand was better than forehand, but he was playing offensive backhands with extreme grip, there was no time on grass for it. Noah, deprived of his natural movement, and unable to get as many points with his backhand as on other surfaces, could only count on holding the serve and waiting for mistakes of opponents at crucial stages of sets and

matches, but it didn't happen. His serve wasn't as efficient as on other surfaces; the explanation of it isn't easy, I can only assume he simply didn't enjoy grass at all & moody attitude prevented him from holding the serve 10-15 times in a row on a regular basis. Like father, like son: there must be something special in vains of the Noah's male linage that a representative of the family in the next generation keeps the sport tradition at high level, changing equipment & enviroment, still being focus on the ball of different sizes. Yannick's father Zacharie (1937-2017) was a professional footballer while Yannick's son Joakim (b. 1985) chose basketball and played in Chicago Bulls for many tears. Quite astonishing how they reach height with respective generations: Zacharie (176 cm), Yannick (193 cm), Joakim (211 cm). *"The key to the match was the third set. I got cramps in my legs. I was very tight and nervous. It was the dream of a lifetime to win this match."* said Noah after his sportive immortalization which gave him the French Open '83 title. For other occasions bringing an exceptional joy he had to wait until the following decade when as a captain of the French team triumphed twice (1991 & 1996) in Davis Cup.

Career record:	478–209 [215 events]
Career titles:	23
Highest ranking:	No. 3 (July 1986)
Best GS results:	Australian Open (semifinal 1990; quarterfinal 1987) Roland Garros (champion 1983; quarterfinal 1981-82, 84 & 87) US Open (quarterfinal 1983, 85, 89)

Tim Mayotte (USA)

Born: August 3, 1960 in Springfield, Massachusetts
Height: 1.90 m
Plays: Right-handed

A man who has one of the worst H2H records in the Open Era - 0:17 vs Ivan Lendl. The initial phase of their rivalry didn't indicate it'd be such a disaster. In the second round of the US Open '82, Mayotte found himself within three points of eliminating Lendl in a two-day duel. He also led 2:0 in the 5th set, serving very well (19 aces), but ultimately lost on the sixth match point. *"One of the highlights of my career,"* Mayotte explained *"Missed an opportunity to boost my confidence"*. In his previous major (Wimbledon), Mayotte reached the first of his two semifinals defeating three seeded players. That year turned him into a solid player of the tennis elite for the rest of the 80s. Paradoxically Mayotte's first trophy (Delray Beach '85) remained his biggest, despite claiming another eleven titles. He was almost 25 when got his maiden title, and it happened in a very strange event, which later transformed itself into the so-called "fifth Slam " held at Key Biscayne. It's absolutely remarkable that in that big tournament, Mayotte [45] didn't need to beat any seeded player, it was the event in which every player he faced from the fourth round onwards, already was satisfied with career best result. In retrospect Mayotte's title is a bit more valuable because in the second round he ousted Boris Becker... the 17-year-old German at the time was participating in his just 15th main-level event and no-one expected he would become a Wimbledon champion a few months later. *"I remember what Borg said when he won Wimbledon,"* Mayotte said after ousting Scott Davis in the three and 1/2-hour final. *"It's part preparation, part effort and part luck."* With the victory, Mayotte earned $112,500, more than he won in all of 1984. Three years later Mayotte was relatively close to getting tennis immortality playing the Olympic final (tennis for the first time officially at the Olympics), but he lost to Miloslav Mecir in their only meeting. *"It's strange because here, the emphasis is on medals instead of 100 percent on winning,"* Mayotte said with a silver medal draped around his neck. *"So there is consolation in getting to the medal group. The ceremony was fantastic, it's such a different way of doing things."* Hopeless against Lendl, the big-serving Mayotte was a difficult opponent for all the best players who appeared on the tennis scene in the 80s, defeating guys like John McEnroe, Stefan Edberg, Mats Wilander as well as American golden kids (Andre Agassi, Pete Sampras, Michael Chang). At the Australian Open '90, Mayotte lost to Sampras almost a five-hour marathon 10-12 in the deciding set, committing a double fault on Sampras' match point - only for one year it was the longest encounter

played in Australia. Fast surfaces (grass, carpet) were the most natural environment for Mayotte. The year 1991 meant for him a sudden downhill, nonetheless on court no. 1 at Wimbledon, he stunned Chang in five sets saving four match points in the 4th set. *"It was the most fun I've had in a long time,"* he said. *"I really didn't come out here expecting too much – I just wanted to have fun."* Mayotte could be expected as a winner, but the way in which he did it was quite stunning. The teenage Chang had been already established as a specialist of matches lasting longer than three hours, who survived eight consecutive five-setters. Mayotte defeated him for the third time in their third meeting though (all at Slams). He never played another match of this magnitude, announcing a decision of retirement early in 1992.

Career record: 340–203 [204 events]
Career titles: 12
Highest ranking: No. 7 (October 1988)
Best GS results: Australian Open (semifinalist 1983; quarterfinalist 1981)
Wimbledon (semifinalist 1982; quarterfinalist 1981, 83, 86, 88-89)
US Open (quarterfinalist 1989) Olympic Silver medal '88 (Seoul)

John Fitzgerald (Australia)

Born: December 28, 1960 in Cummins
Height: 1.83 m
Plays: Right-handed

An excellent doubles player, achieving successes with many partners (especially with Anders Jarryd), but a good singles player in his own right. Despite forty-four Grand Slam appearances, he never advanced to the quarterfinal; it's quite strange that this natural serve-and-volleyer never did it on grass, having four opportunities combining Melbourne & London. Certainly he had a very tough task facing John McEnroe in 1989, but on all three other occasions, he had a good shot to make one step further. Multiple representative of Australia in the Davis Cup competition, two times contributed to the titles, in 1983 in singles, three years later in doubles. He should be especially proud of the 1983 title, because in the second rubber of the final, he defeated Joakim Nystrom in four sets (Nystrom was fresh after winning a grass-court title in Sydney).

Career record: 240–231 [227 events]
Career titles: 6
Highest ranking: No. 25 (July 1988)
Best GS results: fourth round - four times in the 80s

Two-time Davis Cup champion (1983 - singles; 1986 - doubles)

Ramesh Krishnan (India)

Born: June 5, 1961 in Chennai
Height: 1.70 m
Plays: Right-handed

The son of **Ramanathan Krishnan** (b. 1937) who was one of the world's leading tennis players in the 1960s. The Krishnan senior had played two Wimbledon semifinals (1960-61), the 24-year younger son didn't reach the last four of the most prestigious event. At Wimbledon '86, Krishnan had defeated one of the best players at the time - Joakim Nystrom, but in the quarterfinal, he lost to Slobodan Zivojinovic being a slight favorite, having defeated the Yugoslav in their two previous encounters. Krishnan, with his rather anachronic tennis, more suitable to the 70s, seemed a natural grass-court player, yet somehow achieved better results on hardcourts, including two US Open quarterfinals. The first of them is arguably Krishnan's career-highlight. The 20-year-old Indian player spent 3 hours 27 minutes on court with John McEnroe - the double defending champion, being within a few points from leading two-sets-to-love. *"If I'd have gone down two sets, I think it would have made it tough to come back and win it in five."* Krishnan said: *"If you would have told me before the match that I'd be up a set and serving for another, I'd not have believed that."* Krishnan was a key member of the Indian team which reached the Davis Cup final in 1987 (5-1 in singles rubbers; all on grass) and the semifinal in 1993 - that year Krishnan was playing his farewell tour (for the past two years he'd been outside the Top 100), and he upset the French team defeating a Davis Cup debutant **Rodolphe Gilbert** (b. 1968, he replaced an injured Henri Leconte) 2-6, 6-4, 4-6, 7-5, 6-4 in the deciding rubber. *"When we came here we didn't realize that we would be in this position,"* Krishnan said. *"France was a much stronger team, but it was an excellent opportunity for us."* Gilbert was leading 4:2* in the fifth set, only to have Krishnan tie the match, 4-all, before play was halted by darkness. The following day, Krishnan served and held off two break points to lead 5:4; he then took advantage of a poor service game by Gilbert to close out the match which lasted just 12 minutes after the resumption. Krishnan's best Grand Slam win comes from the Australian Open '89, it was a total shocker then, now it's less valuable with the knowledge of Mats Wilander's downhill in 1989. But when they met in the second round of Aussie Open '89, Wilander was a defending champion, undoubtedly the best player of the previous season, moreover he had destroyed Krishnan in their four previous meetings. A "6-3, 6-2, 7-6" scoreline could be anticipated in Wilander's favour, but it was Krishnan who had a problem to win the 3rd set. *"Once you get out onto the court numbers don't matter,"* Krishnan said. *"It was just him against me. You feel the pressure when you are that close to the biggest win*

of your career. The court seemed to get smaller. To beat the No. 1 player in the world is thrilling, but he is not in good form." No-one knew at the time that Wilander was already finished as a Top 10 player, not only as the leader of men's tennis. Krishnan appeared in Melbourne after claiming a title in Auckland. Immediately after the Wilander victory, he was perceived as a candidate for the semifinal, but in the third round lost to a young Mexican - Leonardo Lavalle (b. 1967) - for whom reaching the Grand Slam fourth round meant a career-best result.

Career record: 319–285 [276 events]
Career titles: 8
Highest ranking: No. 23 (January 1985)
Best GS results: Wimbledon (quarterfinalist 1986); US Open (quarterfinalist 1981 & 1987)

Anders Jarryd (Sweden)

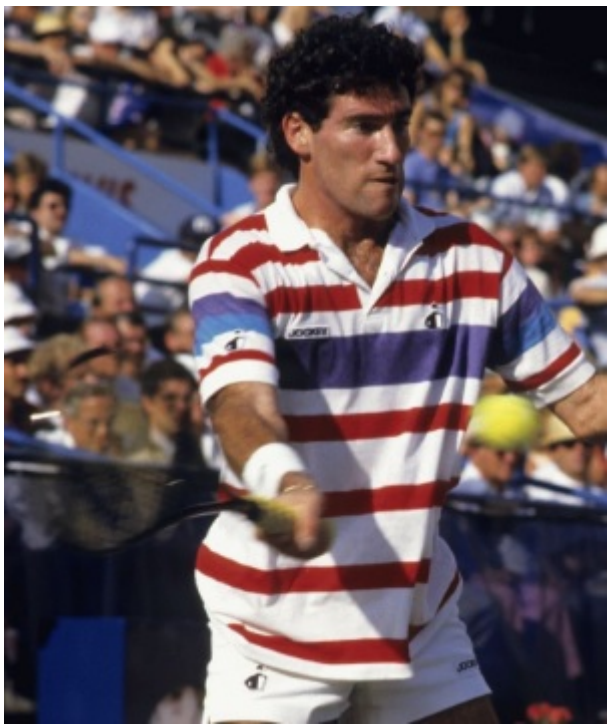
Born: July 13, 1961 in Lidköping
Height: 1.80 m m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

Jarryd's advancements to the main-level finals spread over sixteen years, marking defeats in his first (1981, Bastad) and last final (Rosmalen, 1995). Above all, he was an excellent doubles player - won all Grand Slam tournaments. For over a decade he was a pillar of the Davis Cup team, mainly playing doubles, but it's worth mentioning that in 1987 he played in the final against India instead of a higher ranked Stefan Edberg. Two years earlier, against the Hindu players he won an amazing first set along with Edberg, defeating the Amritraj brothers (21-19, 2-6, 6-3, 6-4). As many as five times he participated in the Davis Cup finals between 1983 and 1989 (once as a singles player, four times as a doubles specialist, with three different partners: Henrik Simonsson, Edberg and Jan Gunnarsson). Apart from the Swedish guys (Simonsson & Edberg), Jarryd was successful in the biggest doubles events partnering John Fitzgerald. I see similarities between the careers of Jarryd and eleven years younger Jonas Bjorkman. Both were more natural baseliners, hitting double-handed backhands, but both were very successful in doubles taking advantage of great reflex more than of delightful volley skills. Jarryd collected 8 titles in singles, 58 in doubles while Bjorkman 6 in singles and 54 in doubles. Both loved representing Sweden in the national competitions.

Career record: 396–261 [261 events] **Career titles**: 8
Highest ranking: No. 5 (July 1985) Davis Cup champ 1984, 85 (didn't play final) & 87
Best GS results: Australian Open (quarterfinal 1987-88) and US Open (quarterfinal 1985)
Wimbledon (semifinal 1985)

Brad Gilbert (USA)

Born: August 9, 1961 in Oakland, California
Height: 1.85 m
Plays: Right-handed



Gilbert will be remembered as a unique coach, someone who considerably helped many great players, especially three guys who share the same name "Andrew": Agassi, Roddick & Murray. Gilbert played a huge role in reaching no. 1 of them all. As far as these three guys are concerned, especially his a cooperation with fellow Americans is significant, they both reached the peak under Gilbert's guidance. An author of a "Winning Ugly" book, TV personality, tennis pundit. During his 20s he belonged to the tennis elite, and as someone who never reached a major semifinal, he won plenty of matches (more than 500) and 20 titles. His biggest title comes from Cincinnati '89. Actually Summer of 1989 was a time when he could perceive himself almost as the best player in the world. First he helped the United States to defeat West Germany in a Davis Cup semifinal (five set win over Carl-Uwe Steeb), then reached a final in Washington - he lost to Tim Mayotte in a rain suspended match. Following that defeat, he captured three titles within three weeks (Stratton Mountain, Livingston, Cincinnati). It was 17 matches won in a row, the end of the winning streak was awesome - in back-to-back matches, Gilbert defeated after tough three-setters Boris Becker & Stefan Edberg, the best players in the world at the time, just behind Ivan Lendl. Only a win over Lendl separated Gilbert from full satisfaction. They faced each other 16 times, and Gilbert never found a medicine, so it's a pity they didn't play in Gilbert's amazing Summer at the end of the 80s. Gilbert, as the hottest player on the tour, was stunned in the first round of the US Open '89 by **Todd Witsken** (lived: 1963-1998) in what seemed to be a routine three-set victory. *"I was trying to eat, but I wasn't keeping much down,"* after the defeat said Gilbert, who had won 23 of his previous 24 matches since Wimbledon, *"I tried to eat some bananas. I tried some chocolate and brownies, which were good for a buzz for a few games. Then I got too much of a sugar rush. But I still had my chances. I was up a set and 4:2 and I had a chance to go up a double break. If I had been able to tough that out, I would have been up two sets and I could have played around a little more in the third set. Todd played well and made some good shots."* The 28-year-old Gilbert was never the same afterwards, but in the early 90s he took an opportunity to become

one of the richest players thanks to a controversial event in Munich (Grand Slam Cup). In the first edition, Gilbert, as an alternate advanced to the final (after a five-set win over David Wheaton; the players almost had a fight after the third set). His three wins were worth 1 million dollars, amazing money at the time. To compare, considered as the fifth Slam then, the event in Key Biscayne offered $1,200,000 for 96 players in the main draw! In 1994, as a Top 50 player, Gilbert became a coach of Agassi, helping him to triumph at the US Open in an initial phase of their cooperation which lasted eight years. Gilbert wasn't the same player as a coach, he was regularly losing, within twelve months since taking tutelage over Agassi, he won only 9 of 26 matches and decided to quit when the prospect of playing qualies in the French Open '95 appeared on the horizon.

Career record:	519–288 [294 events]
Career titles:	20
Highest ranking:	No. 4 (January 1990)
Best GS results:	Wimbledon (quarterfinal 1990)
	US Open (quarterfinal 1987)

Juan Aguilera (Spain)

Born: March 22, 1962 in Barcelona
Height: 1.82 m
Plays: Right-handed

Typical representative of the Spanish school. There were plenty of boys born in the 60s who wanted to follow the successes of Manuel Orantes and Jose Higueras. Aguilera was one of them, they tried to play in a similar way - high percentage of 1st serves in, keep the ball in play as long as possible using one-handed backhand slice as the assurance. Aguilera was supposed to achieve much more when he entered the Top 10 in 1984. I think his ultra-defensive style couldn't be effective enough in the second half of the 80s when tennis became much more physical, and younger baseliners were able to penetrate the court with their much more offensive topspin ground-strokes, in turn others - serve-and-volleyers - could obtain plenty of points thanks to the improvement of the serve speed. Regardless of that, Aguilera [26] recaptured after six years his biggest title he'd obtained in 1984: his second triumph at Rothenbaum in Hamburg is exceptionally impressive in retrospect as he defeated Goran Ivanisevic, Michael Chang, Jim Courier, Magnus Gustafsson, Guy Forget & Boris Becker - among these six potential Top 10ers (!), only Becker had his best year behind, however, he was a year before becoming the best player in the world. The German lost to Aguilera 1-6, 0-6, 6-7 being completely outplayed for the first sixty minutes of that 2-hour 30-minute final - *"I have never seen anything like the way he played in the first two sets. He was like a teacher. He put the ball exactly where he wanted it every time, there was no way I could do anything."* For many years before losing its prestige, Hamburg was a special clay-court tournament. The temperature was lower than in other tennis cities in the same time of the year and persistent rain made the surface slower - this is how I would try to explain that Aguilera won his second big event after long drought, he simply brought tennis back to the mid-80s during that amazing May '90 week in Hamburg as he schooled six younger, more athletic players at Rothenbaum. In Aguilera's footsteps, two other Spaniards conquered the Hamburg title out of nowhere - Roberto Carretero in 1996 and Albert Portas in 2001, both in all-Spanish duels. Full name: Juan Aguilera Herrera.

Career record: 142–139 [136 events]
Career titles: 5
Highest ranking: No. 7 (September 1984)
Best GS result: Roland Garros (fourth round 1984)

David Pate (USA)

Born: April 16, 1962 in Los Angeles, California
Height: 1.82 m
Plays: Right-handed

At the turn of the 80s and 90s there was a shift in specialization for singles & doubles - the best singles players more or less at the time stopped regularly playing doubles. In the American tennis, pairs like Ken Flach/Robert Seguso and Rick Leach/Jim Pugh were very telling about that trend - those guys born in the 60s realized that instead of focusing on singles in the more & more globalized tennis, it'd be better for them to concentrate on doubles. There's a bit of a different story with another American pair: Scott Davis/David Pate (Australian Open 1991 champions). These two guys focused more on doubles approaching their 30s, as young players they were still quite successful in singles. Pate's best result comes from La Quinta '85 - the predecessor of Indian Wells. Admittedly that Californian event in terms of the draw cannot be compared to Indian Wells editions, yet the draw consisted of 56 players and the legendary Jimmy Connors was seeded no. 1. The unseeded Pate, en route to the final, eliminated three seeded guys and in the final he faced 'wild card' **Larry Stefanki** (b. 1957), so it was a pretty open match for them both with an unexpected chance to win the biggest title, because something like that might happen just once in a lifetime - Stefanki prevailed 6-1, 6-4, 3-6, 6-3 (the 22-year-old then Stefanki didn't win another title & is mainly remembered as a coach of many top players). *"I was concerned about winning and raising my ranking. That's important for me. I don't feel I played a very good match."* said Pate after his 7-6(6), 6-4 semifinal win over **Libor Pimek** (b. 1963, Czechoslovak who changed his nationality to Belgian). Curiosity: Pate recorded the fastest serve of 1990 (125 mph = 201 kph).

Career record: 181–168 [170 events]
Career titles: 2
Highest ranking: No. 18 (June 1987)
Best GS result: Wimbledon (third round four times)

Jeremy Bates (Great Britain)

Born: June 19, 1962 in Solihull (England)
Height: 1.80 m
Plays: Right-handed

The best British player at the turn of the 80s and 90s, he was the man to cheer for during Wimbledons between the eras of John Lloyd (eight years older than Bates) and Tim Henman (twelve years younger than Bates). Bates participated in every Wimbledon edition of the years 1982-96, but never managed to reach the quarterfinal which was within his grasp taking into consideration his serve-and-volley gamestyle and the local support. He played the fourth round twice, and both times (1992 & 94) lost to Guy Forget. Especially the first of those two meetings turned into a very bitter defeat because Bates held a match point on serve in the 4th set - Forget passed him. *"I didn't chicken out,"* said the first Brit to reach the round of 16 in 10 years (at the time). *"I threw the ball to serve, and I can't remember what it was – somebody took a picture or sneezed or something – and I decided not to hit the ball. So I composed myself again. I went for the serve and just missed it, by 6 inches or so. The second serve I don't remember. Maybe it was too short."* Bates was ranked UK number 1 in 1987 and again from 1989 to 1994. In 1994 when his career seemed over at the age of almost 32, he became one of the oldest maiden champions in history (the first British male to win an ATP tour title since 1977 and the oldest champion on the tour that season) triumphing in Seoul (6-4, 6-7, 6-3 over **Joern Renzenbrik** of Germany, b. 1972, for whom it was the only ATP final as well)... Partnering with fellow British player Jo Durie, he won two mixed doubles titles at Wimbledon in 1987 and the Australian Open in 1991. He was also a men's doubles runner-up at the Australian Open in 1988 (partnering Peter Lundgren). Trivia: in a prestigious London-Masters of the Champions Tour in 2005, he won the most dramatic match in the history of that event, defeating the eventual champion, Paul Haarhuis 2-6, 7-6(17), [16-14] saving ten match points in total!

Career record: 132–193 [176 events]
Career titles: 1
Highest ranking: No. 54 (April 1995)
Best GS result: Wimbledon (fourth round 1992 & 94)

Scott Davis (USA)

Born: August 27, 1962 in Santa Monica, California
Height: 1.87 m
Plays: Right-handed

When I began watching tennis in the early 90s, the U.S. pair Scott Davis/David Pate meant "typical doubles players", I had no access to archive results then being unaware that these both Yankees, until the mid 80s were among the most gifted singles players who could potentially replace the legends like Jimmy Connors & John McEnroe. Davis was more successful - he reached one major quarterfinal & his biggest final (Delray Beach '85) is slightly more impressive than Pate's La Quinta the same year. Delray Beach '85 was the first edition of the event later known as Key Biscayne/Miami - 128-draw, the same as at majors. The progress of the event was absolutely shocking; in the final Tim Mayotte defeats Scott Davis 4-6, 4-6, 6-3, 6-2, 6-4, so looking just at year-by-year finals the value of the event evaporates, cause La Quinta tells nothing. Yes, the best two U.S. guys (Connors & McEnroe) didn't play then, but two other top dogs (Ivan Lendl & Mats Wilander) were the two top seeds; the draw included the army of Swedish young guns, the 17-year-old Boris Becker was there as well. At the time someone could say "Davis had amazingly lucky draw", yeah, it looked like the only big name he ousted it was the ageing Tomas Smid, but in retrospect it looks much better - Davis eliminated a few young players of his generation who later achieved much more than him (Jakob Hlasek, Brad Gilbert & Edberg, whom Davis trashed in the quarters 6-1, 6-4, 7-5). *"Singles was the thing that was always my priority,"* Davis said after his only major title in doubles (among 22 main-level in total). *"Obviously I had some good years and then some years when I was a little off. Eventually, David and I started playing really good doubles in tournaments together, so my career started stemming more in doubles. Winning the Australian Open was really emotional, because we're real good friends on and off the court. We just really enjoyed that moment... I'd say he's still one of my closest friends."*

Career record: 206–198 [200 events]
Career titles: 3
Highest ranking: No. 11 (October 1985)
Best GS result: Australian Open (quarterfinalist 1984)

Sergio Casal (Spain)

Born: September 8, 1962 in Barcelona
Height: 1.85 m
Plays: Right-handed

Full name: Sergio Casal Martínez... About him - the doubles player, we can say a lot from the perspective of tennis history, but this book is mainly focused on singles, so considering Casal - the singles player, I'll narrow down the description to his two meetings against Boris Becker. They met six times in total, but two matches have status as the most important in Casal's career - the first comes from the Paris-Bercy final held on a fast carpet surface. The 24-year-old Spaniard [100] lost in straight sets (having beaten i.a. much higher ranked John McEnroe & Tim Mayotte), but he left a very good impression with his elegant attacking style, conquering the hearts of the Parisian crowd, who gave him a huge support in that lost final. The second comes from a decisive fifth rubber of a Davis Cup tie between Spain and West Germany, March 1987. That time in his hometown on clay, in front of the local 5,000 crowd chanting 'Sergio, Sergio!' Throughout the contest, Casal stunned Becker after a bizarre 6-2, 0-6, 6-2, 6-3 scoreline. *"In the second set things did not go well for me, but in the third I began using the same tactics as in at the start of the match, and got a good result,"* Casal said. That victory is exceptionally impressive in retrospect with knowledge of Becker being one of the greatest Davis Cup players of all time; his record 38-3, two of those three defeats he suffered to... Casal... the first one in a dead rubber of 1985. In doubles, Casal triumphed in 47 events (two majors), the vast majority of them alongside Emilio Sanchez with whom he got the Silver medal at the Olympics in Seoul '88.

Career record: 122–146 [139 events]
Career titles: 1
Highest ranking: No. 31 (November 1985)
Best GS result: US Open (third roud 1986)

Christo van Rensburg (South Africa)

Born: October 23, 1962 in Uitenhage
Height: 1.86 m
Plays: Right-handed

The best South African player of the 80s... only on the assumption we don't count Kevin Curren & Johan Kriek - these two, much more successful guys changed their nationalities in the 80s. Van Rensburg was rather a late bloomer, playing all his finals in the second part of his career. The first of them is for him perhaps the most memorable - Orlando '87; the 25 year-old Afrikaner defeated five US players en route to the maiden title, with a 6-3, 3-6, 6-1 victory over the legendary Jimmy Connors in the final despite a 155-0 difference betwwen them in the main-level finals. It was a terrible period for Jimbo, he lost 11 straight finals in the years 1985-88. *"I knew that would happen at some time,"* Christo said after the final which he finished with an ace. *"He plays his best tennis when he gets the crowd behind him. I knew I just had to play tougher on the next points."* Van Rensburg was defeated four times in the round last 16 of majors, at Wimbledon after tight four-setters to Bobo Zivojinovic & Mats Wilander. Faster surfaces were a natural environment for his serve-and-volley attitude. Good doubles player teamaed up with Paul Annacone (Aussie Open '85 champions). Trivia: Van Rensburg is one of only two men to beat Pete Sampras in straight sets at Wimbledon (doing so in 1990, when Sampras was the No. 12 seed), the other being 1996 champion Richard Krajicek.

Career record: 166–160 [162 events]
Career titles: 2
Highest ranking: No. 19 (February 1988)
Best GS result: Australian Open (fourth round 1989)
Wimbledon (fourth round 1986 & 1989)
US Open (fourth round 1990)

Joakim Nyström (Sweden)

Born: February 20, 1963 in Skelleftea
Height: 1.85 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

As a coach he helped Jurgen Melzer to reach the French Open '10 semifinal. The man from the most northern European city among those which produced ATP players, had a better career than his Austrian pupil overall, but as a player he failed in his three quarterfinal major attempts. Both '85 quarterfinals, Nystrom lost to John McEnroe, the first of them was a great opportunity for the Swede to reach the semifinal. Nystrom led 3:1* in the decider against the best player in the world at the time, on his favorite surface, and McEnroe was never a specialist from making recoveries in the deciding sets, but his confidence at the time was huge, and he ended up the match after 3 hours 42 minutes as a victor. *"I felt when I got that break to go up, 3:1, in the last set that I had a good chance to win the match,"* Nystrom said. *"But then he came to the net and put a lot of pressure on me."* One month before in Dallas, Nystrom stunned McEnroe 6-4, 7-6, 6-3 in the first round, saving four set points in the 2nd set. With that victory, Nystrom snapped McEnroe's 23-match winning streak. One month after a painful defeat to McEnroe in Paris, Nystrom suffered another bitter 5-set loss. He was serving twice to win a 5th set against a West German teenager (Boris Becker), yet lost 7-9, and the underdog went on to sensationally capture the title. We can only ponder what could have happened with Becker's career if Nystrom had finished him off. In the mid 80s, Nystrom belonged to the tennis elite: '11-11-7' it's his ranking in the end of the years 1984-86, respectively. In those years (collected 11 out of 13 titles), Nystrom, similarly to his doubles partner Mats Wilander, could win events on clay as a baseliner as well as on faster surfaces attacking the net quite regularly. His biggest title comes from Monte Carlo '86; in back-to-back rainy matches he defeated fellow Top 10ers: Stefan Edberg & Yannick Noah. *"I knew he was tired,"* Nystrom said after the final, *"And I didn't have to get so close to the lines with my passing shots."* Noah's wife, Cecilia, gave birth to a baby girl Saturday night in New York, just twelve hours before the MC final. *"I was not into the game,"* said Noah, *"I wasn't thinking about the match because this morning I had a little daughter and that for me is more important."* Nystrom was forced to end his career in 1989 because of injuries of both knees, at age of 26. Actually after winning his last title (Bastad '87) he was struggling with the knees for two years, participating in the biggest events irregularly. That title was very prestigious because in the last

three matches he defeated the three other best Swedes at the time! Very calm, timid player, he had tools (especially his backhand down the line was impressive) to be remembered as the third greatest Swedish player of the 80s, nonetheless he's rather forgotten. Curiosity: Nystrom was never beaten by the best Swedish player born in the 60s - Edberg. They played thrice, always a decider was required, and twice Nystrom prevailed after the same scoreline (4-6, 6-0, 6-3). Completely different H2H against the second best Swede of that generation - Wilander; Nystrom needed 13 matches to finally defeat his one year younger best friend on the tour with whom shared the same coach, Jon-Anders Sjogren (also Anders Jarryd & Hans Simonsson belonged to that group). Since retiring from tennis, Nyström served as Fed Cup captain for Sweden and as an assistant coach to Wilander with the Swedish Davis Cup team.

Career record:	265–142 [148 events]
Career titles:	13
Highest ranking:	No. 7 (March 1986)
Best GS results:	Roland Garros (quarterfinal 1985) US Open (quarterfinal 1985-86)

Two-time Davis Cup champion, 1985 & 1987 (in both finals won doubles rubbers partnering Wilander), also played in the Davis Cup '83 final as a singles player, suffering two defeats

Paul Annacone (USA)

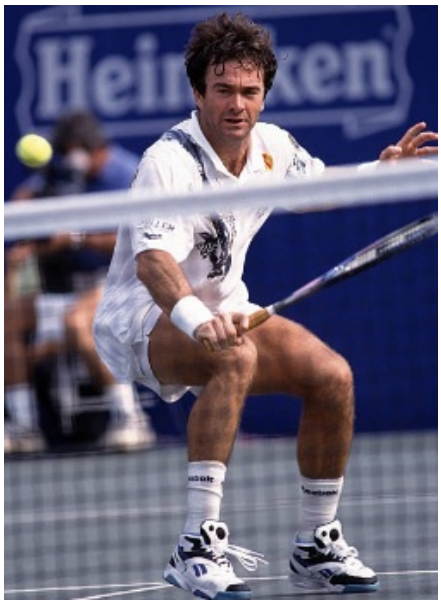
Born: March 20, 1963 in Southampton, New York
Height: 1.84 m
Plays: Right-handed

Annacone is foremost known as Pete Sampras' coach in the late 90s and a guy who helped Roger Federer for a while. So his coaching credentials are perfect, but he was a good player in his own right. The years 1985-86 it was his best period, he played four out of his six finals then, and made one of the biggest upsets in the 80s eliminating John McEnroe in the US Open first round after a stunning scoreline (1-6, 6-1, 6-1, 6-3). It's true that McEnroe came back to the tour after a half year hiatus, but following his defeat to Annacone, BigMac collected three straight titles. Annacone met his pupil Sampras once, when SamPe was a teenager and beat him 6-7, 7-5, 6-3 at Queens Club '89. Other great players who left the court as losers of confrontations with Annacone, are Stefan Edberg & Mats Wilander, but both Swedes - like Sampras - weren't at their peaks. One of the most offensive players in the 80s, constantly attacking the net not only on serve, but on return as well - sometimes to be involved in already rare in the 80s, volley vs volley exchanges. Obviously with this style the life on clay courts is not easy, Annacone wasn't interested in participating in the European events on the dirt, he just made a few trips to Paris, and reached the third round of Roland Garros '88. A bit stiff player, judging by his serve-and-volley skills and good ground-strokes off both wings, he seems to be an underachiever. Curiosity: Annacone was the first player to win an-all tie-break three-setter in the main-level final as he defeated Edberg 7-6(5), 6-7(8), 7-6(4) after 2 hours 54 minutes in an all-serve-and-volley duel in Los Angeles '85. *"We're all aware I had some good fortune last night,"* said Annacone about the final. *"My opponent wasn't feeling too good. I can't really say I'm sorry now."* Annacone needed eight match points, including five in the second-set tiebreaker, to finally chalk up the victory.

Career record: 157–131 [134 events]
Career titles: 3
Highest ranking: No. 12 (March 1986)
Best GS result: Wimbledon (quarterfinal 1984)

Wally Masur (Australia)

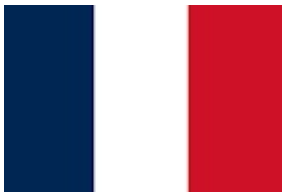
Born: May 15, 1963 in Southampton (England)
Height: 1.80 m
Plays: Right-handed



There were five Aussies (eight year difference between the oldest & the youngest) who played together in Davis Cup in the early 90s, they all had game-style more suitable to the 80s than to the 90s, but each of them reached Grand Slam semifinal - I mean Masur, Darren Cahill, Mark Woodforde, Jason Stoltenberg & Todd Woodbridge. They have very similar numbers of tournaments won, very similar highest ranking - Masur is the only one who reached two major semifinals, and he did it at two different surfaces which makes it more impressive. I write on many pages of this book that Australian Open until 1988 cannot be comparable to those editions that occurred afterwards, nevertheless the years 1983-87 were better than all years between the start of the Open Era and 1982, so Masur's AO 1987 semifinal shouldn't be underestimated, especially that in the fourth round he stunned the two-time Wimbledon champion - Boris Becker, after a strange 4-hour 40-minute match (the longest Aus Open match at Kooyong) in which the teenage German saved three match points in the 4th set to lead 2:0 in the decider. A 6-2 set for him seemed quite probable, yet Masur won six straight games. *"He had me in the bag,"* Masur said. *"Then he let the crowd rattle him a little and I kept my head."* Masur had more luck than two years earlier when on the same court he squandered two match points in the 3rd set and lost in five to Stefan Edberg, the eventual champion. Masur's second, much more unexpected semifinal, happened at the US Open '93 and is connected to one of the greatest comebacks in Grand Slam history: Masur survived against a fellow Aussie - **Jamie Morgan** (b. 1971) 3-6, 4-6, 6-3, 6-4, 7-5 trailing 0:5 in the decider! At 1:5 (30/40) Masur withstood a match point on return, and from 2:5 (30-all) won 18 out of the last 19 points - I don't know any other case in the Open Era that a player lost despite a 5:0 lead in the deciding set. *"I cannot believe I won that match,"* Masur said. *"I mean, it was just ridiculous. I was gone. He definitely tightened up a bit, but I didn't miss a ball for about six games. I just didn't miss a ball."* The same year, the 30-year-old Masur helped his country in advancing to the Davis Cup final, but didn't play in the final against Germany because lost an internal "who will play beside Richard Fromberg?" match to Stoltenberg.

Career record: 328–287 [270 events] **Career titles:** 3
Highest ranking: No. 15 (October 1993)
Best GS results: Australian Open (semifinal '87; quarterfinal '83), US Open (semifinal 1993)

Henri Leconte (France)



Born: July 4, 1963 in Lillers
Height: 1.84 m
Plays: Left-handed

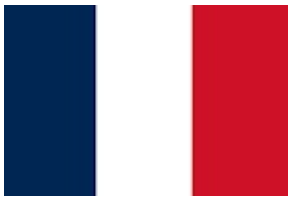
In retrospect, looking at five different generations of French players of the Open Era, it seems that the one playing in the 80s was the best: Yannick Noah (1960), and two younger left-hander players - Leconte (1963) & Forget (1965) - Noah as the only French player won a major, Leconte played a major final, Forget disappointed at majors overall, but he claimed two Mercedes Super 9 titles in 1991 and he won a match that gave France the Davis Cup triumph the same year (Leconte highly contributed to that title). Leconte marked his existence on the tennis map as someone worth following in November '82 as he captured his maiden title in Stockholm, defeating in the final one year younger (already French Open champion) - Mats Wilander (Leconte had saved three match points in the third round vs Tomas Smid). That success caused Leconte's appearance in the Davis Cup final, but he lost an important rubber to Gene Mayer. The years 1986-88 were the best in Leconte's career, in those years Leconte played 7 of his 16 finals and he was a real force in the most important tournaments which was finalized with the French Open '88 final. The Frenchman had won three five-setters before the final, and after losing the opener to a rock solid Wilander, he ran out of gas. On 12 May 1989, he underwent the first of three operations on a herniated disk. The year 1991, when he was 28 year-old, initiated a bad period which ultimately led to his retirement, however, the end of that year was sweet. Noah - at the end of his career became the Davis Cup captain - appointed Leconte to play the second rubber of a tie against the United States, and it was right on the money - Leconte, ranked no. 159, not having won a match for five months, stunned Pete Sampras and the following day helped Forget to beat one of the best doubles pairs at the time - Ken Flach / Robert Seguso, easier than anyone could have expected. Leconte, struggling with his disk, surprised two times more: first at the French Open '92 when as a 'wild card' [200] advanced to the semifinal, then in Halle '93 when claimed his last title as a player ranked no. 141, outplaying in the last two matches Top 10'rs (before the event, Leconte had a 2-8 record for the year). He finished his career in his favorite tournament - French Open '96, just like sixteen years before when he had played there his first main-level match, he lost to a Swedish guy (to Hans Simonsson in 1980, to Thomas Johansson in 1996). Leconte left the Centre Court in tears with flowers, and all of a sudden he

appeared as a 'wild card' two weeks later in Rosmalen - he lost to Kenneth Carlsen, and it was ultimately the last match in his professional career at the main-level (later that year he played two more Challengers). The chubby Frenchman had very short service motion, similar to Roscoe Tanner's serve. Leconte was an all-round player, successfully implementing serve-and-volley style on all surfaces. He possessed exceptionally fast hands, especially his backhands were sensational at times, really incredible how fast he was able to play with a short swing. Very emotional player, who enjoyed interacting with the crowd finding inspiration in the loud atmosphere. Chanting "Henri! Henri!" - this is what he loved playing in France, it could have elevated him to another level. One of the greatest examples of it comes from his fourth round match of the French Open '90. On Centre Court he faced Andrei Chesnokov, who was playing tennis of his life then, having won Monte Carlo & being a runner-up in Rome. Chesnokov had won 16 of his 17 matches and as a French Open semi finalist a year before, he was among the biggest favorites to win the title - Leconte almost outplayed him in straight sets under two hours. The Soviet player took the control of the sets 3 and 4, but Leconte responded in the decider with 'all or nothing' attitude - he was attacking the net on every possibility as server and receiver, and in that set he won 6-3 among 29 points he obtained as many as 16 came from his winners!

Career record:	377–269 [250 events]
Career titles:	9
Highest ranking:	No. 5 (September 1986)
Best GS results:	Roland Garros (runner-up 1988; semifinal '86 & 92; quarterfinal '85 & 90) Wimbledon (semifinal 1986; quarterfinal 1985 & 87) US Open (quarterfinal 1986)

Davis Cup champion 1991

Thierry Tulasne (France)



Born: July 12, 1963 in Aix-les-Bains
Height: 1.77 m
Plays: Right-handed

Tulasne, a son of a tennis coach, may be mainly associated as a bald coach of French players (Sébastien Grosjean, Paul-Henri Mathieu and Gilles Simon - for a very long time), but as a young player he had long hair and a headband resembling Bjorn Borg. To some degree he was a "golden boy" of French tennis. In terms of results he is nowhere near to the other French player of his generation (eight days older Henri Leconte & Guy Forget), but he got recognition earlier. In 1980, before turning 17, as ranked 579, he defeated No. 4 Vitas Gerulaitis in Rome, then triumphed as a junior at Wimbledon; already as an 18-year-old boy he won his maiden main-level title (Bastad) and reached the fourth round of Roland Garros (he never improved that achievement, equaled in 1989) - with wooden racket, he was one of the first players to hit one-handed backhand top-spins with this equipment. Everything came too early for him, endorsements from Donnay, Lacoste and Lamborghini. He was rich before he was really successful and it spoiled him. *"You're 18/19 and you read this as a kid, what are you thinking? My confidence was shattered!"* he said about that period. Tulasne's career highlight came in September '85 when he defeated in Barcelona's final the contemporary two-time Roland Garros champion, Mats Wilander 0–6, 6–2, 3–6, 6–4, 6–0 after 3 hours 20 minutes. At the press conference after his victory, Tulasne said that his secret to winning the tournament was a magnesium-based diet that gave him enough energy. Serious hip problems forced him to finish his career in 1991 at age of 28 after two unsuccessful years on the tour. Tulasne reflected his career: *"I sometimes think to myself what might have been if I had been born twenty years later and with a different mentality in those early days when I should have worked hard I did not, that is my biggest regret, as a pro I would show up and expect Connors or Lendl to rollover and lose to me. I was arrogant and stupid."*

Career record: 227–221 [211 events]
Career titles: 5
Highest ranking: No. 10 (August 1986)
Best GS result: Roland Garros (fourth round 1981 & 1989)

Mikael Pernfors (Sweden)

Born: July 16, 1963 in Malmö
Height: 1.73 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

One of the strangest careers as far as distinctive players born in the 60s are concerned. Pernfors belongs to the golden generation of Swedes, but his game-style and road to success differ from other Swedish players. First of all, in contrary to all other Swedes, he wasn't tall, besides he didn't fit to the "Borg's pattern"; even though he was short, he wasn't a typical Swedish patient baseliner; he tended to play a mixed game of retrieving and attacking, loved to apply dropshots and lobs (in the 80s there were more good attacking players than defensive ones thus he had plenty of opportunities to use lifted lobs - his trademark). He didn't train with a bunch of Swedish blondes because he studied at the University of Georgia in the United States and became the first player since **Dennis Ralston** (lived: 1942-2020) two decades earlier to win back-to-back NCAA singles titles in 1984 and 1985. He turned pro relatively late, after second NCAA championship (at the age of 22) and shocked the tennis world in the following season, beginning it as a Top 200 player with an abysmal 3-8 record at the main-level. Two good US results at the beginning of 1986 gave him an abrupt advancement in the ATP ranking, but when he arrived at French Open '86 he could realistically think only about playing in the second round... he advanced to the final becoming one of the most unexpected Grand Slam runners-up in the Open Era (ousted four seeded players, including two top dogs: Stefan Edberg & Boris Becker). All of a sudden, within one year from a player who could have dreamt about entering the Top 100 he became a Top 10'er. And not only that, in the season's conclusion he was shockingly chosen by the Swedish captain Hans Olsson to play in the Davis Cup final instead of Mats Wilander! Pernfors' only experience at the time on that surface was Wimbledon's 86 fourth round. That selection almost paid off - Pernfors stunned Paul McNamee on day one, then on Sunday he was playing amazing tennis for the first two sets against Pat Cash, but lost after 3 hours 27 minutes. Another three years didn't bring anything spectacular, but he remained a solid Top 30 player. Australian Open '90 marked a sudden twist in his career following his controversial fourth round victory over John McEnroe (the American was disqualified in the 4th set). Pernfors had no chance in the quarterfinal against Yannick Noah, and disappeared from the broad tennis elite. The 26-year-old (at the

time) Swede suffered a series of injuries afterwards and dropped outside the Top 200 for over two years to magnificently come back to the ATP tour triumphing in Montreal '93. As a player ranked no. 95, having won three Challenger titles of 1993, the 30-year-old Pernfors shocked four seeded players at the Canadian Open to lift his third and last title. In the final, in a 85-degree heat (30 Celsius) he came back from a *2:5 in the decider against Todd Martin, depriving him of a big title, which certainly Martin deserved to win.

Career record:	140–114 [114 events]
Career titles:	3
Highest ranking:	No. 10 (September 1986)
Best GS results:	Australian Open (quarterfinal 1990)
	Roland Garros (runner-up 1986)

Slobodan Živojinović (Serbia)

Born: July 23, 1963 in Belgrade (Yugoslavia)
Height: 1.94 m
Plays: Right-handed

Слободан "Bobo" Живојиновић, along with Yannick Noah, Kevin Curren & Boris Becker, was the most powerful server in the mid 80s. Those guys were the first top players of the Open Era, serving around 20 aces per match on surfaces different than clay; Curren was the first one to overcome 30 aces in a match (he did it against Jimmy Connors at Wimbledon '83). John McEnroe could strike a similar number of aces, but in his case it was more a matter of variety and placement than speed. The big serve helped Zivojinovic to be a more dangerous player in the "best of five" format, hence his very good records at Slams & Davis Cup in the years of his prime (1985-89). The Yugoslav was really big, using boxing nomenclature - the only natural "heavyweight" among the best players of the 80s, at the end of his career he weighed more or less 100 kg! Before he was overweight in the late 80s, his record in five-setters had been excellent (11:4), but the only top name he had defeated in those times was John McEnroe in a bizarre Australian Open quarterfinal of 1985. The following year, "Bobo" reached another grass-court semifinal as an unseeded player, and lost it in five to Ivan Lendl. *"I think my big advantage was I was hitting hard and I didn't let him play easy,"* Zivojinovic said after the quarterfinal win over Ramesh Krishnan. *"He's one of the best touch players today and he showed it sometimes when I was playing loose shots. So I was going for everything or nothing."* That was unique, double major semifinalist without a main-level title! Later that year he claimed his maiden title in Houston, defeating five American players in a row. Zivojinovic loved representing Yugoslavia, he considerably helped his country to reach the Davis Cup semifinal in the years 1988-89, and to a lesser extent in 1991 - that year, the Yugoslavs had great chance to claim the title - Goran Ivanisevic began serving better than anyone, Goran Prpic was in a form of his life that year; unfortunately the Yugoslav War broke out (almost immediately after the Davis Cup quarterfinals when Yugoslavia defeated Czechoslovakia 4:1), and they both - as Croats - refused to play for Yugoslavia. The Serbian Zivojinovic was accompanied by **Srdan Muskatirovic** (b. 1972, never advancted to Top 300), a player from a Satellite level, and they were doomed to failure in the semifinal against France. Zivoijinovic was overall more successful in doubles, he even won one major title (US Open '86 partnering Anders Gomez), also as a doubles specialist he helped Yugoslavia to win the World Team Cup in 1990.

Career record: 150–138 [128 events]
Career titles: 2
Highest ranking: No. 19 (October 1987)
Best GS results: Australian Open (semifinal 1985)
Wimbledon (semifinal 1986; quarterfinal 1987)

Luiz Mattar (Brazil)

Born: August 18, 1963 in Sao Paulo
Height: 1.83 m
Plays: Right-handed

The best Brazilian player before the rise of Gustavo Kuerten (Mattar finished his career more or less at the time "Guga" began his own). I remember him from my childhood as an exceptionally aggressive player in terms of his behaviour. I'd like to watch at least one of the three matches he played against John McEnroe being very curious about the tension between them. As a professional player Mattar greatly benefited from the fact, there were several main-level events in Brazil - the first 9 of his 11 finals Mattar played in his own country. Considering the number of his titles it's quite strange that he never played a major fourth round, he simply hadn't enough skills to threaten the best guys. He could have in his resume one big victory, but failed very badly - it was the first round of Davis Cup '92, he led *5:2 in the 4th set against Boris Becker, then wasted six match points on serve, including a triple MP (4-6, 7-5, 6-1, 6-7, 0-6 after 4 hours 25 minutes). Brazil upset Germany anyway, and a similar situation took place in the quarterfinal - Mattar lost to Omar Camporese after 5 hours 47 minutes (the longest match of the 90s) the opening rubber, yet Brazil overcame Italy. In the semifinal Brazil had no chance against Switzerland. Trivia: Mattar lost two finals to Andre Agassi, the first of them meant Agassi's first main-level title (Itaparica '87), the second (Scottsdale '94) his comeback to the tour after a 5-month break.

Career record: 191–178 [170 events]
Career titles: 7
Highest ranking: No. 29 (May 1989)
Best GS result: third round (three times)

Yahiya Doumbia (Senegal)

Born: August 25, 1963 in Bamako (Mali)
Height: 1.85 m
Plays: Right-handed

The only player in this e-book, who never won a Grand Slam match (only four appearances, in the late 90s, two in New York). There are two biggest mysteries in the Open Era: one is Roberto Carretero, Doumbia is the other one, but chronologically the Senegalese is the first. Already 25 year-old Doumbia, ranked No. 453 advanced to the main-draw of Lyon '88 and shocked Chesnokov in two tie-breaks (9/7, 7/5) in the first round, then won another four matches and raised the cup as the lowest ranked champion (Lleyton Hewitt will improve this record ten years later). Soon afterwards he disappeared form the main scene, actually he was long forgotten when out of nowhere, as a 32-year-old guy with ranking No. 282, he repeated his dream week in France - as a qualifier he claimed a title in Bordeaux, not dropping a set, noone even won five games in a set against him (!), even though among the defeated guys there were only experienced ATP players with Jakob Hlasek at the head of the list. The graduate of the University of Hampton in Virginia, has also won one Challenger title (Campos '91) and several Satellites: Finland '93, Denmark & Russia '95, Iran & Tunisia '97. Since the retirement caused by permanent problems with right knee, he lives and trains in France, his adopted country. There were two originally African players in the 80s; the other one **Nduka Odizor** (b. 1968) from Nigeria, who won one title (Taipei 1983), reached the fourth round at Wimbledon the same year, who had won the longest three-set match as he ouvercome Guy Forget 7-6, 4-6, 22-20 at Queens Club '87 in 4 hours 20 minutes (twenty-five years later Roger Federer and Juan M. Del Potro played six minutes longer in London at the Olympics).

Career record: 24–34 [33 events]
Career titles: 2
Highest ranking: No. 74 (September 1988)

Henrik Sundström (Sweden)

Born: February 29, 1964 in Lund
Height: 1.88 m
Plays: Right-handed

Sundstrom put aside his skis, football and the clarinet he played in the school orchestra in the small village of Bjarred to concentrate on tennis full time, it was worth of this scoreline: 13-11, 6-4, 6-3... Sundstrom's 3-hour 41-minute victory over John McEnroe [1] in the Davis Cup '84 final, a highlight of his career. McEnroe was in a form of life that year, virtually unbeatable, entering the contest having lost hardly three matches that year! The American squandered a double set point twice: at 8:7* & 11:10, Sundstrom [7] was serving at 10:9 (the set lasted two hours). In the 3rd set, McEnroe led *3:1 (40/30), Sundstrom passed him with a cross-court backhand and took the final five games, passing BigMac on his first match point once again off his backhand side. The 20-year-old Sundstrom became a Davis Cup hero that year, in the semifinal vs Czechoslovakia he had defeated Ivan Lendl (third best player in the world at the time) 4-6, 3-6, 6-3, 6-1, 6-1 trailing *0:3 (0/40) in the 3rd set! The great Lendl never lost such a match before or after in his very long career. Unfortunately chronic injuries forced Sundstrom to retire five years later at the age of 25. In the years 1988-89 he appeared only in a few tournaments. The setbacks haunted his career early in 1986 when he lost plenty of points from 1985 and within a few months dropped from Top 20 to the outskirts of Top 100. Just like other Swedish prodigy (Kent Carlsson), Sundstrom was a typical clay-courter, all his 13 finals he notched on that surface. As opposed to Carlsson, Sundstrom was playing one-handed backhand, a very classy shot in his performance. *"We weren't from big cities but small places where the clubs had good courts and the system was built on developing the players in the juniors,"* Sundstrom said about the wave of Swedish boys born in the 60s who stormed the tennis world in the 80s. *"We all grew up together in the juniors and had great times. We are all individuals, but we learned to fight for each other and our country."*

Career record: 154–109 [111 events]
Career titles: 5
Highest ranking: No. 6 (October 1984)
Best GS result: Roland Garros (quarterfinalist 1984)

Davis Cup champion 1984

Goran Prpić (Croatia)

Born: May 4, 1964 in Zagreb (Yugoslavia)
Height: 1.80 m
Plays: Right-handed

A man with a knee-brace. His career had two openings. He was professionally playing just two years, trying to get into the Top 100 when in February '86 he suffered a bad injury after four games vs Aaron Krickstein at Boca Raton. After a surgery, Prpic spent two years recovering before returning to the tour. He needed another two years of playing to finally enter the Top 100 at the age of 25. Once he did it, he showed skills on clay with two very good results within two weeks in the German speaking area (final in Stuttgart, semifinal in Kitzbuhel) ended up with defeats to Martin Jaite. The period between clay-court seasons in 1990 and 1992 was the best in his career, starting with a title in Umag and triumph at the World Team Cup (Prpic won all his singles matches, including 6-1, 6-4 over Stefan Edberg, who soon afterwards became the best player in the world). In 1991 he reached semifinals in three consecutive Mercedes Super 9 events (all on clay) being very close to get the final in Hamburg. The '93 season marked a regress due to recurring problems with the knee, but at French Open he managed to reach his second major quarterfinal in which he played an interesting 4-setter against the double-defending champion Jim Courier. It was his swan song, officially he retired from tennis in 1996, but after French Open '93 he was only playing occasionally without any good results. In 1998 he made a cameo at the Croatian Futures to retire after splitting sets with **Igor Gaudi** (b. 1975).

Career record: 125–120 [107 events]
Career titles: 1
Highest ranking: No. 16 (July 1991)
Best GS results: Australian Open (quarterfinal 1991)
Roland Garros (quarterfinal 1993)

Miloslav Mečíř (Slovakia)

Born: May 19, 1964 in Bojnice (Czechoslovakia)
Height: 1.90 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

When I think: who was the best Open Era player to never win a Grand Slam title (?), my thoughts go to Mecir. A simplistic solution to answer this question would be to analyze the guys who played the most major finals not winning any of them. This is a group of two-time major finalists: Kevin Anderson, Alex Corretja, Kevin Curren, Steve Denton, Todd Martin, Mecir, Cedric Pioline & Robin Soderling. Three players (Corretja, Martin & Pioline) won much more matches than Mecir, Corretja was also ranked higher, so I'd reasonable speculate between Corretja & Mecir. I favore Mecir due to his all-court versatility. Corretja played both his major finals on clay, Mecir on hard, yet on two different venues; the (Czecho)Slovak played semifinals at all majors while Corretja didn't reach a semifinal outside France. Their biggest titles? Corretja triumphed at 'Masters' '98 in Hanover, ten years earlier Mecir got a gold medal at the Olympics in Seoul. Of course it's not easy to weight both titles on the same scale because Corretja needed to face (at least in theory, but in practice too) all the best players in the world while Seoul '88 didn't gather all the best guys as the first official Olympic event, yet Mecir needed to win six 'best of five' matches. Well, another good comparison is their other biggest titles. In the 80s there still wasn't something like Masters 1K, yet the prestige was actually the same - Corretja won those tournaments twice (Rome, Indian Wells), so did Mecir (Key Biscayne, Indian Wells). And here's one important factor - in the years 1987-89, Key Biscayne was known as the "fifth Grand Slam" because the champion needed to win seven 'best of five' matches. I'd even argue that Mecir's title claimed in Florida '87 is more valuable than Stefan Edberg's Australian Open title of the same year (in Melbourne the seeded players had 'bye' in the first round). When I ponder about the most prestigious events it looks like this (without subtle nuances):

- Grand Slams
- Olympics
- "Masters"
- Masters 1K
- WCT Finals/Grand Slam Cup
- the rest of main-level events with a gradation depending on the prize money mainly

Ok, so before the introduction of the Grand Slam Cup in Munich 1990, in the 80s a similar function (an indoor event gathering the best players & "the best of five" format each round) belonged to the World Championship Tennis which was annually held in Dallas. I praise the Munich event more, but Corretja didn't even play a semifinal there - Mecir won Dallas in 1987, having defeated Mats Wilander, Andres Gomez & John McEnroe; two of those three players belonged to the very top in men's tennis then. There's one more thing - competitiveness against the best players in the biggest tournaments. Admittedly what Corretja has achieved in Hanover '98 cannot be underestimated, but at majors he didn't beat either Pete Sampras or Andre Agassi (albeit played very good five-setters against them in New York), in turn Mecir in the 'best of five' had defeated all the best players in the world of the late 80s. Mecir won 20 of 23 matches against the Swedish players (the biggest collective force in men's tennis at the time!) during 18 months of the years 1985-86. Especially his 7:4 record vs Wilander is very intriguing. To me, Wilander was the best tactician of the 80s, nevertheless he couldn't find a solution facing the awkward Mecir. The most bitter defeat of those seven comes from Wimbledon '88 - in retrospect: if Wilander had claimed that title, he would have enjoyed the best Open Era season... was outplayed 3-6, 1-6, 3-6 by Mecir in the quarterfinal (their last meeting by the way). Mecir could be a pain in the ass for all top dogs; against big servers he could retrieve more than others, facing Wilander, he could outplay the patient Swede on the baseline with more acute angles. In terms of technique he was unique - big guy, but not a big server, his upper body was unusually longer so he was moving like a player - let's say - 10 cm shorter. He was a baseliner, but his volley technique was faultless, so no problem for him to apply serve-and-volley when the situation required it. He knew how to dismantle his opponents, they needed to change (or at least modify) their tactics in order to beat him. After many years, this is how Wilander recalls Mecir: *"Best anticipation of any player in our generation for sure. The most flexible... and then crazy good hands. He is the best player in the world to not have won a slam, for sure. No question in my mind. He should have won three or four."*

Career record:	262–122 [117 events]
Career titles:	11
Highest ranking:	No. 4 (February 1988)
Best GS results:	Australian Open (runner-up 1989; quarterfinal 1987) Roland Garros (semifinal 1987) Wimbledon (semifinal 1988; quarterfinal 1986) US Open (runner-up 1986; quarterfinal 1987)

Olympic Gold medal in Seoul 1988

Jimmy Arias (USA)

Born: August 16, 1964 in Grand Island
Height: 1.75 m
Plays: Right-handed

Arias, along with Aaron Krickstein, was supposed to replace Jimmy Connors & John McEnroe in the pinnacle of the U.S. tennis. He was just 16.10 years old when got his first big title - mixed-doubles at the French Open '81 partnering his female counterpart Andrea Jaeger; a few months later he became the youngest player (at the time) to participate in the US Open, losing 6-7, 6-7, 3-all ret. to Harold Solomon. In the Top 100 he already appeared turning 17 and the highlight of career he was enjoying being a 19 year-old boy with very good results in New York & Paris. Arias was an example of fast exploitation. Being relatively young (29 y.o.) he retired after several disappointing years & struggling with injuries. Out of nowhere he played his last ATP event four years later - went through the qualifying rounds in Washington (ousted Doug Flach & Eric Taino) to take advantage of beneficial draw and injury of Wade McGuire's (7-20 main-level record) injury in round one... no chance in the second round vs Wayne Ferreira. Arias recalls his career: *"At 19, I made one big mistake that changed my career. I got mono and kept playing, which enlarged my spleen and caused liver problems. I was given three months of bed rest. I started going through all the scrapbooks my mother had put together, and I had two terrible thoughts: the first one was, if I never accomplish anything else in tennis, I've already done well. What you say happens. I never actually did anything else that I considered worthy, although I won some big matches. The second thought was even more disturbing: I didn't want to be No. 1 in the world anymore. It was too famous for my taste. I wanted to be able to go to a movie and not have everyone know who I was."*

Career record:	283–222 [222 events]
Career titles:	5
Highest ranking:	No. 5 (April 1984)
Best GS results:	Roland Garros (quarterfinalist 1984)
	US Open (semifinalist 1983)

Mats Wilander (Sweden)

Born: August 22, 1964 in Växjö
Height: 1.82 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

Parallels between Wilander & Bjorn Borg's are staggering. Wilander was not only playing like his eight years older compatriot (with amazing baseline patience on clay; serve-and-volley on grass) winning the biggest titles, he also matured very early tennis-wise and burnt out at a very similar age. It was the year 1982 when Wilander replaced Borg as the potential king of clay. Borg had won the French Open title five times, and decided to suspend his career at the age of 25 - at the same time Wilander appeared in Paris for the first time among professionals, and as an almost

18-year-old boy claimed the title (Borg conquered Paris in his second French Open being in the same age, more or less, in 1974). Wilander played four more finals in the French capital, and he was arguably the most successful clay-court player of the 80s (Ivan Lendl also won French Open three times in five finals; in their mutual meetings on Philipp Chatrier court it was tied 2-2, but I perceive the Swede as a more successful clay-courter given his contribution to the Davis Cup titles on the red surface). Jay Berger being asked in 1988 *"Is Agassi's forehand the biggest weapon in tennis?"*, he replied *"No, it's Wilander's brain"* (btw, they met twice & Berger won both matches easily!). I agree with that statement and think that Wilander could write a better "Winning Ugly" book than Brad Gilbert. When I watch Wilander's matches I don't see anything particularly interesting: the serve was just decent, groundstrokes rather moderate as well as Wilander's volleys. Of course everything at high level, but nothing impressive, the forehand was not aesthetically pleasant, actually nothing allowed to expect that this guy would win seven major titles (Wilander's two grass-court Australian triumphs of the years 1983-84, cannot be compared on equal terms to his five other GS titles). So where is the secret to Wilander's stellar career? Very likely in his mind as Berger suggested; Wilander knowing his all limitations, was able to perfectly construct his game-style, and also adjust it to his opponents. Wilander's once said that the legendary Davis Cup loss to John McEnroe of 1982, gave him more than plenty earlier wins. During that match, after losing the first two sets on a surface that suited McEnroe more, facing the partisan crowd too, the Swede decided to keep the first serve in as long as possible and it changed the trajectory of the match preventing McEnroe's cheap-and-charge

attacks in returning games, and Wilander was within two games from winning the longest match in history at the time! One may say that he had a coach beside, regardless of the inventor of the tactics change, there's no doubt that Wilander could keep the concentration at the highest level for a long period of time. His physical preparation was great, he quickly improved his volley skills, accelerated the serve, and polished his backhand slice. His Australian Open '83 wasn't less shocking than his first major title. He had been labelled as a clay-courter, yet within 1.5 years since the Parisian triumph, Wilander could already deliver a full package. It was very helpful in the years to come, nothing great as far as far as his strokes were concerned, but everything very good, and flexible thinking, constantly analyzing which tools to use and against whom, also changing it throughout the match depending on the situation. The US Open '88 final, a pinnacle of Wilander's career it's a great example of his highly strategic mind. It was a period when he was in great form, but losing the most important finals to Lendl. Even though on hardcourts Wilander was playing in rather defensive mode, he won that final with the help of a constant pressure on Lendl; in the sets 2-5 Wilander was regularly applying the serve-and-volley tactics despite Lendl's piercing passing-shots. Over the years Wilander figured out that Lendl's backhand return wasn't aggressive, and was approaching the net, targeting only that wing; perhaps the tactics couldn't have been so efficient if the Swede had been doing that permanently... he was doing it wisely, intertwining with conservative serves to Lendl's forehand staying on the baseline behind them, moreover in that match, Wilander decided to keep the ball in play off the backhand side almost entirely with slices. You have to praise a player, who, instead of repeating the same strategy time and time again in vain, counting on luck, tries to propose something contrary to his own style. From purely technical level, I like in Wilander's game his passing-shots - he was hitting the ball much faster being attacked by opponents, with an attitude "from the baseline I can play in moderate pace longer than you, but if you want to attack me better do it with exxtreme precision, otherwise the ball will come at you much faster." The year 1988 was great - three major titles and Key Bisacayne (fifth Slam) - one of the best seasons any player enjoyed in the Open Era, could have been even better if Wilander hadn't lost to his toughest rival (Miloslav Mecir) in Wimbledon's quarterfinal. There were still matches against more natural grass-court players ahead, but Wilander was in such a terrific form, that he couldn't be written off facing Stefan Edberg and Boris Becker. After the final victory over Lendl, Wilander became no. 1 in the world, he was only 24, but it was already his eighth full season among professionals. *"It's the biggest victory I ever had,"* said Wilander after the final. *"Bigger than my first Paris (French Open) title. It meant so much. A Swede has never won this tournament. I'm going to be No. 1 now. It's definitely the biggest match I have ever played."* In the aftermath, he lost his enthusiasm to train hard, and the will to force himself to constantly think during matches. Never before or after, a player who reached the peak, experienced such a downhill like the Swede in 1989, well, it was still a good year by the standards of the majority of very good players (two major quarterfinals and helping Sweden to

play seventh (!) consecutive Davis Cup final, yet for a multiple Grand Slam champion of a calendar year, it was a big failure. Another two years were even worse, in 1992 the disguised and looking much older than the age would suggest Wilander didn't play at all, he needed to redefine his career. After the comeback in Summer of '93, he was playing more for personal satisfaction; he did something Borg hadn't unfortunately done in 1983. The pressure free Wilander surprised the tennis world twice in 1995 reaching quarter/semifinals in big American events (Key Biscayne & Cincinnati) winning four successive matches in them both. His attitude towards professional tennis perhaps was too careless - between two very good US appearances, Wilander was tested positive for cocaine (with his good friend Karel Novacek). In his final '96 season, Wilander played his last ATP final (almost six years after the previous one), also that year defeated Patrick Rafter, who would soon become one of the best players in the world. The final stages of Wilander's career weren't as nice and worldwide appreciated as in Edberg's case, but the farewell was much more tasty than in case of the third great Swede - Borg.

Career record: 571–222 [233 events]
Career titles: 33
Highest ranking: No. 1 (September 1988)
Best GS results:
Australian Open (champion 1983-84 & 88; runner-up 1985; semifinal '90)
Roland Garros (champion 1982, 85 & 88; runner-up 1983 & 87; semifinal 1984; quarterfinal 1989)
Wimbledon (quarterfinalist 1987-89)
US Open (champion 1988; runner-up 1987; semifinal 1985; quarterfinal 1983-84)

Davis Cup champion 1984, 85 & 87 (the third time as both, singles & doubles player)

Year-end rankings 1980-1996: 283-69-7-4-4-3-3-3-1-12-41-159-X-330-129-46-196.

Jordi Arrese (Spain)

Born: August 29, 1964 in Barcelona
Height: 1.75 m
Plays: Right-handed

Catalan: Jordi Arrese i Castané. A player actually connected only to the clay-courts throughout his career, on this surface he played 11 out of 12 ATP finals, the only hardcourt final (which he won) - Buzios in Brazil. In the early 90s the clay-court lovers were moving to South America after the US Open to play a series of tournaments, some of them on clay, others on hard, so basically the draws of those hardcourt events were filled with clay-court specialists. Despite great physical preparation, Arrese was never a threat at Roland Garros; in this context his silver medal gained at the Olympics '92 in his hometown, was completely unexpected - in that event all matches were played in 'the best of five' format. Arrese [30] took advantage of a favorable draw, anyway in two matches he was not a favorite - in the second round he ousted 9-7 in the 5th set Magnus Gustafsson, who was considered at the time as one of the best clay-courters; in the semifinal after 3 hours 48 minutes, Arrese defeated in four sets Andrei Cherkasov, who had eliminated Pete Sampras. The full happiness was very close, two games separated Arrese from the gold medal in a pretty open final against Marc Rosset, who was similarly unexpected in the end-game. The ATP ranking did not take into account the Olympics results then, otherwise Arrese could advance to the Top 20 following his career-best result. A few years after retirement, Arrese became the national team captain and won the Davis Cup 2004 title in Seville defeating the United States in the final.

Career record: 224–210 [214 events]
Career titles: 6
Highest ranking: No. 23 (November 1991)
Best GS result: Roland Garros (third round 1991)

Silver medal at the Olympics (Barcelona '92)

Martin Jaite (Argentina)

Born: October 9, 1964 in Buenos Aires
Height: 1.77 m
Plays: Right-handed

Argentina played one (lost) Davis Cup final during the times of Guillermo Vilas & Jose-Luis Clerc, it happened in 1981. It seemed that with another generation of Argentinian players, born in the 60s, at least repeating of the '81 success, was possible. Admittedly none of the three best Argentinians born in the 60s (Martin Jaite, Alberto Mancini, Guillermo Perez-Roldan) was as good as Vilas or Clerc, but each of them had his very successful period on clay-courts, each of them played one French Open quarterfinal, and participated at least once in a big final, which in the 90s was called "Mercedes Super 9". They all retired almost at the same time in the mid 90s. The collective potential wasn't fulfilled though, the Argentinians reached just one Davis Cup semifinal, in 1990 when they were dispatched by the Australians on grass (Jaite & Mancini in singles, Javier Frana as a leading doubles player; in the World Team Cup just one final, lost to West Germany in 1989 (Jaite & Perez-Roldan played singles, Frana/Gustavo Luza in doubles)... Jaite's best moment came in 1987 as he claimed his biggest title defeating Mats Wilander in Barcelona, 7-6, 6-4, 4-6, 0-6, 6-4. It was the first time Jaite had won in seven meetings facing Wilander. Four months before Jaite had lost to Wilander the final in Rome (straight sets), in 1988 he lost another big final - Monte Carlo to Ivan Lendl, after 3 hours 41 minutes. To Lendl, he also lost his lone French Open quarterfinal. From July 2007 till December 2008, Jaite was coaching David Nalbandian, and helped lead him to win titles in Madrid and Paris, where he became the first man to defeat the top two players in the world, Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal, in consecutive tournaments. In the years 2012-13 Jaite was a team captain of the Argentinian Davis Cup team. Trivia: Jaite faced Michael Stich five times and always in the "best of five" format; he won their first two encounters in five-setters, 6-3 in the deciders (both in 1990, first in Davis Cup, then at Roland Garros after one of the longest matches of the year which lasted 4 hours 46 minutes; then Stich won another three matches (3-0, 3-0 & 3-1 in sets respectively). Jaite's H2Hs vs the Davis Cup teammates: 3-2 Mancini, 3-3 Perez-Roldan.

Career record: 301–179 [170 events]
Career titles: 12
Highest ranking: No. 10 (July 1990)
Best GS result: Roland Garros (quarterfinal 1985)

Jakob Hlasek (Switzerland)

Born: November 12, 1964 in Prague (Czechoslovakia)
Height: 1.87 m
Plays: Right-handed

Born as Jakub Hlásek to Czech parents... was he a "poor man's Edberg"? The same height, also right-hander, both light blondes with manes, both serve-and-volleyers who possessed better backhand than forehand. One huge difference - Edberg was doing everything better. Perhaps Hlasek's first serve was generally faster, but Edberg's serve was overall better considering his distinctive second delivery. In the first few years on the tour Hlasek was just a solid Top 50 player. It was changed in the last quarter of the '88 season when he was playing like possessed week by week winning a few matches on four continents. It all began in America at the US Open when reached the fourth round and played a competitive 4-setter against the best player in the world - Ivan Lendl; then after a week break he flew to Asia (South Korea) to participate in the Olympics, then came back to Europe to play four indoor events within six weeks and get his maiden title (Wembledy); directly from England he flew to Africa (Johannesburg) to raise the trophy again only to play the following week third successive final... in Europe (Brussels). All those events allowed him to jump from No. 25 to no. 8 which meant that after packing his check for being a runner-up in Belgium, he flew back to New York to join the best players in the world - with such an intensity of appearances he could be anticipated as a whipping-boy who ran out of gas, however, Hlasek in his first match at "Masters" stunned Lendl trailing 2:4 in the 3rd set, won another two matches only to be beaten in the semifinal by Boris Becker after two tie-breaks. Between his two New York events, Hlasek manufactured a 32-7 record while in the first three quarters of the season he had just 17-8. Like many other players before and after, Hlasek remained a man of one season, or more precisely a man of amazing three months. Hlasek, as a player of two decades, defeated at least once all the greatest players of his times, the best, albeit negative H2H among the greatests he has against John McEnroe (3-4).

Career record: 432–330 [307 events]
Career titles: 5
Highest ranking: No. 7 (April 1989)
Best GS result: Roland Garros (quarterfinal 1991)

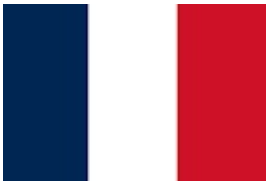
Ronald Agenor (Haiti)

Born: November 13, 1964 in Rabat, Morocco
Height: 1.80 m
Plays: Right-handed

Ronald Jean-Martin Agenor lived in Morocco until 10, then he spent 4 years in Zair before going to France (Bordeaux)... That what Agenor achieved in 1999 was like a tennis resurrection. Probably the majority of fans thought (I'm refering now to the pre-Google/Wikipedia era:) that the 35-year-old Haitian finished his career. He disappeared from the ATP tournaments and after a series of poor results, and struggling with injuries he dropped to No. 691 in the year 1997. Agenor, somewhat connected to the French tennis, but never representing France, couldn't count on 'wild cards' at French lower levels when he felt fit and ready again, so he decided to look for some points in the Satellite circuit, playing matches without linesmen & ballkids. It is nothing unusual for young upcoming players, but for an old guy (tennis-wise) who had played many matches on Centre Courts of big events, it must have been mentally difficult. Agenor gritted his teeth, began laboriously collecting points in the lowest events, then entered Challengers, won some of them, and at the end of 1999 he was ranked in the Top 100 again, for the first time in 4.5 years, at the age of 35! He finished the season in the Top 100 as the oldest player since Jimmy Connors (No. 82 in 1992). It helped him to participate in the ATP events of 2000, admittedly he dropped outside the Top 100 quite quickly, usually losing the first rounds, but in 2001 he almost shocked the tennis world when he led 3:2 in the 3rd set against Gustavo Kuerten [1]... Agenor achieved his career-best result at Roland Garros '89, advancing to the quarterfinal and losing in four sets to Michael Chang. Curiosity: he played three times against Andre Agassi, he not only won every time - he did it every time easily: 6-1, 6-4 Basel '87... 6-3, 6-1 in Rome '88 and 6-0, 6-3 (!) in Tokyo '89. The year 1987 ok, Agassi was only 17 and gathering experience, but how to explain their other two matches? I have no idea. Despite moderate height, Agenor was able to serve very fast, one of a few players who overpass 210 kph, it happened in 1992 - the year of the service acceleration in general.

Career record: 221-257 [256 events]
Career titles: 3
Highest ranking: No. 22 (May 1989)
Best GS result: Roland Garros (quarterfinalist 1989)

Guy Forget (France)



Born: January 4, 1965 in Casablanca (Morocco)
Height: 1.90 m
Plays: Left-handed

There were two left-handed French players who seemed like potential successors of a few years older Yannick Noah: Forget & Henri Leconte. They both had some special skills allowing them to believe they would win at least one Grand Slam event. Leconte reached one major final (French Open 1988), Forget remains as one of the best players in history to never play a major semifinal, but his career was generally better, chiefly thanks to a memorable 1991 year when he was in a mix with Stefan Edberg, Boris Becker, Jim Courier & Michael Stich. He was magnificent, the hottest on the tour, in the first quarter of the year when won 25 of his first 28 matches (counting three Hopman Cup wins – prestigious event at the time), defeating world's No. 1 Edberg twice in the meantime. So he could be perceived as a potential leader of the ATP ranking, especially considering the fact he put the serve as a weapon to another level, unknown in the 80s, serving more than ten aces per match. His momentum was halted by Courier, the American defeated the Frenchman in the Indian Wells final (7-6 in the 5th set), and one week later in the Key Biscayne fourth round. Forget suffered a setback during the subsequent clay-court season, but regained his confidence in the last months claiming his two biggest titles (Cincinnati & Paris), and winning a deciding Davis Cup rubber of the final, defeating on all three occasions a 20 y.o. inconsistent Pete Sampras. Forget developed quite interesting game-style in the early 90s; he was the best server then, but only as far as the first serve was concerned - he could go to the net behind it or stay back (quite often hitting the ball harder) on hardcourts and carpet (on grass he stuck to the S/V tradition), but his second serve was just an invitation to a baseline rally, so he was able to introduce to the game a big arrhythmia - you could expect completely different pace from him as he was serving or receiving, and within his serving games, also two different modes. Forget slowed down his glamor in 1992, but he was still among the best players in the world; in 1993 he suffered a right knee injury, sidelined almost exactly a year - after his comeback the mixed style that had been developed in the early 90s paid off - he couldn't play serve-and-volley anymore, yet had enough experience from the back of the court to change his profile from a 'serve-and-volley baseliner' to a baseliner who can surprise you with fast

serve and sporadic net adventures. With a limited movement, Forget got his last major quarterfinal (Wimbledon '94) ranked 1130 (!), and won his last title after a four year break (Marseille '96). The body issue prevented him from applying serve-and-volley in singles, but there was no problem to continue that style in doubles covering just half of the court - admittedly he didn't win any doubles title in his last full season (1996), however, I assume it was one of the most satisfying doubles seasons because with his old partner - also in the twilight of his career - Jakob Hlasek, Forget reached at least a quarterfinal in all majors; in his last match of the season (along with **Guillaume Raoux**, b. 1970) he got an extremely important point which considerably helped France to win the Davis Cup trophy (against Sweden) for the second time. As a player he was fulfilled at the age of 31, in 1997 he played just five tournaments, in the moment of retirement he had lost 11 out of his last 12 main-level matches in singles.

Career record: 378–290 [291 events]
Career titles: 11
Highest ranking: No. 4 (March 1991)
Best GS results: Australian Open (quarterfinal 1991, 93); Wimbledon (quarterfinal 91-92, 94)

Peter Lundgren (Sweden)

Born: January 29, 1965 in Gudmundra
Height: 1.85 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

Lundgren is mainly known as an overweight coach of Marcelo Rios, Roger Federer, Marat Safin and Stan Wawrinka, but many years earlier he was in much better physical shape and had his "15 minutes of fame" in 1987. There were plenty of good Swedes in the mid 80s and the only distinctive feature of Lundgren was his long hair, reminiscence of the great Bjorn Borg. He was ranked outside Top 100 when within three months jumped to Top 30, defeating i.a. Pat Cash twice (the then Wimbledon champion), and each of the two best players once - Ivan Lendl & Mats Wilander. The victory over Lendl was sensational. In the semifinal of San Francisco, Lundgren withstood two match points to beat the Czechoslovak 6-3, 4-6, 7-6 after 3 hours 12 minutes snapping his 25-match winning streak! *"I felt a little stiff this morning after the Lendl match, so I went sight-seeing and had only 20 minutes of practice before playing* ***Jim Pugh*** *(b. 1964),"* Lundgren said after claiming the title the following day. *"I played so much yesterday I didn't think I needed any more."*

Career record: 119–136 [139 events] **Career titles:** 3
Highest ranking: No. 25 (December 1987)
Best GS result: Wimbledon (fourth round 1989)

Marián Vajda (Slovakia)

Born: March 24, 1965 in Považská Bystrica (Czechoslovakia)
Height: 1.72 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

I have seen him so many times... many years after he finished his moderately successful career, as a coach of Novak Djokovic, sitting calmly in the box wearing a baseball cap (he was more emotional as a coach of his fellow Slovak - Dominik Hrbaty, helping him to achieve one of his best results - the Monte Carlo '00 final). Nevertheless he'd been one of the first players I watched on TV, it was a Challenger in Hague; I witnessed his last two wins, at the time I didn't even know that it's one level below the main one, and also quite interesting that a Challenger event was covered by Europosport - never seen it later. I'm sentimental about Vajda, a few months later I saw him playing against **Joao Cunha-Silva** (b. 1967 - the best Portuguese player for at the turn of 80s and 90s, who didn't enter the Top 100), my first match on clay which I watched on TV. It was an exciting time for me because I had just begun training in a tennis club being very hungry of any kind of tennis inspiration. Curiosity: Vajda's second title comes from Geneva '88 where he defeated in the final Kent Carlsson, arguably the third best clay-courter at the time (behind Mats Wilander and Ivan Lendl) snapping his 20-match winning streak on that surface.

Career record: 119–152 [152 events]
Career titles: 2
Highest ranking: No. 34 (September 1987)
Best GS result: Roland Garros (third round 1991)

Karel Nováček (Czechia)

Born: March 30, 1965 in Prostějov (Czechoslovakia)
Height: 1.90 m
Plays: Right-handed

Career record: 300–246 [242 events]
Career titles: 13
Highest ranking: No. 8 (November 1991)
Best GS results: Roland Garros (quarterfinal 1987, 1993)
US Open (semifinal 1994)

One of the biggest malcontents on the tour. Discontent with everything surrounding him from the first points of a match. Grimaces, throwing rackets (once even towards the umpire!), jeering towards the linespersons. I'm not sure he was like that already as a young player, the bad things I write about him is what I remember watching his matches in the 90s, what I wrote about him in my notes at the time he was active. Dangerous - tennis wise - mainly on clay-courts. He showed his potential for the first time in 1986 triumphing in Washington (clay at the time!) as a player ranked no. 110. En route to the title he defeated six players, four of them were clay-court specialists. He had to wait until 1991 for his best season - that year he won four titles (three of those finals against Magnus Gustafsson). That year he shared the court five times with Gustafsson, losing to him in the French Open first round. They were both Top 20 players then, so a very brutal first round match-up, impossible after the change of rules for seeded guys (2001). Novacek had a status of one of the best players who had never reached a major semi-final. His third quarterfinal opportunity came not in Paris, but in New York. I had never seen Novacek before being so calm, as he convinced himself that only ultimate focus would guarantee him a win over Jaime Yzaga. The Czech player kept his composure after squandering chances to win that match much more quicker: he wasted six set points from leading 5:2* in the 2nd set, and a 5:4* (30/0) lead in the 4th set. Novacek fired 28 aces and left the court as a winner 6-2, 6-7, 6-1, 5-7, 6-3. *"It was the dream destination to break the quarterfinals of the Grand Slams, and I am endlessly happy that I did it today,"* Novacek said. *"I won 13 tournaments. I have been playing Davis Cup. I have been playing Masters. I have been playing everything that basically exists in tennis, but I never went to play in the semifinals of Grand Slams."* In the semifinal he lost in straights to Michael Stich, a player whom Novacek beat in straights a few months later in Melbourne, so in retrospect he can think that a major final was really within his grasp. Following Australian Open '95 he was losing almost everything and decided to retire at the age of 31. Similarly to his Davis Cup collegue Petr Korda, Novacek had all strokes very classical, but he lacked Korda's finesse. At the time they were both at their peaks (early 90s) their older compatriot Ivan Lendl wasn't interested in representing Czechoslovakia anymore, he was applying for the USA citizenship. It's a pity for the Czechoslovak tennis because in the years 1991-93 with Lendl on the board, Korda & Novacek could have had a big chance to triumph in the Davis Cup (they lost those years in the quarterfinals, to Yugoslavia, USA & Germany respectively) as well as in the World Team Cup (played the '92 final). Curiosity: Novacek [48] was in sensational form at Roland Garros '87 dropping just four games in his first eight sets of the tournament (!): Tom Nijssen 6-2, 6-1, 6-0; Eduardo Bengoechea 6-0, 6-0, 6-0; Eric Winogradsky 6-1, 6-0, 2-6, 6-4.

Paolo Canè (Italy)

Born: April 9, 1965 in Bologna
Height: 1.80 m
Plays: Right-handed

After the successful 70s for the Italian tennis, another decade brought a drought. Cane was actually the only player from Italy among those appearing in the 80s, who notched some interesting results. He drew attention for the first time during the Olympic games in Los Angeles 1984 when the event had an etiquette of an exhibition and only under-21 players were allowed to participate. Cane, ranked just 390, stunned the no. 2 seed Pat Cash in the first round and advanced to the semifinal... *Cane* ("dog" in Italian) participated in two matches at the highest level, one lost, one won: in the second round of Wimbledon '87 he was defeated by Ivan Lendl [1], 6-3, 6-7, 7-6, 5-7, 1-6, which was a shocker because until that match Cane had been associated with clay-courts; three years later he won a two-day marathon in Cagliari against Mats Wilander 6-4, 3-6, 4-6, 7-5, 7-5. The 4-hour, 37-minute encounter had been suspended because of darkness Sunday with the players tied at two sets each and the teams tied 2-2. The loss marked the first time since 1983 that Sweden failed to reach the Davis Cup finals. *"It was a lot of suffering,"* Cane said about the big surprise, *"I also had some luck, but I played with great determination. I always trusted in a victory."* Undoubtedly the match of his life even though Wilander was already behind his prime-time... At the turn of 80s and 90s when Cane and Omar Camporese made a pillar of the Italian Davis Cup team, appeared their younger left-handed compatriot **Diego Nargiso** (b. 1970), one of the best juniors of 1987 (Wimbledon title), who played the first official Olympic tennis event, defeating **Francisco Maciel** of Mexico, after an amazing first round match (4-6, 2-6, 7-6, 7-6, 8-6), but similarly to other great junior of those times (**Nicolas Pereira**), was unable to transfer his initial successes to the professional tour and finished career modestly with two lost ATP finals (Pereira also played two, but won them both)... Maciel (b. 1964) had eliminated Cane at the unofficial Olympic event four years before, and got the Silver medal after a final loss to Stefan Edberg.

Career record: 136-131 [126 events]
Career titles: 3
Highest ranking: No. 26 (August 1989)
Best GS result: second round a few times

Olympic bronze medal at unofficial Olympic event (Los Angeles '84)

Emilio & Javier Sanchez (Spain)

Born: May 29, 1965 (Madrid) and February 1, 1968 (Pamplona)
Height: 1.80 m and 1.77 m
Plays: Right-handed, both

Full family name: Sánchez Vicario. It's difficult to explain why the older brother achieved much more. As opposed to the McEnroe brothers who had completely different personalities & game-styles, and a bigger age-difference (John 7 years older than Patrick) put them to different tennis eras (John was a transitional player between wooden & steel/aluminium rackets), the Sanchez brothers were actually playing at the same time facing the same opponents. Their game-style were almost identical, and suited to something that could be called in the 80s "Spanish school" - one-handed backhands, plenty of slices, clay as the most natural environment, good technique overall, allowing to apply serve-and-volley tactics when required. Emilio had something indefinable, something that helps to beat players theoretically better - he had defeated Ivan Lendl, Boris Becker & Stefan Edberg, so the best players when he was in his prime while Javier lost to them all his matches. Javier's curiosity: he lost to Edberg twice after the same scoreline (6-2, 6-7, 2-6); first in Stuttgart '92 blowing two match points, one year later in Monte Carlo being two points away from victory. Javier could be envy of his older brother, he copied him with everything, yet it wasn't enough to get either his ranking or his biggest title (Rome '91). At least at Slams they were at the same level - two quarterfinals for each of them. In Javier's case, quite surprisingly both quarterfinals occurred in New York, not in Paris which seemed more probable. Emilio's trivia: in both his major quarterfinals (1988) he was stopped by Mats Wilander (the best in the world then) after almost identical matches... 7-6, 6-7, 3-6, 4-6 in Paris & 6-3, 6-7, 0-6, 4-6 in New York blowing set points in both cases to lead 2-0 in sets. It's funny that those two matches repeated the pattern they had established one year earlier at Wimbledon - then Wilander prevailed 2-6, 7-6, 6-3, 7-5.

	Emilio	**Javier**
Career record:	431–291 [287 events]	327–335 [333 events]
Career titles:	15	4
Highest ranking:	No. 7 (April 1990)	No. 23 (June 1994)
Best GS results:	Roland Garros (quarterfinalist 1988) US Open (quarterfinalist 1988	US Open (quarterfinalist 1991, 96)

Pat Cash (Australia)

Born: May 27, 1965 in Melbourne
Height: 1.83 m
Plays: Right-handed

A player with the best resume among those who haven't won 300 matches at the main-level. Tennis potentially lost many excellent matches in the 90s due to Cash's sudden downfall. He's a player of the Stefan Edberg/Boris Becker generation, similarly to the Nordic blondes, he established himself as an elite player in the mid 80s before he turned 20. Just like Edberg & Becker, Cash's attitude was very offensive, he had neither Becker's forehand, nor Edberg's backhand, but he was a warrior, he felt the game very well and in the initial phase of his career he was comparably successful to the multiple Grand Slam champions. He was just 23 in 1988 when he had played three major finals (Edberg and two years younger Becker had played three as well) and led Australia to two Davis Cup triumphs (1983 & 1986) in both editions gathering the most "points" for his team and winning the clinchers. Taking into account Cash's respectable H2Hs against Ivan Lendl & Mats Wilander, I suppose he'd play competitive Grand Slam matches against not only Pete Samrpas, but against Michael Chang, Andre Agassi & Jim Courier too, being a real value of the early 90s everywhere except clay-courts. His relatively poor ground-strokes made him no threat on clay. I'd say that from technical point of view the only aspect of his game in which he exceeded Edberg/Becker was the lob, very helpful stroke on faster surfaces, but actually meaningless on clay. Wimbledon '88, and surprised (in terms of the scoreline above all) loss to Becker, ended Cash's great times on the circuit. For another nine years he was mainly associated with injuries (knee, achilles, tendon) and better or worse attempts to recreate his career. In 1993 he didn't play at all, in each of these seasons in parentheses (1989, 1994, 1995-97) he played just a few tournaments. In his disastrous 90s, he notched just one impressive win, it occured in Dubai '95 when he stunned in the first round (2-6, 6-4, 6-4) Thomas Muster, in the best season of the Austrian. After retirement he coached top players (Mark Philippoussis & Greg Rusedski) and was regularly playing in the Champions Tour not being able to win any of them.

Career record: 243–148 [139 events]
Career titles: 6
Highest ranking: No. 4 (May 1988)
Best GS results: Australian Open (runner-up 1987-88; quarterfinalist 1982 & 84)
Wimbledon (champion 1987; semifinalist 1984; quarterfinalist 1986 & 88)
US Open (semifinalist 1984)

Davis Cup champion 1983 & 86

Mark Woodforde (Australia)

Born: September 23, 1965 in Adelaide
Height: 1.87 m
Plays: Left-handed (two-handed backhand)

One of the most experienced Open Era players counting singles & doubles combined. In singles he was participating in the biggest events in the years 1985-200 while in doubles one season longer. In doubles he won everything the most important what could have been won (all majors - 12 titles in total, twice Masters, Olympic gold medal in Atlanta '96, and contributed to the Davis Cup triumph '99 winning in the final a rubber along with his long-time partner Todd Woodbridge). The Woodies - how commonly they were called - won 59 titles together, among other Woodforde's 10 doubles titles, there's only one major - the US Open '89, partnering John McEnroe. When the Woodies won Wimbledon for the sixth time, they overcame two great pairs (John McEnroe/Peter Fleming & Bob Hewitt/Fre McMillan) who had won 57 titles together. *"We are Ausatralians"* said Woodforde, *"We grew up in a traditional way that singles is more important than doubles. The fact we have won much much more in doubles, it's like fluke."* But in singles Woodforde was a respectable player, just like his partner Woodbridge, he reached a major semifinal once (ironically he lost in the first round doubles then), and finished his career with a positive record despite more than 3000 defeats, having overcome a few best players in the world - Pete Sampras, Andre Agassi and Jim Courier - against Courier he played 10 times and left the court as many as five times as winner, also when Courier was the best in the world (6-3, 2-6, 6-2 at Key Biscayne '93)!

Career record: 319–312 [298 events] Davis Cup champion 1999
Career titles: 4
Highest ranking: No. 19 (April 1996)
Best GS result: Australian Open (semifinalist 1996)

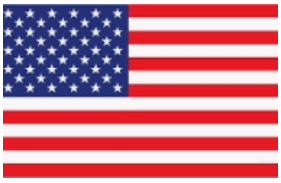
Darren Cahill (Australia)

Born: October 2, 1965 in Adelaide
Height: 1.88 m
Plays: Right-handed

Cahill is mainly known as an excellent coach (Lleyton Hewitt, Andre Agassi, Simona Halep), but in the late 80s he was a dangerous player on different surfaces. Like all Australians he was associated with grass-courts, but in 1988 he surprised the tenis world capturing a title in Gstaad on clay. His quarterfinal victory over Emilio Sanchez (4-6, 7-6, 7-6) was impressive. The following month he reached his best result at Slams - semifinal in New York after a 5-set win over a 5-set specialist Aaron Krickstein (in the second round Cahill had easily defeated Boris Becker). In the semifinal Cahill had no chance against Mats Wilander, who he would easily beat two years later on the same surface (Cincinnati). In doubles he co-created one of the best pairs with Mark Kratzmann. Shortly after claiming his third and last title (San Francisco '91 - one of the first finalas I had watched) he was sidelined due to chronic problems with knees. He required seven operations within three years. His comeback & farewell year (1994) was quite intriguing - he won just five matches, but three of them against the players considered as the fastest servers at the time (Goran Ivanisevic, Marc Rosset & Richard Krajicek). That match against Krajicek (Cahill's last win) is mind-blowing - the Dutchman was among favorites to the title, yet he Cahill had no problems to break him several times in the first two sets, leaving the court as a 4-set winner. Nickname: Killer... why? A subversive way - as a mild mannered nice guy, he was given that nickname. *"I think it's nearly impossible to play that type of tennis in today's game and be consistently successful. The equipment has made it that much more difficult, as the spin a player can impart on the ball now is enormous. That means more returns coming back into play, more shoestring volleys, more passing shots made, more successful topspin lobs—all equating to making it incredibly demanding to play a net-rushing style."* Cahill's considerations about the chances of net-rushers in the late 10s. Trivia: he has lost the longest deciding 5th set tie-break, to **Ken Flach** 6-1, 4-6, 6-3, 1-6, 6-7(15) at US Open '87 blowing five match points. Flach lived 1963-2018, died of sepsis.

Career record: 133–122 [118 events]
Career titles: 3
Highest ranking: No. 22 (April 1989)
Best GS result: US Open (semifinal 1988)

Richey Reneberg (USA)



Born: October 5, 1965 in Phoenix, Arizona
Height: 1.79 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

Very unapproachable and self-controlled player on the court, yet very relaxed and prone to joke off the court. The two-faced Reneberg was one of the longest competing guys born in the 60s. He began his professional career relatively late because he attended Southern Methodist University, where he was a three-time champion and reached the 1986 National Collegiate Athletics Association finals. That year he made his debut, and the following year displayed himself to the wide public when he [241] advanced to the third round at Wimbledon (as a qualifier) and pushed the best player in the world, Ivan Lendl, to a four-setter in which the decider hung in the air. At the US Open '87, Reneberg played a competitive four-setter against the other best player of the 80s - John McEnroe, so it was clear that he'd be a dangerous floater in the years to follow despite the lack of serious weapons. Reneberg improved his volley game over the years playing a lot in doubles (along with **Jim Grabb**, b. 1964 and **Jared Palmer**, b. 1971). He represented the United States in Davis Cup & World Team Cup. Many top players (including a young Pete Sampras) left the court as losers facing the man from Arizona. The great Sampras needed to save a match point in Philadelphia '93 to avoid a 0-3 in H2H vs Reneberg. However, in the biggest events, Reneberg collected just one huge win - at the US Open '94 when he ousted Boris Becker after a dramatic five-setter saving a mini-match point at 5-all in the decider. Reneberg's best results (semifinals) in the biggest events come from hardcourts: Key Biscayne '91 and Montreal '93; in both cases he defeated good players but didn't face anyone from the very top. Infamously, Reneberg lost all epic deciders he was involved in doubles: 17-19 and 20-22 in the 5th sets (p. Grabb) as well as 13-15 (p. Patrick McEnroe) and 15-17 (p. Palmer) in the 3rd sets. Reneberg was a member of the American team triumphing in Davis Cup 1995, he was supposed to play along Todd Martin in doubles, but Samrpas replaced him. Anyway he can be proud because partnering Palmer, he won two doubles rubbers that year (vs France & Italy).

Career record: 307–263 [265 events]
Career titles: 3
Highest ranking: No. 20 (May 1991)
Best GS results: Wimbledon (fourth round 1997)
US Open (fourth round 1994)

Davis Cup 1995 champion(didn't play final)

Amos Mansdorf (Israel)

Born: October 20, 1965 in Ramat HaSharon
Height: 1.73 m
Plays: Right-handed

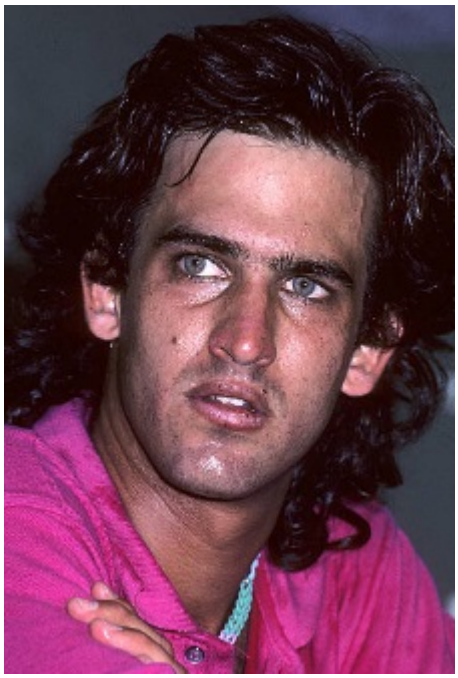
Stocky & sluggish **פרודסנמ סומע**, a descendant of Jewish-Polish grandparents, couldn't achieve good results on clay (all his 16 finals outside of that surface), but during his best years on the tour (late 80s/early 90s), there were still plenty of fast courts all over the world, and his brilliant technique, helped him to make successful career and a status of the best Israeli in history. He enjoyed the best two weeks of his tennis life in Europe between October 24 and November 6, 1988. He came to Paris as player ranked No. 33, and had plenty of luck at the beginning, because the best player in the world at the time - Mats Wilander - withdrew from their match in the last moment due to flu, the potential substitutes already left France, so Mansdorf didn't face a 'lucky loser'. He began his campaign defeating Derrick Rostagno [38] and it initiated a 15-set winning streak – the Israeli captured the title – the biggest in his career, and it was such a confidence booster that in the following week, he reached the semifinals in Antwerp (the most prestigious exhibition event then), stunning No. 2 Ivan Lendl 6-2, 6-2 in the second round! A few months before he'd lost to Lendl in five-sets at the US Open. At Wimbledon '90 he was involved in another five-setter against a top class player, being three points away from victory, he lost to Stefan Edberg - the eventual champion. The calm Mansdorf, surprisingly was also involved in a five-set loss in which he was zealously arguing with his opponent - Yannick Noah, known for very relaxed behaviour, so a verbal clash between the two guys couldn't be anticipated. They were fined $500 each. The Frenchman was fined by the Men's Tennis Council for an audible obscenity, Mansdorf was fined for unsportsmanlike conduct. The incident occurred when Noah refused to shake hands with Mansdorf after their match. Noah, who accused Mansdorf of cursing at his family, repeated the obscenity in front of television cameras. *"The whole thing is settled,"* Noah said. *"I spoke to Amos and it is over. It is not a big deal."* The Israeli led 6-3, 6-3, 5:3, so when the easy victory slipped away from his hands, he lost his calmness and said something to Noah's sister, then Noah said something unpleasant to him, and Mansdorf was playing his passing-shots trying to hit the body of the Frenchman. *"She was getting to me, and it was my fault that I let her get to me in a 20,000 (capacity) stadium,"* Mansdorf said. *"I lost a big point, and I just said something. That was unprofessional behavior, and I cannot forgive*

myself for that…" Mansdorf decided to finish his career when nothing indicated it. In the second part of the 1994 season, he reached the Cincinnati quarterfinal, then played a final in his favorite event (Tel Aviv); he was a Top 80 player, could go to Australia in 1995 and play there a few tournaments without qualies, but he thought it was a time to quit and begin a new, coaching chapter in his life.

Career record: 304–231 [221 events]
Career titles: 6
Highest ranking: No. 18 (16 November 1987)
Best GS results: Australian Open (quarterfinal 1992)

Derrick Rostagno (USA)

Born: October 25, 1965 in Hollywood, California
Height: 1.85 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)



When I think about Rostagno, my thoughts go to the US Open '89 and his second round match against Boris Becker. It's a good example of how a few centimeters may change the course of tennis history. The American was arguably playing the match of his life, he'd saved six break points at 3:4 in the 4th set and served for a place in the third round at 6:5 (15/0) – lost four straight points though. In the tie-break, he led *6:4 making a FH-volley error on the fifth stroke of the rally. On the second match point he played 'chip & charge', Becker slipped playing cross-court FH, but the ball hit the netcord changing its trajectory – enough to force Rostagno's volley error. Moments later, Becker, on his first set point, played his only successful lob of that encounter, and without troubles established a 5:1* (40/15) lead in the decider when his short lapse of concentration occurred. The German won another five matches and the title. After the loss, Rostagno had a 1-7 record in five-setters, finishing his career with one of the worst records: 4-11 (1-10 in the meantime) which partially explains why this gifted player couldn't achieve more in his career. He failed at the US Open '89, but in another two seasons he notched very valuable Wimbledon wins over the American legends (John McEnroe '90 and Jimmy Connors '91) after very similar matches.

Career record: 191–184 [181 events]
Career titles: 1
Highest ranking: No. 13 (November 1991)
Best GS result: US Open (quarterfinal 1988)

Stefan Edberg (Sweden)

Born: January 19, 1966 in Västervik
Height: 1.88 m
Plays: Right-handed

Among the European countries, Sweden was the strongest for two decades (80s & 90s). The decade of the 80s was incomparably better, but the decade of the 90s was great too, especially comparing to the downhill of the 21s century. In the 80s the strength of tennis in Sweden had faces of Bjorn Borg (played just 1980-81), Mats Wilander, Henrik Sundstrom, Anders Jarryd, Joakim Nystrom, Jonas Svensson & Kent Carlsson; in the 90s of Thomas Enqvist, Magnus Larsson, Magnus Gustafsson, Jonas Bjorman, Magnus Norman & Thomas Johansson. Edberg combined both generations (Davis Cuup triumphs in the span of ten years) as a transitional player who belonged to the elite for the entire second half of the 80s and the first half of the 90s, and he was the only one displaying a serve-and-volley style on a regular basis, on every surface. An excellent junior, he won all four Grand Slam junior titles in 1983 to become the only player to achieve the "Junior Grand Slam" in the Open Era. His professional career could never occur though, because during the US Open '83, Edberg's serve accidentally caused the death of linesman Dick Wertheim. It was a traumatic experience, Edberg was in depression thinking about quitting tennis, but thankfully he understood it was a terrible accident, and he shouldn't have blamed himself. The first big success came already in Edberg's first full year on the tour, in doubles. He helped Sweden to defeat USA in the Davis Cup '84 final, partnering Jarryd. In the mid 80s Edberg established himself as a great singles & doubles player, winning majors in both competitions, taking away from McEnroe not only a status of the best singles & doubles player, but also the best serve-and-volleyer. In singles, Edberg had won two Australian Open titles on grass (the last two editions on that surface), but he realized that he needed to improve his game in order to overcome at the top the best player of the 80s - Ivan Lendl. There was one big problem - Edberg's forehand. He was hitting all strokes with a classical continental grip, playing like that in the 80s (all the more in the 90s) was rather unique; Edberg's backhand was great, but with the continental grip you cannot play fast top-spin balls off the forehand. As a S/V player, Edberg developed (with the help of his British coach, Tony Pickard) a complex game; in the 80s he corrected his service motion a bit and decreased the speed of the first serve in order to keep a very high percentage. Edberg's rush to the

net was very natural, he wanted to be as close to the net as possible and there were troubles with his foot faults; once he finally mastered his feet movement, he was able to play the approaching volley being closer to the net than any other player. As a receiver, Edberg was fully aware of his limitations: he was using his forehand only as a shot allowing to keep the ball in play, but he also mastered his passing-shots off the weaker wing using wisely angles, so to some degree in Edberg's forehand I see a difference between his results juxtaposing the times when more athletic guys, playing with bigger spins appeared on the tennis scene. Edberg was struggling a lot with Jim Courier for instance because the American wasn't eager to attack the net not being well prepared, so passing him wasn't easy, on the other hand Courier was hitting the ball with plenty of top-spin which caused Edberg's troubles to keep the ball in play before approaching shots. Nevertheless when Edberg was in his best physical shape (the years 1989-91) he could deliver amazing tennis not hurting his opponents with the weaker side. His footwork was simply outstanding, and he was taking advantage of it playing cheap-and-charge often. Edberg was close to triumph even at Roland Garros, in 1989 he advanced to the final, and wasted plenty of opportunities to beat Michael Chang in four sets, something he paradoxically did in 1996 on the same court when he reflex wasn't the same while Chang greatly improved as a player, and was in his prime... The end of the 80s marked Edberg's rivalries with Lend, Wilander, but mainly with Boris Becker. Edberg's rivalry with the German is peculiarly interesting because Becker won as many as 25 out of their 35 matches, yet Edberg was better in their most important matches (2-1 in Wimbledon finals, 1-0 in Masters finals & 1-0 at Roland Garros - Becker wasn't as close to reaching the final in Paris as in 1989 when lost a five-setter to the Swede). Edberg's decline happened quite abruptly, in 1994. At the beginning of the year he lost the Grand Slam semifinal in Australia, he still wasn't a veteran (28) by the standards then, and it'd be very difficult not to expect him in a few more semifinals at majors in the future. However, between Roland Garros '94 and US Open '96, Edberg didn't even reach the quarterfinal, usually losing in the second rounds. It was a huge blow for someone who was regularly advancing to the quarterfinals.

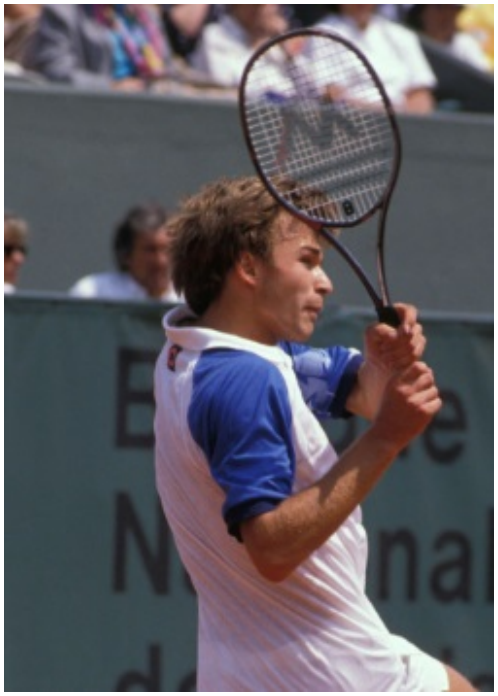
Career record: 801–270 [283 events]
Career titles: 41
Highest ranking: No. 1 (August 1990)
Best GS results:
Australian Open (champion 1985 & 87; runner-up 1990, 92-93; semifinal 1988, 91 & 94)
Roland Garros (runner-up 1989; quarterfinal 1985, 91 & 93)
Wimbledon (champion 1988 & 90; runner-up 1989; semifinal 1987, 91 & 93; quarterfinal 92)
US Open (champion 1991-92; semifinal 1986-87; quarterfinal 1996)

Masters champion 1989
Davis Cup champion 1984 (doubles), 1985 & 1994
Olympic gold medal of unofficial event at Olympics 1984 (Los Angeles)

Andrei Chesnokov (Russia)

Born: February 2, 1966 in Moscow, Soviet Union
Height: 1.87 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

Андрей Чесноков



Some sort of a specialist to play his best tennis on bigger occasions. He played 15 main-level finals (won seven of them) and 5 of his last 7 occurred at Masters Series events ('Mercedes Super 9' at the time). I'm not sure how to explain it, perhaps the financial issue. He was simply more motivated when he'd earn more money which wasn't very easy because he began his career being guided by the communist regime of the Soviet Union. Several statements of Chesnokov from the 80s were quite bizarre. For instance, playing in the Antwerp '88 final (exhibition status) he sprained his ankle against John McEnroe in the 2nd set of the 'best of five' final. Given the surface and the quality of the opponent, Chesnokov had no chance, but he continued, even winning five games limping. *"I said I cannot play anymore,"* but he said, *"You must"*. Chesnokov refused to say who pressured him: *"It is my secret."* The following year he achieved his career-best French Open semifinal after ousting the defending champion Mats Wilander in straight sets. *"I want to keep my secret about prize money,"* Chesnokov said, *"I will take some, maybe not $73,000. Maybe a little less. Maybe $72,000. Maybe I'll buy a ticket to the United States before going back to Moscow."* In 2019 at the courts near Lake Garda in Italy, I had a conversation with a guy who introduced himself as a former Soviet player. He was born in the 60s, and told me that he was playing with Chesnokov in Russia (then the Soviet Union) in the 80s, and they both, Chesnokov & Alexander Volkov, weren't even in the Top 5 in the country. But somehow it was Chesnokov first, who left the huge country participating in tournaments all over the world, before Mikhail Gorbachev's famous "perestroika" and "glasnost". Volkov & Andrei Cherkasov followed suit afterwards. In 1985, being completely unknown, Chesnokov made a trip to Paris, went through the qualifying rounds and stunned the Top 10 player, Eliot Teltscher in the second round before losing to Heintz Gunthardt in the third round after one of the longest matches of the 80s in Paris (lasted 4 hours 40 minutes). *"Before this tournament I thought they (the international touring pros) were so strong,"* Chesnokov said. *"But now I realize they can be beaten."* said Chesnokov, a physical education student at a special Moscow sports institute, ranked 307th in the world on the ATP computer.

Career record: 344–259 [244 events]
Career titles: 7
Highest ranking: No. 9 (April 1991)
Best GS results: Australian Open (quarterfinal 1988)
Roland Garros (semifinal 1989; quarterfinal 1986 & 1988)

Paul Haarhuis (Netherlands)

Born: February 19, 1966 in Eindhoven
Height: 1.87 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

Haarhuis was like wine - the older, the better. As a singles player he won his maiden title at age of 29, one year later he notched his best Mercedes Super 9 result advancing to the Indian Wells final (having defeated Pete Sampras & Goran Ivanisevic in back-to-back matches). Actually until he turned 25, he hadn't had in his resume any interesting results (one big win - defeated John McEnroe at US Open '89 being ranked 115, as a qualifier). In 1991 he reached the US Open quarterfinal and was on his way to go one round further, but didn't handle well the pressure of the huge Centre Court in New York facing the local here - Jimmy Connors. In 1992 he regularly began to play in doubles with his countryman Jacco Eltingh. Soon afterwards the Dutchmen created one of the best teams of the 90s beside the Woodies. Haarhuis/Eltingh triumphed in five Slams, and twice in "Masters". Doubles certainly helped Haarhuis in the singles development. Since the beginning of his career he was a defensive player with great returns, but doubles helped him to improve the net-play, so it turned to be an additional weapon in his arsenal. Trivia: Haarhuis helped the Netherlands to sensationally defeat Spain in the Davis Cup '93. On clay in Barcelona, Haarhuis overcame in five-setters Sergi Bruguera (later that year he'll win his first French Open title) and in the fourth rubber he saved a match point defeating Carlos Costa after a 4-6, 3-6, 6-3, 7-6, 6-3 thriller. The deciding point got **Mark Koevermans** (b. 1968, one title) also erasing a two-sets-to-love deficit in overcoming Bruguera 3-6, 6-7, 6-4, 6-4, 6-4. Fun fact: Koevermans defeated Bruguera four times in a row on clay when the Spaniard was already considered as a specialist of the surface, yet before his French Open titles.

Career record: 267–258 [248 events]
Career titles: 1
Highest ranking: No. 18 (November 1995)
Best GS result: US Open (quarterfinal 1991)

Patrick McEnroe (USA)

Born: July 1, 1966, Manhasset, New York
Height: 1.83 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

Patrick was growing up in the shadow of his older brother John, watching his many battles vs Jimmy Connors, also on the US Open stadium court; so it was a huge, dreamlike opportunity for him to confront himself with the US legend in front of the packed crowd in a night session of the US Open '91 when he faced Connors in the first round. Despite a two-sets-to-love lead and 3:0* (40/0) in the 3rd set, PMac lost in five sets and to some degree that loss is the most memorable moment of his career. He just won one title, but notched two good Grand Slam performances, being stopped by Boris Becker on both occasions. First at the Australian Open '91 as the lowest ranked player to enter the main draw [114], when he took an advantage of very favorable draw and an injury of Jay Berger, the only seeded player who McEnroe had beaten then (Berger played his next to the last match in Melbourne... in the quarterfinal McEnroe defeated in five sets **Cristiano Caratti** (b. 1970) who was also outside the Top 100, and being inspired by the Australian run, he reached his only ATP final in the following event - Milan; second at the US Open '95 when the younger McEnroe co-created one of the longest four-setters in the tournament history. *"Unfortunately, I never had the chance to play against John (McEnroe) here at the Open, but his younger brother gave me more than a handful, and I am just very happy to have come through."* Becker commented after a 6-4, 7-6, 6-7, 7-6 thriller at night session. Patrick was different than John, technically & emotionally. In contrast to the older bro, he was not only operating with a different hand, he was also using the double-handed backhand. Just like the famous brother he knew how to play doubles well (first big success came at French Open '89 - Patrick became a champion along with Jim Grabb), so he felt quite comfortable at the net, yet in singles he prefered to stay back, relying on flat ground-strokes.

Career record: 140–163 [165 events]
Career titles: 1
Highest ranking: No. 28 (September 1995)
Best GS results: Australian Open (semifinal 1991)
US Open (quarterfinal 1995)

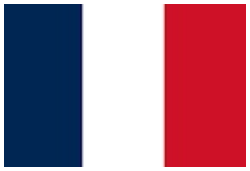
Horacio de la Peña (Argentina)

Born: August 1, 1966 in Buenos Aires
Height: 1.80 m
Plays: Left-handed

Nicknamed "El Pulga" ("the Flea"), the long-haired guy from the 'Jaite-Roldan-Mancini' generation. Not good enough to do what those guys did - to reach a major quarterfinal, advance to the Top 20 or regularly represent Argentina in the Davis Cup, but dangerous floater on clay-courts where he won four titles (one more than Mancini!). Two titles quite impressive:
- Florence '89 as he defeated in his last two matches two major champions (destroyed 6-1, 6-1 Andres Gomez, one year before the Ecuadorian triumphed in Paris and a teenage Goran Ivanisevic in the final);
- Kitzbuhel '90 as he defeated Sergi Bruguera, Emilio Sanchez & Karel Novacek in his last three matches, so three players who belonged to the clay-court elite in the early 90s "*My net game is much better and I am winning a lot of points that my opponents don't expect me to get*", said De La Pena after the semifinal win over Sanchez referring to his training in Switzerland with a legendary Australian - **Roy Emerson** (b. 1939, tweleve Grand Slam titles before the Open Era). After retirement he coached plenty of Argentinian & Chilean players (Fernando Gonzalez enjoyed the best career among them). De La Pena's best win at majors? 4-6, 6-2, 6-4, 6-2 over John McEnroe in the first round of Roland Garros '87. Following that victory he moved from Argentina to the United States: *"I was very famous in Argentina and everything was so easy. I didn't want a new girlfriend. I wanted to improve as a tennis player."*

Career record: 190–180 [177 events]
Career titles: 4
Highest ranking: No. 31 (April 1987)
Best GS result: Roland Garros (fourth round 1986)

Thierry Champion (France)



Born: August 31, 1966 in Bagnols-sur-Ceze
Height: 1.83 m
Plays: Right-handed

I suppose every pro tennis player who begins participating quite regularly in the main-level events, may quite realistically dream about two things: winning a title and reaching a Grand Slam quarterfinal. Generally speaking it's easier to win a title because - you have to win five (four) matches, but there are so many tournaments that you can count that in some of them you will not meet anyone who seems to be out of your reach; in theory at majors you have to win one match fewer, but all the best players always are there, so you have to expect defeating someone much better than you and you need to deal with "the best of five" format so it's not only a matter of your technical skills - the tactics and physical preparations are of extreme importance as well. There are two blondes born in the 60s who did something what logically couldn't be expected from them - they are multiple major quarterfinalist despite being titeless; one is Christin Bergstrom who lost his both ATP finals, yet managed to play three major quarterfinals, the other one is Champion - just one main-level final (severely beaten by the surface ruler - Kent Carlsson), but participant of two major quarterfinals. Very patient, conservative in his on-court attitude Champion, shocked the tennis world for the first time in Paris - as a qualifier he ousted Juan Aguilera, Guy Forget and Karel Novacek 6-3, 4-6, 3-6, 7-6, 6-3 in the fourth round after saving two match points; one year later in the Wimbledon second round he overcame the former champion Pat Cash 7-5, 6-7, 4-6, 6-1, 12-10 on Court 2, the graveyard of champions. "The best of five" certainly worked his way, he finished the career with an excellent 11-4 record (.733). As a coach, he helped Gael Monfils reaching the French Open '08 semifinal.

Career record:	102–164 [162 events]
Career titles:	-
Highest ranking:	No. 44 (August 1991)
Best GS results:	Roland Garros (quarterfinal 1990) Wimbledon (quarterfinal 1991)

Jonas Svensson (Sweden)

Born: October 21, 1966 in Goteburg
Height: 1.89 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

Svensson, my first favorite player. He was quite unique in the amazing generation of Swedish players born in the 60s. Generally they were counter-punchers with two-handed backhands while Stefan Edberg was a one-handed serve-volleyer; Svensson didn't fit to the basic category, but he wasn't a serve-and-volleyer either. His tennis was rather fancy, based on improvisation. Perhaps he was the best lobber among all players born in the 60s & 70s, he also used to play a lot of drop-balls, after the bounce or hitting volleys. He was playing his best tennis on clay (he didn't win a title on that surface though) or indoors, especially in Paris. Both his French Open semifinals are impressive, especially the first one from 1988. In the quarterfinal he stunned in straight sets Ivan Lendl who was a double-defending champion (he beat Lendl thrice in their five meetings). In turn two years later he eliminated the future double champion, Sergi Bruguera - only 19-year-old at the time, but had defeated Edberg in the first round. Edberg was Svensson's toughest opponent. They played ten times and only once Svensson managed to play a deciding set which he lost quickly anyway. Svensson's second major upset comes from the fourth round of the Australian Open '89 when he ousted in straight sets Boris Becker. *"He played superb tennis over three sets. He didn't let anything distract him, and he never let me into the match."* the German stated. In the years 1990-91 Svensson played back-to-back semifinals in Paris-Bercy. At the age of 25 he reached the peak of his career and finished it three years later steadily losing his ranking. Trivia: Pete Sampras suffered his worst main-level defeat to Svensson (0-6, 1-6 in Munich '90).

Career record: 258-204 [205 events]
Career titles: 5
Highest ranking: No. 10 (March 1991)
Best GS results: Australian Open (quarterfinal 1989)
Roland Garros (semifinalist 1988 & 1990)

Jay Berger (USA)

Born: November 26, 1966 in Fort Dix, New Jersey
Height: 1.80 m
Plays: Right-handed (two handed backhand)

The American player of a Jewish origin will be remembered as an owner of one of the most bizarre service motions - he was waiting with his serving hand behind the back a few seconds before tossing the ball with his left hand. He drew some attention already in his second main-level event. As a USTA Boys' 18s National Champion and excellent college player (Clemson University) he received 'wild card' at the US Open '85 - he reached the fourth round in which he even won the first set against Yannick Noah, a top 10 player at the time. The following year he turned professional and soon afterwards he won his maiden title in Buenos Aires (en route to the title he defeated three players of Top 200, but in the last two matches local favorites Guillermo Perez-Roldan & Franco Davin, who soon would advance to the Top 100 too). 1989 was his best year, he reached two major quarterfinals (in Paris after the longest 4-setter at the time - 4 hours 38 minutes over Jimmy Connors 4-6, 6-3, 7-5, 7-5). *"I respect him more than any other player,"* Berger said. *"This is such a great win for me. I'm so drained I can hardly talk." "I played a perfect match, I just lost it,"* Connors said. *"All I can do is go out and fight until death. I enjoy matches like these. To play a kid like that 14 years younger than me and to stay out there and be in the match like that, it's fun."* Chronic knee injuries forced his retirement when he was 25. Curiosity: Berger faced Mats Wilander twice in a non-calendar year, defeating him on both occasions (Orlando '88 & Rome '89) not dropping a set when the Swede was No. 2 & 3 respectively.

Career record: 141–80 [83 events]
Career titles: 3
Highest ranking: No. 7 (April 1990)
Best GS results: Roland Garros (quarterfinal 1989)
US Open (quarterfinal 1989)

Magnus Gustafsson (Sweden)

Born: January 3, 1967 in Lund
Height: 1.86 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

He was born in a small town in the Baltic Sea and began playing at age of six. For a long time he was training along with Jonas Svesson & Christian Bergstrom, other successful Swedish players; the main rule said *"who earns the most, pays for the travel of the colleagues*". A serious injury caused him to be sidelined between May '94 and May '95 (two successive editions of Roland Garros meant his back-to-back main-level events). In the meantime he underwent arthroscopic right shoulder surgery and dropped from no. 13 to 611, but with the help of Challengers he rapidly returned to the Top 100 and at the beginning of 1997 he almost came back to the place preceding the injury... In the first years of his career he was labelled as a clay-courter, yet with time he improved his volley game which helped him to be a dangerous player also indoors, even on grass at Wimbledon he equalled his career-best result from Roland Garros. It's quite strange that he never played a quarterfinal in Paris, but he hadn't luck with draws, for instance in the years 1995-97 he faced Top 10 players in the first rounds of three consecutive editions; third time lucky, in 1997 he defeated Goran Ivanisevic only to be shocked by **Galo Blanco** (b. 1976) in the following round (the Spaniard sensationally reached the quarterfinal then). An extensive forehand was his trademark shot, I think only Wayne Ferreira could play in the 90s with comparable huge swing. Another thing featuring the Swede was his serve on ad-court; he used to serve from his backhand corner in order to begin construction of the point with his massive forehand. Very good player representing his nation, twice (vs Canada '92 & Slovakia '98) he won decisive fifth rubbers. In the Davis Cup '98 final he easily won his Friday rubber helping Sweden to destroy Italy in Milan. Seven years earlier, he won one singles more than Stefan Edberg when Sweden triumphed at the World Team Cup in Dusseldorf. Taking into account his entire career he is one of the most unfulfilled Open Era players considering majors. The Swede reached the quarterfinal just once (42 appearances).

Career record: 415–260 [268 events]
Career titles: 14
Highest ranking: No. 10 (July 1991)
Best GS result: Australian Open (quarterfinal 1994)

Davis Cup '98 champion

Alexander Volkov *(Russia)*

Born: March 3, 1967 in Kaliningrad (Soviet Union)
Died: October 19, 2019 in Kaliningrad (Russia)
Height: 1.87 m
Plays: Left-handed (two-handed backhand)

Алекса́ндр Во́лков

"He was a tough player to play. He could have played terribly, but if he was on and he was feeling the ball well, he was tough to play on grass because he took the ball very early. He was not a great server and not a great volleyer. He wasn't great at any stroke in particular, but he had a very good all-court game if he was on. He played very unconventionally… if you didn't play your best and he was playing well, it was that little fraction of one ball here, one point there that could have made the difference." Stich lately said about Volkov, a player who had almost won their meeting at Wimbledon '91 in the fourth round. Stich needed a miracle to win it (trailed *1:4, 15/40 in the 5th set), then he triumphed in the entire event becoming an unexpected champion. 'Tricky', this is a key to Volkov's game-style. He was a worse version of Marcelo Rios, similar easiness to play all the basic shots, but in contrast to the Chilean, the Russian didn't like to run. It was quite funny to watch him on grass, majority of players applying serve-and-volley tactics, hit the approaching volley in the service boxes, Volkov hit it quite often beside the boxes because his movement towards the net meant rather a few quick steps than running. So as Stich said, when Volkov had a good day, he was dangerous for all the top players. He defeated Pete Sampras twice, whereas Ivan Lendl, Jim Courier & Andre Agassi once (in the only meeting against AA). The only top player who knew how to intimidate the tricky Russian, it was Boris Becker, who defeated him ten times, never being close to lose; albeit needed five times deciding third sets. Volkov had the best record among the multiple Grand Slam champions, against Stefan Edberg. The Swede was the main favorite to win the US Open '90 title having an impressive Summer on US hardcourts, but the Russian blew him off the court in the first round. *"It's much freer, it's because Mr. Gorbachev came,"* said Volkov after the biggest upset of 1990 commenting on the geopolitical situation at the time. *"I can play anywhere I want to, with someone along or on my own. I can keep all my prize money, I just have to pay taxes. Gorbachev came and everything became more open."* Trivia: as a Top 20 player, Volkov saved match points defeating two tennis legends in their last matches; first in Atlanta '92 Volkov survived against 15 years older [444] Guillermo Vilas 5-7, 7-6(6), 6-3... one year later did the same against 11 years older [1148] Bjorn Borg 4-6, 6-3, 7-6(7). It's funny that Volkov had defeated 15 years older

Jimmy Connors in Wembley '89, also saving a match point... 3-6, 6-4, 7-6(6). The American was ranked higher though, when the only time he met the 'unorthodox' Soviet Union player.

Career record: 304–256 [240 events]
Career titles: 3
Highest ranking: No. 14 (August 1993)
Best GS results: US Open (semifinal 1993; quarterfinal 1992)

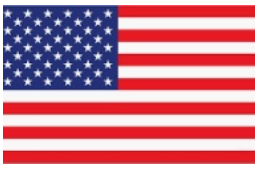
Christian Bergström (Sweden)

Born: July 19, 1967 in Gothenburg
Height: 1.80 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

Actually he won't be remembered by many tennis fans (probably even in Sweden), but many players who never won an ATP title just like Bergstrom, badly wanted to play at least one Grand Slam quarterfinal - the lean Swede played three (once at Australian Open, twice at Wimbledon) which makes his career special, because he didn't win an ATP not only in singles, in doubles either! Advancing unexpectedly to those major quarterfinals, he beat some very good players (Ivan Lendl, Wayne Ferreira, Guy Forget). At the 1992 Australian Open he snapped Lendl's record run of 40 first round victories by consecutive appearances in Grand Slams. *"My game plan was to make him a little bit insecure on the court,"* said Bergstrom after that win, arguably the most valuable in his career. Bergstrom lost his both ATP finals in singles in Adelaide (1992-93), but on both occasions he was within a couple of points to win the title after straight setters. Two out of his three major quarterfinals, Bergstrom lost to his famous compatriot, one year older Stefan Edberg (in straight sets, each time gathering nine games).

Career record: 161–162 [164 events]
Career titles: -
Highest ranking: No. 32 (January 1992)
Best GS results: Australian Open (quarterfinal 1993)
Wimbledon (quarterfinal 1990 & 94)

Aaron Krickstein (USA)



Born: August 2, 1967 in Ann Arbor, Michigan
Height: 1.83 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

The prodigy of the American tennis, the youngest player to win a main-level title (at age 16.2 months in Tel Aviv - quite interesting because he's of the Jewish origin). Krickstein also set a record for being the youngest player to ever break the top 10 (at age 17) - he reached the Rome final where he lost to Andres Gomez in four sets. The Ecuadorian became Krickstein's most frequent opponent after that final. In the years 1984-86 they were regularly facing each other and Gomez won all their eight meetings. Gomez's style definitely didn't suit Krickstein, but the teenage American had also another foe at the time - Jimmy Connors. The American legend bageled his 15 years younger compatriot when they met for the first time in 1984; how important in mutual meetings can be building a mental edge, confirmed their memorable match at the US Open '91 - the 38-year-old "Jimbo" defeated Krickstein in dramatic five sets despite Krickstein's fantastic five-set record. Krickstein was a great counter-puncher, he drove Stefan Edberg crazy a few times, but on the other hand Krickstein couldn't beat for a few years the more powerful serve-and-volleyer, Boris Becker. At the time when Connors & John McEnroe were behind their prime, Krickstein was the biggest US hope. His ability to win five-setters was impressive, but when you're involved in too many long matches, sooner or later your body lets you down. So inability to win matches easily, somewhat contributed to the fact that Krickstein's amazing progress was halted. It's not only that, in the mid-80s he suffered a few injuries (problems with knees and wrists), he was hurt in a car accident in 1987; Krickstein had just finished his first practice in four months with the broken leg and got into a taxicab on Long Island that would take him to where he was staying. Krickstein's driver ran a red light and the taxicab was hit broadside by another car. Two of Krickstein's ribs were broken. *"I had to start all over again psychologically,"* Krickstein said about his attempt to recreate his career at the beginning of 1988. Within two years he came back to Top 10 (he was there first in 1985) to play at Masters for the only time, unsuccessfully. As a "marathon man" he certainly could achieve something bigger at majors as well as win a big event. His biggest title is not included in his official resume. It happened in Antwerp '91 (a year before that event got an ATP status) when the prize money was the biggest in the event history ($1,250,000); Krickstein was generally the most efficient on hardcourts, but in Autumn '91 he had played his best tennis on carpet, first reached the Stockholm semifinal having defeated Michael Stich & Goran Ivanisevic (lost to Edberg) and went to Antwerp where trashed four

opponents. In the final he was supposed to face Becker who had never been defeated before, unfortunately the German withdrew because of the flu. Krickstein got $250,000 his biggest paycheck. A few months later they met in Monte Carlo, and Krickstein defeated Becker (6-1, 6-4) for the only time in their eight meetings; He had a similar story with Ivan Lendl in their meetings, only one win over the Czech.

Career record: 395–256 [260 events]
Career titles: 9
Highest ranking: No. 6 (February 1990)
Best GS results: Australian Open (semifinal 1995)
US Open (semifinal 1989; quarterfinal 1988 & 90)

Marcelo Filippini (Uruguay)

Born: August 4, 1967 in Montevideo
Height: 1.77 m
Plays: Right-handed

The best Uruguayan player in modern history before Pablo Cuevas. Typical clay-courter from South America, oddly three of his five titles he collected defeating Australian players. At the end of his career, he finally reached the French Open quarterfinal, something actually all clay-courters dream about. As a qualifier, ranked 140, the 32-year-old Filippini defeated four Top 100 players not losing a set, including a seeded Greg Rusedski in the fourth round. In the quarterfinal he was trashed by Andre Agassi after one of the shortest major Open Era matches in the final stages (72 minutes!). That result was more surprising if we consider that Filippini lost in Paris his four previous starts in the first round... three of them after five-setters though. Curiosities: vs Alberto Berasategui, Filippini played the longest main-level game, in Casablanca 1996 - it went to deuce 20 times before Berasategui broke on his seventh opportunity to lead 2:1 in the second set (Berasategui won 6-2, 6-3). The game lasted 28 minutes, Filippini squandered 14 game points! A game, more or less, like 24/22 in a tie-break. The match lasted 1 hours 19 minutes, so in effect, apart from that one marathon game, all other games were smooth. On 30.01.1987 he defeated **Alvaro Jordan** of Colombia (lived: 1962-2001, never reached Top 200), in the 5th set 17-15, establishing a record for the most games played in the decider on clay-courts at the time. It will be equalled at Roland Garros many years later (Philipp Kohlschreiber d. **Lukas Dlouhy**, b. 1983).

Career record: 244–250 [235 events] **Career titles:** 5
Highest ranking: No. 30 (August 1990) **Best GS result:** Roland Garros (quarterfinal 1999)

Carl-Uwe Steeb (Germany)

Born: September 1, 1967 in Aalen
Height: 1.80 m
Plays: Left-handed (two-handed backhand)

Steeb is the last man to play, not deciding two-game advantage sets. Ironically he lost them both (8-10 and 6-8) in the best weekend of his tennis life, in December 1988. Steeb was appointed by the coach of West Germany (Nikki Pilic) to play against Sweden in the Davis Cup final, despite his modest experience. Higher ranked **Eric Jelen** (b. 1965) - as a singles & doubles player - helped Germany to go through the quarterfinal & semifinal, he had a positive record over Mats Wilander (2:1), but both matches the attacking Jelen won on fast surfaces, thus Pilic thought that on clay in Gothenburg, Steeb [74] would have a bigger chance - and it was a perfect decision! The first rubber which turned to be crucial, it was against all odds for the 21-year-old Steeb - he faced the best player in the world, lost the opening two sets, yet triumphed after the 5-hour thriller saving a match point (Wilander's first five-set defeat after seven wins in a row, his first MP-up defeat since 1982). *"I'm so happy,"* said Steeb after the finest victory of his career. *"I just went for my strokes all the time. In the last three sets I think I played really well. I played more aggressive in the end and made my own points. Mats looked tired and he missed his passing shots when I came in. Of course, I was nervous in the beginning, but after 4 hours of play you don't think about it."* Steeb also contributed to the title defence the following year (another final vs Sweden!) - that time he lost a revenge to Wilander, but in the semifinal got very important win over Andre Agassi - the American was a teenager, but already established as one of the best players in the world. Among Steeb's three titles, the first one he claimed in Gstaad is the most valuable - in the final he replicated his win over Wilander against a fellow Swede - Magnus Gustafsson. Steeb squandered two set points in the opener, and seemed disheartened in the 2nd set to ultimately prevail 6-7, 3-6, 6-2, 6-4, 6-2. Trivia: the only retired player included in the book who won as many main-level matches as he lost - two-hundred twelve.

Career record: 212–212 [195 events]
Career titles: 3
Highest ranking: No. 14 (January 1990)
Best GS results: fourth round at three different venues

Davis Cup champion 1988-89

Thomas Muster (Austria)

Born: October 2, 1967 in Leibnitz
Height: 1.80 m
Plays: Left-handed

Speaking percentage-wise, Muster's best Slam was Roland Garros (71% of wins), but at Australian & US Opens he played as many quarterfinals as in Paris which is quite surprising. It's less surprising if we look closer at Muster's ten years in Paris beginning in 1989 when he had played Australian Open semifinal and advanced to the Key Biscayne final (Ivan Lendl was an end station twice). That year he simply couldn't play after a car accident (hit by a drunk driver; side ligaments in his left knee). In 1991 he lost the first round to the best player of the decade - Pete Sampras. The years 1992-93? Twice halted by the ruler, at the time in Paris - Jim Courier. 1994 - another tough draw, very demanding second round win over Andre Agassi and a sensational defeat to Patrick Rafter, who later became the best player in the world so that match has a different perspective with time. 1996? Fourth round defeat when Muster was supposed to defend his title, but ousted by an inspired Michael Stich. That year the sunny conditions generally helped big servers and Stich took advantage of the weather. 1997? Again sensational, third round loss to Gustavo Kuerten who... wins the event and two more titles in Paris. Finally 1999, and the first round defeat to finish career, to Nicolas Lapentti, who was playing tennis of his life that year. And we have only three advancement to the quarterfinals; first in 1990 when Muster lost in the semifinal to Andre Gomez having defeated the Ecuadorian a few weeks before in Rome, the title in 1995 when Muster was an absolute favorite, yet almost lost in the last eight (Albert Costa), and the quarterfinal in 1998 (defeated by Felix Mantilla) when was already prone to lose matches on clay, and no-one could have been surprised if he had lost in the first week. *"Muster reminds me a lot of Gillermo Vilas because he hits the ball so hard,"* Gomez said after the upset loss in Rome '90. It was also my impression when I was watching Muster in the 90s, he was playing in a way allowing me to suspect that he based his game-style on the Argenitnian. Great athleticism, a lot of topspin off both wings manufactured with the left-hand, and also good touch at the net - these attributes they shared. Muster was a workaholic, he needed that to come back to his previous shape after the Key Biscayne accident. He was famously pictured hitting tennis balls in a special chair, with his left leg in a cast.

Six months later, he returned and went onto be named the ATP's Comeback Player of the Year. The enormous effort he put into returning to his top form, paid dividends in 1995 - that year Muster was absolutely phenomenal on his beloved clay - he collected twelve titles, eleven of them on the dirt. It's absolutely extraordinary that en route to half of them he was one point away from defeat (won seven match point down matches in total that year). His dedication to win as many titles as possible, created for him a chance to become no. 1 in the world, which ultimately happened the following year when he wasn't playing with the same efficiency on clay, yet improved on faster surfaces, finally even winning some matches on hated grass (his record at Wimbledon? terrible 0-4, in the years 1988-91 he didn't even bother to make a trip to England).*"My No. 1 in 1996 was based on my 12 tournament wins in 1995… I don't know how many people can say that, measurably, they have been No. 1 at something, the best in the world. I loved that moment."* said Muster. He wanted to prove to the two best players of those times (Andre Agassi & Pete Sampras) that he could compete with them everywhere. Muster began to operate closer to the baseline at the end of his career, attacking the net more often (like he'd used to do in the late 80s) and the year 1997 was his best as far as hardcourts are concerned (Australian Open semifinal, Key Biscayne triumph, final in Cincinnati), but he lost his feeling of clay, and that year he won just 9 matches (lost 9 too) on that surface while in the two previous years enjoyed fantastic 65-2 (1995) and 46-3 (1996) records there. When Alex Corretja stunned him 7-5, 6-1 in the Gstaad '95 first round, it meant Muster's first loss after 35 consecutive wins (40 on clay). Making stats of Muster's matches I've noticed he was prone to play lobs despite not doing it very well, his return was so-so, on the backhand side usually just blocking. It may explain his modest H2H records against serve-and-volleyers, he had weak reflex and often instead of trying to pass his opponents he was playing defensive lobs. A 0-10 Head-to-Head vs Stefan Edberg is brutal, but there are also poor records against other similar players: 0-3 vs Rafter, 2-3 vs Stich. Moreover tied records against serve-and-volley big servers like Goran Ivanisevic & Richard Krajicek, they all were able to beat Muster even on clay.

Career record:	625–273 [308 events]
Career titles:	44
Highest ranking:	No. 1 (February 1996)
Best GS results:	Australian Open (semifinal 1989 & 97; quarterfinal 1994) Roland Garros (champion 1995; semifinal 1990; quarterfinal 1998) US Open (quarterfinal 1993-94 & 96)

Jaime Yzaga (Peru)

Born: October 23, 1967 in Lima
Height: 1.70 m
Plays: Right-handed

The best Peruvian player of the Open Era? No doubt about it. Before Yzaga, there was Alex Olmedo (b. 1936 in Peru), Australian Open and Wimbledon champion in 1959, so a decade before the end of amateurish tennis. Olmedo became an American citizen before his greatest successes, he represented the United States in Davis Cup, so I can risk a thesis that Yzaga has been the best Peruvian player of all times. In the 90s he was a counterpart of today's Diego Schwartzman - short player with balanced power from both wings and a big heart, allowing him to win dramatic matches more often than losing them. As opposed to Schwartzman, Yzaga had a successful junior career becoming a French Open '85 champion after defeating the real champion ten years later - Thomas Muster (2-6, 6-3, 6-0). The best examples of Yzaga's prowess come from 1994. In the third round of the French Open, Yzaga ousted Michael Chang [8] after 4 hours 35 minutes, later on at the US Open, in back-to-back matches he eliminated after 3.5 hour five-setters players who'd co-created the final a year before - Cedric Pioline & Pete Sampras - in all those three matches Yzaga was within 1 or 2 games from defeat. He was fighting like crazy in his another match (quarterfinal vs Karel Novacek), but fifteen sets within a few days against more powerful players it was too much for his sturdy legs. The same year Yzaga survived also dramatic five-setters at Wimbledon (Nick Gould - unknown British player, 7-5 in 5th already leading 5:1) and Davis Cup vs Denmark (vs **Frederik Fetterlein**, 11-9 in 5th). In 1994 he won the longest tie-break of the season as he eliminated Andrei Cherkasov 7-6(14), 6-0 in the first round of Indian Wells. Yzaga claimed his biggest title in 1993, and it happened in surprising circumstances. For many years Yzaga was known as a player dangerous on clay or hard courts outdoors, and all of a sudden in Sydney (hard indoors) en route to the title the Peruvian defeated five higher ranked opponents, including two Top 10ers. Especially his win over Jim Courier was stunning, the American occupied No. 1 in the world not long before and an aura of a double Australian/French Open champion. *"It's the best win of my career,"* said the 54th-ranked Yzaga, who did not win a set in three previous meetings against Courier. In the final Yzaga won his tightest four-setter defeating Petr Korda, to whom had lost all four previous professional meetings (Yzaga defeated Korda at

Wimbledon '85 in junior competition). He holds the record for the most participations in the Peruvian Davis Cup Team, with a total of 68 rubbers counting singles and doubles (26 ties; **Ivan Miranda** played more - 31). Despite being a regular ATP player for many years, Yzaga didn't help his country in advancing to the World Group; simply he was too weak in doubles to tip the balance. With Yzaga as a leading player, Peru lost play-off ties twice (Australia in 1989 and Denmark in 1994). He was a captain of the Peruvian team in the 2007 Davis Cup, when the victory against Belarus, finally moved Peru to the World Group. Trivia: Yzaga is one of two players who defeated Sampras in five-setters twice, the other one is Korda. The 17-year-old Sampras played his first US Open match against Yzaga, and lost it 7-6, 7-6, 4-6, 5-7, 2-6. Unfortunately I couldn't find any info about Sampras' debut at majors.

Career record:	265–223 [214 events]
Career titles:	8
Highest ranking:	No. 18 (October 1989)
Best GS results:	Australian Open (quarterfinal 1991) US Open (quarterfinal 1994)

Shuzo Matsuoka (Japan)

Born: November 6, 1967 in Tokyo
Height: 1.88 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

□□ □□ ...people in Japan waited a long time for a representative they would be proud of. In the interbellum there were good players like **Ichiya Kumagae**, **Zenzo Shimizu** and **Jiro Sato**, after them no-one distinctive until the late 80s. A decade before Kei Nishikori appeared on the big scene, Shuzo Matsuoka had been considered as the unquestionably best player from the country of a blooming cherry. Nowhere near to Nishikori's achievements, but I have to say about him 'a solid player' in terms of the results, also adding 'entertaining to watch'. I see resemblance between him and Sergio Casal: both guys born in the 60s, who won one ATP tournament each, having saved their names in collective consciousness of more advanced tennis fans, by reaching finals in bigger events than the ones they triumphed in - Casal in Paris '86 and Matsuoka at Queens Club '92 lost the finals in the best weeks of their tennis lives. It seems that Matsuoka belonged to a group of players who were able to deliver their best performances against the best players in the world. Before he stunned Goran Ivanisevic & Stefan Edberg (saving six match points!) en route to the final in London, he had almost defeated Pete Sampras (two points away; btw - Matsuoka defeated Sampras withstanding match points in 1991) and Michael Stich (blew a match point) earlier in 1992. *"He's got a great first serve,"* Edberg said of Matsuoka, after defeating him two years earlier in L.A. *"He's athletic. He's not a bad player when he gets his serve going."* Matsuoka's injury that he suffered in a match, made an impact on the change of rules. At the US Open '95, the Japanese was close to playing a fourth consecutive set in a tie-break against Petr Korda, struck a forehand winner down the line (after 3 hours 25 minutes), and fell down in severe pain like being hit by a thunderbolt. The trainer couldn't intervene, ultimately the agonizing Matsuoka was defaulted by Steve Ullrich because of delaying the continuation of that first round encounter. The whole strange situation lasted two minutes, when the match was over Korda and the officials ran to the lying sufferer trying to help him. The incident led to a change in the rules allowing players to receive medical treatment for cramps during matches.

Career record: 145–163 [156 events]
Career titles: 1
Highest ranking: No. 46 (July 1992)
Best GS ranking: Wimbledon (quarterfinal 1995)

Boris Becker (Germany)

Born: November 22, 1967 in Leimen (West Germany)
Height: 1.90 m
Plays: Right-handed

As a young child, he played football and tennis with equal passion. Becker decided to devote to the racquet sport at the age of 12 training in his hometown, a small town near Munich. In the years 1982-84 he won West German titles in the junior category. When he won his first German championships defeating boys three years older, he was only 15, but he didn't look that much. He was generally considered to be an adult! Boris matured at a dizzying pace - both physically and mentally. In 1984, the only 16-year-old Becker was ready to play with professionals. He quickly signed a lucrative contract with "Adidas", it was dealt with by experts - Gunther Bosch and the manager of Ion Tiriac, although it was close that Wojtek Fibak would become Boris' tutor. We didn't have to wait long for the effects. The 16-year-old Boris, on May 14, 1984, won his first "Grand Prix" tournament. Hand in hand with... a 15 years older Fibak, they conquered the doubles event in Munich. A few months later the teenager reached the 1/4 finals of the Australian Open. He trained very intensively (from 4 to 5 hours a day): squats, push-ups, running at various distances and serving. He spent less time on the other shots because he had received them as a gift from 'fate'. In 1985 came the first big victory in singles - Queens Club. This tournament preceded Wimbledon, in which hardly anyone was betting on Becker. However, this young (only 17 years and seven months) boy, playing athletic, uncompromising tennis, diving, winning "unwinnable" points, became the youngest champion in the tournament history. He showed not only great skills, but also great mental resilience - in the third round vs Joakim Nystrom he trailed 4:5* (30-all) in the 5th set to win it 9-7! The teenager impressed with his strong service, an accurate forehand, excellent coverage of the net and winning the so-called "big points". Despite numerous ailments, Becker remained at the forefront for the following ten years. He won the biggest events and was the main author of the German successes in the Davis Cup competitions. He once said about the game of tennis: *"5-10 years ago it was played differently. Vilas, Wilander - it was a different game, from the back of the court. I think that a good tennis player proposing constant volleys will beat an opponent who plays from the baseline"* - indeed, good tactics on the turn of the 80s & 90s, especially against players

born in the 50s, who had begun their careers using wooden racquets, but not always efficient on clay courts. Becker never won a tournament in singles on the dirt, which is the biggest blow in his stellar career. He was thrice a semi-finalist at Roland Garros courts and a six-time finalist of smaller events, but he did not claim a title. Even when he had a match (Monte Carlo '95 and a lost final to Thomas Muster 6-4, 7-5, 1-6, 6-7, 0-6). Clay turned out to be the curse of the German. These failures were largely caused by his weight. Becker seemed to be too heavy to smoothly move on clay courts, his powerful serve wasn't as effective as on other surfaces. He went down in history as one of the greatest tennis champions nonetheless. An extremely spectacular player, admired and well welcomed all over the world. Playing at the highest level, he stayed in touch with the best guys of the world for 12 years (1985-96)! He was the co-author of many great meetings: with Ivan Lendl, Stefan Edberg, Andre Agassi, Pete Sampras and the McEnroe brothers. Especially his duels against Edberg for a long time electrified the audience - they played 35 matches (25-10 for Becker), competing for the status of the world's leader in the yeara 1989-91 when the best one of the 80s (Lendl) was ageing. Boris was a specialist of fast surfaces (especially grass & carpet), where his offensive style based on strong serving, great net coverage and risky flat strokes off both wings, paid dividends. There was one problem in Becker's game - he was a slow starter; quite often he was losing the opening set which made the thing complicated, but his will to win was tremendous, thus his loads of wins in the "best of five" matches from behind. Becker was a very slow-pace server too, which is counter-intuitive given his inclination to get the points quickly. *"Boris had no technique in his youth, but he had an amazing fighting spirit. By all means he tried to get the ball to the other side"* - said Boris Breskwar, his first coach. Becker had many coaches in general. After Breskwar, he was looked after by: Gunther Bosch, Bob Brett, Tomas Smid, Gunther Bresnik, Eric Jelen, Nick Bolletieri and finally Mike DePalmer, Jr. from August 1995 until the end of his career.

Career record: 713–214 [264 events]
Career titles: 49
Highest ranking: No. 1 (January 1991)
Best GS results:
Australian Open (champion 1991 & 96; quarterfinal 1984 & 90)
Roland Garros (semifinals 1987, 89 & 91; quarterfinal 1986)
Wimbledon (champ 1985-86 & 89; runner-up 1988, 90-91 & 95; semifinal 93-94; quarterfinal 92 & 97)
US Open (champion 1989; semifinals 1986, 90 & 95)

Davis Cup champion 1988-89
Masters champion 1988, 92 & 95

Year-end rankings 1983-99: 563-66-6-2-5-4-2-2-3-5-11-3-4-6-62-69-131

Kent Carlsson (Sweden)

Born: January 3, 1968 in Eskilstuna
Height: 1.82 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

Clay-court beast - totally dedicated to that surface (he was beginning his seasons in April and 90% of his pro matches he played on the red dirt!), so much commitment that didn't want to participate in Masters '88! Carlsson was potentially on his way to follow his compatriots - Bjorn Borg (12 years older) and Mats Wilander (4 years older) as a multiple Roland Garros champion. He triumphed in Paris as a junior demolishing six boys one or two years older. He could be certainly perceived as a potential "King of Clay" in the 90s because already at the age of 21 (the year 1989) he had played 17 main-level finals (all on clay), winning 9 of them, having beaten in the finals top clay-courters like Emilio Sanchez (Kitzbuhel '88) and Thomas Muster (Barcelona '88). It's quite strange that he didn't even play one Roland Garros quarterfinal, but in his first three appearances as a teenager, lost thrice to the future champion Andres Gomez (the third time after a tough four-setter). In 1987 another tight 4-setter in his first fourth round, that time against the crowd favorite - Yannick Noah 6-7(4), 3-6, 7-6(5), 5-7. In 1988 lost in five sets to a fellow Swede, Jonas Svensson, who was in great form then (Svensson ousted the double defending champion Ivan Lendl in the quarters). The year 1988 was awesome for him on clay anyway - he claimed five titles and had a 20-match winning streak. It's just a hypothesis, but if Wilander had defeated Carl-Uwe Steeb in the first rubber of the Davis Cup '88 final, Carlsson could have played the fourth rubber (instead of Stefan Edberg) to beat Steeb giving Sweden the crown and at least partially fulfill his career. Certainly he could have been among the top three favorites to win the event in 1989 (with Ivan Lendl & Alberto Mancini), but that year his left-knee problem aggravated and he skipped Paris after several disappointing results. That year he suffered a few surgeries (the first one in 1987) which made an impact on his ranking at the end of the year - No. 309. He decided to retire at the age of 22 (!) as the year 1990 kicked off... He should be remembered as the best player among those who played just a few years and one of the first ones using heavy top-spins off both wings.

Career record: 160–54 [66 events]
Career titles: 9
Highest ranking: No. 6 (19 September 1988)
Best GS result: Roland Garros (fourth round 1987-88)

Petr Korda (Czechia)

Born: January 23, 1968 in Prague
Height: 1.91 m
Plays: Left-handed

"I was waiting for this a long, long time. What we went through was unbelievable. I didn't believe it could happen. It's a dream come true." said Korda after winning the Australian Open at the age of 30, repeating Andres Gomez' story (French Open '90) of claiming a maiden major title after ~ten years of playing at the highest level. The Czech in his 33 previous major appearances had played one final though (it didn't happen in the case of Gomez, who failed to reach even the semifinal before the French Open '90 in his 26 attempts - the Ecuadorian was regularly skipping the Aussie Open). Born in the capital (it's not so obvious for good Czech players), Korda began his tennis journey under the guidance of his father: *"Because of him I've got a golden touch!"* From the earliest years he was admiring Ivan Lendl, during one of events in Prague, Korda had a pleasure to work as a ball-boy during Lendl's match, so defeating his childhood hero (5-7, 6-1, 6-4 Stockholm '91) must have been a career highlight in the first years on the tour (ultimately Korda won 4 out of their 5 meetings). Korda as a child was exceptionally thin, with years he obtained desirable kilograms, but as a professional player he still looked far away from the athlete standards. Quite untypical problems haunted him: groin, hernia, paranasal sinuses and other small issues. He was devastated at times, thinking about premature retirement. *"I was in constant pain, I was wondering whether I'd normally live."* He overcame a series of operations and approaching 30th birthday, he finally firmed up his disposition. Between July '97 and January '98 he jumped from no. 27 to 2! He even had for a few weeks a chance of becoming the best player in the world, but always 2-3 matches separated him from that feat. Unquestionably, Korda must be mentioned in discussions about claiming title in the most extraordinary circumstances. During Compaq Grand Slam in Munich '93, he defeated in the quarterfinal (4-6, 6-0, 6-4) Sergi Bruguera trailing *2:4 in the 3rd set. In the semifinal he outlasted Pete Sampras after almost 4.5 hour struggle; he seemed to be finished in the 4th & 5th sets of that encounter, hardly standing. There were even speculations that he'd pull out of the final; he not only entered the court - he won another five-set thriller, against the second best player of the season - Michael Stich. Unbelievable, he not only won as long deciders in back-to-back matches as no-one before, he did it against the best players in the world on a surface favoring his opponents, and what's

more astonishing he managed to do that winning fewer points on both occasions (10 vs Sampras, 13 vs Stich)! Unfortunately, that difficult, yet successful career was finished in controversial circumstances. At the end of 1998, the ITF announced that during Wimbledon '98 Korda tested positive for the banned steroid nandrolone. Korda was stripped of the ranking points (1999) and prize money (94.500$) that he had won at Wimbledon '98, but was not banned from the sport. Korda immediately lost his respect in the eyes of his colleagues. Krajicek: *"If he used nandrolone why hasn't he been disqualified? If he was found not guilty, why did they take away his money?"* Bjorkman: *"Before Wimbledon he was playing the best tennis of his life, much worse after it. If someone takes illegal substances he should be banned for a few years."* Despite criticism, Korda went to the Australian Open to defend his title, and got a slap in the face in the first round - he defeated Galo Blanco after five sets, but the Spaniard refused to shake hands. Shortly after Korda was banned in his native country - couldn't play in any official tournament for two years since the ITF's announcement. It was a depressive period for him, he was dropping in the ranking like crazy, just one year after trying to reach the peak of the tennis world, he found himself outside the Top 100 (six defeats in a row, including to **Rodolphe Cadart**, who won just three main-level matches). He lost to **Danny Sapsford** (paradoxically playing his last event in career, too) in the Wimbledon qualies, and the cup of bitterness was full to overflowing - he suddenly announced his retirement. 1.5 years later, when the Czech ban expired, Korda made his cameo in the hometown, playing in the first round of Prague Challenger losing 6-4, 3-6, 6-7 to little known Martin Hromec of Slovakia (never played a main-level match). The 32-year-old Korda said that playing in the tournament would be the best present for his father, who turned 60 that week... Generally speaking Korda was an offensive baseliner, but on grass he was implementing serve-and-volley tactics, and he knew how to play it on other surfaces as an element of surprise. Quite recently, his son (**Sebastian Korda**, b. 2000) out of nowhere (0-3 main-level record, ranked outside Top 200) reached the fourth round of Roland Garros where he was brutally verified by Rafael Nadal. In the first event of '21 Korda advanced to the Delray Beach final. Will the Korda junior be as good as his father? The next few seasons will tell. He is taller than Petr and plays two-handed backhand using the right hand at all other strokes.

Career record:	410-248 [246 events]
Career titles:	10
Highest ranking:	2 (February 1998)
Best GS results:	Australian Open (champion 1998; quarterfinal 1993) Roland Garros (runner-up 1992) Wimbledon (quarterfinal 1998) US Open (quarterfinal 1995 & 97)

Grand Slam Cup champion 1993

Bernd Karbacher (Germany)

Born: April 3, 1968 in Munich (West Germany)
Height: 1.86 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

Karbacher didn't make his ATP debut until he turned 23. In the 80s/90s it was an advanced age for a player, enough to say that 24-year-old Wilander was spent after six intensive years on the tour a few years earlier. In 1992, Karbacher could be happy that with the help of 'wild card' in Munich, he advanced to the semifinal and became a Top 100 player. Soon afterwards in an obscure ATP event on the home soil in Cologne he triumphed defeateing i.a. arguably the best clay-courter of the 90s - Thomas Muster. Nevertheless it was tough to expect that lanky Karbacher with ugly haircut and narrow shoulders would become a dangerous floater in the mid 90s. For a guy with a negative record, he enjoyed very nice career being a two-time major quarterfinalist (two points away from advancement to the French Open '96 semifinal) and defeated several multiple Grand Slam champions: Pete Sampras, Boris Becker, Stefan Edberg and Ivan Lendl, who played his last match in his career facing Karbacher, and I assume for the only time in his career lost a set leading 5:0 (4-6, 6-7, 0-1 ret.), squandering nine set points in the progress. Karbacher said: *"It is sad in a way, but it is normal. What he reached in his career was great but he is 34. You can't play 20 years. It is normal that some young guy will come up and beat him."* No-one beat Lendl after Karbacher though... Trivia: Karbacher had the best tie-break record on the tour in 1994... 22-7 (75 %); three tie-breaks in Challengers.

Career record: 135–161 [159 events]
Career titles: 2
Highest ranking: No. 22 (April 1995)
Best GS results: Roland Garros (quarterfinal 1996)
US Open (quarterfinal 1994)

Carlos Costa (Spain)

Born: April 22, 1968 in Barcelona
Height: 1.82 m
Plays: Right-handed

Full name: Chales "Carlos" Costa Masferrer... Not related to Albert Costa... Carlos was just an average clay-court Spanish player for the first few years of his career, playing below the level of his peers, doubles partners & fellow Catalans - **Tomas Carbonell** & Francisco Clavet, but the year 1992 changed his tennis life making him more distinctive & memorable figure than the other two Spaniards. He was the hottest player on the tour during the clay court season that year: back-to-back titles in Estoril & Barcelona - 2R in Monte Carlo - finals in Madrid & Rome - semifinal in Hamburg. Within two months Costa manufactured a 25-4 record and advanced from Top 60 to Top 10! Brad Stine, Jim Courier's coach at the time, came away with this assessment: *"He has a tendency to attack more. He takes the ball a little bit earlier than some of the other guys. He's got a very good first serve. And his backhand - it's like poetry in motion."* In such a great form he was a certain candidate to play at least in the quarterfinals of Roland Garros '92, but in the fourth round unexpectedly (mostly in the scoreline) he was defeated by Goran Ivanisevicv and never came back to his stunning form once he stepped on grass afterwards. There are players who around the age 25 experience the best seasons of their careers, of course the year 1992 must be considered as the best in Costa's career, but to be precise, the magic lasted only two months. For the rest of his career Costa remained a clay-court specialist (all his thirteen finals on that surface), nonetheless he shocked the tennis world indoors as defeated Pete Sampras in Stockholm '93 on a fast surface 7-6, 2-6, 6-1 (his career indoor record just 6-24 in the end). *"I've had little success indoors, and to beat the world's best player is just unbelievable,"* said Costa snapping Sampras' twelve match-winning streak. The encounter ended just before midnight, with fewer than 500 spectators watching. *"It was kind of boring,"* Sampras said. *"I'd prefer 10,000 screaming Swedish fans."*
Comparison of rankings (during Roland Garros 1991 and 1992) of three Spanish (Catalan) players born in 1968 and their highest ranking in parenthesis:
Costa: 200 - 10 (No. 10 then)
Clavet: 51 - 23 (No. 18 in 1992)
Carbonell: 81 - 73 (No. 40 in 1996)
After retirement Costa disappeared from the tennis scene for a few years, then appeared as an agent for Rafael Nadal and David Nalbandian. Curiosity: Costa

displayed reminiscence of his clay-court '92 form in Umag '95; in the final he led 6-3, *5:2 (40/15) against Thomas Muster, who was virtually unbeatable on that surface at the time, yet the Austrian survived 3-6, 7-6, 6-4. Earlier that year when Muster was building his invincibility, Costa led *5:3 in the 3rd set to lose 3-6, 6-3, 5-7. They faced each other seven times at the main-level and the Austrian left the courts always as the winner. Muster defeated at the main-level seven times Carbonell & Clavet as well.

Career record:	248–208 [208 events]
Career titles:	6
Highest ranking:	No. 10 (May 1992)
Best GS results:	Roland Garros (fourth round 1992-93) US Open (fourth round 1992)

Omar Camporese (Italy)

Born: May 8, 1968 in Bologna
Height: 1.88 m
Plays: Right-handed

There are players who never advanced to the Top 10, didn't win many tournaments, but you can suppose they were much better than their accomplishments would suggest. The handsome, tall, stylishly playing Italian belongs to this group. He drew attention in Melbourne '91 losing a remarkable match 12-14 in the decider to Boris Becker (the champion of that event) after 5 hours 11 minutes which was the longest match in the tournament history for 18 years! In retrospect, I can say it wasn't a fluke he had almost beaten the great German player (led on return 5:4, 30/15 in the 5th set). In the early 90s he was able to play on equal terms against the Top 10 players. Almost a year before the Becker loss, Camporese fought over 4 hours against Mats Wilander (4-6, 4-6, 7-5, 7-6, 4-6), in 1991 he lost three dramatic matches to Becker in total, the same year he defeated Ivan Lendl (final in Rotterdam, arguably the biggest success in Camporese's career), Sergi Bruguera, Jim Courier & Pete Sampras! In 1992 he defeated Bruguera (again) and Emilio Sanchez giving Italy a valuable Davis Cup win over Spain, also stunned Goran Ivanisevic in the Milan final. Advancement to the Top 10 seemed a matter of time for the 24-year-old Italian. In Hamburg he lost a quarterfinal to Stefan Edberg being two points away from a straight sets victory, and actually since that loss he was never the same, anyway he avenged that defeat against Edberg the following year in Milan. The 1993 year was his last regular on the ATP Tour, many injuries forced him to come back to the Challenger circuit where he was struggling to regain his form for seven years until he decided to quit. Nonetheless, in the meantime he reminded about himself in 1997 as a player ranked No. 156, contributing to another Italian win over Spain in the Davis Cup quarterfinal as he came back from two-sets-to-love to defeat Carlos Moya [9] not dropping a service game in 3 hours 41 minutes (faced break points in four games)! During Camporese's best years, the second best Italian, **Stefano Pescosolido** (b. 1971) won two ATP titles, but it wasn't enough to enter the Top 40.

Career record: 150–157 [150 events]
Career titles: 2
Highest ranking: No. 18 (February 1992)
Best GS result: Australian Open (4th round 1992)

Horst Skoff *(Austria)*

Born: August 22, 1968 in Klagenfurt;
Died: June 7, 2008 in Hamburg (Germany)
Height: 1.75 m
Plays: Right-handed

Arguably the best Open Era player who never reached the third round at majors (in twenty-one attempts). The easiest explanation it'd be to say "he couldn't play well the best of five matches", but it wasn't true because for example in the Davis Cup '89 rubber of a tie between Austria and Sweden, he defeated a five-set specialist Mats Wilander after one of a few matches in history that lasted more than six hours (6-7, 7-6, 1-6, 6-4, 9-7). Skoff came back from a *1:3 deficit in the final set, saving a double mini-match point at 5-all with two backhand volleys. The Grand Slam matches somehow didn't go in his favor, quite often he faced the best players in the world. In 1990 he could be a Davis Cup hero: in a 90-minute rain-delayed decider he led two-sets-to-love against a teenage Michael Chang in front of the 17.000 partisan Austrians, then lost the third set and the match was suspended due to darkness. The following day, despite cramps, Chang won two consecutive sets, breaking Skoff 7 times in 10 service games. "*Today the court was a lot slower than yesterday,"* said Skoff, who said he had been beaten in the most important match of his life. *"Michael got to my forehand easier. I didn't play that bad, but the slow surface was making it easier for him to get to my shots."* Skoff was a clay-court guy, but the biggest of his 4 ATP titles, comes from the indoor conditions and a prestigious duel against fellow Austrian - Thomas Muster - in the capital of Austria (Vienna). Skoff prevailed 4-6, 6-3, 6-4, 6-2 after almost 3-hour encounter, coming back from a break down in the 2nd set after a game in which converted his 11th break point (!) - mainly due to that game it was a special match from statistical point of view, because Skoff converted only 6 out of 24 break points, but he did it in every game he created opportunity! It was the third all-Austrian final in the Open Era following two split meetings between **Peter Feigl** & **Hans Kary** in 1979 (Linz, Lagos). The stocky, grunting Skoff after a quite successful 1994 season when he triumphed in four Challengers, completely lost his form in 1995 at the age of 27. He got additional kilograms and for the next four years he was playing only Challengers, but not good enough to come back to the main-level. He finished his career in 1999, and didn't look like an athlete when the millenium made its transition. He was visibly overweight, and probably it made an impact on his heart... Skoff died in Hamburg (the city where he played his biggest final, in 1989), following

a heart attack, at the age of almost 40. *"It's hard to comprehend that a person so young had to die,"* Muster said about his teammate. *"He accompanied me, challenged me and motivated me over many years."* Skoff was always more motivated playing against his higher ranked compatriot, he defeated Muster in five straight matches (won 11 consecutive sets!), but ultimately lost their rivalry 5 to 6.

Career record:	228–203 [195 events]
Career titles:	4
Highest ranking:	No. 18 (January 1990)
Best GS result:	three times second round at Roland Garros (negative record everywhere, 5-21 in total!)

Michael Stich (Germany)

Born: October 18, 1968 in Pinneberg (West Germany)
Height: 1.93 m
Plays: Right-handed

The second best German player of the Open Era, behind Boris Becker, but his first few years on the tour didn't indicate it would be like this. The 80s and the 90s, meant the times that all the best guys of those decades, established themselves as successful players already as teenagers. Stich was an exception. When West Germany won two Davis Cup titles in the years 1988-89, the core of the team created Becker and Carl-Uwe Steeb (both from Baden-Württemberg - southern region of Germany - both one year older than Stich)... the man from Pinneberg (Schleswig-Holstein, northern Germany) didn't play even a rubber in eight ties (Eric Jelen & **Patrick Kuhnen** were considered as doubles players who might have replaced the leading singles guys). It was so unlikely that the fifth best German of those golden years would lead Germany for the third Davis Cup title in 1993! Stich marked his existence on the tour in February '90 when triumphed in Memphis as no. 80. He won six matches but didn't beat anyone special, the highest defeated opponent it was Andrei Chesnokov [19], not known as an indoor specialist. *"It's a great feeling,"* Stich said about collecting his first title. *"I don't really know what happened out there. But I'm sure I'll recognise what happened some days from now. There aren't that many German players who have won Grand Prix titles. Maybe I'll get some recognition,"* And he got! A few weeks later Niki Pilic nominated him for a Davis Cup tie in Argentina; Stich lost

in five sets to Martin Jaite as well as their 5-set second round encounter at Roland Garros (4 hours 46 minutes - one of the longest matches of the year). Even though Stich amazingly improved in the following years, that loss to Jaite featured the weakest aspect of his tennis - inability to play the best tennis as a match goes over a three-hour mark... Stich didn't play another impressive event in 1990, but during the US Open for instance, he showed his big potential forcing Ivan Lendl to fight hard for a 4-set victory. *"He pushes and pushes, and then he sneaks in on an unusual shot,"* Lendl said. *"He puts a lot of pressure on you that way."* The classical serve-and-volleyer was on his way to become more patient improving his groundstrokes. The breakthrough came in January '91 - Stich advanced to two Australian finals (Adelaide, Sydney) followed by a third round at Australian Open when for the second time he played a match on the Grand Slam main arena, losing a tight 4-setter again, that time to the best server at the time - Guy Forget. Stich kept his form after the Australian January, a series of good results, highlighted with unexpected clay-court semifinals (Hamburg, French Open) led him to the tournament of his life - Wimbledon. Within six months he turned from a Top 50 to Top 10 player, but he wasn't considered a favorite to the title, and then a miracle occurred in the fourth round. After losing a 4th set to Alexander Volkov 1-6, he trailed *1:4 (30/40) in the decider - as Stich later said, he'd accepted his defeat and fearlessly hit his second serve - it was an ace. Stich held, also another serving game, but Volkov leading 5:3 (30/15) was ready to close the match out... he played his nonchalant volley and a few centimeters separated him from a double match point. Stich recalls in 2020: *"I hit a forehand passing shot that hit the top of the tape and just went over his racquet. He was at the net, and it landed on the sideline. Then I got the break and, I'm not sure since it's almost 30 years ago now, but I think I didn't lose a point afterwards. I won my service game, I broke him to love and then I served out to love again and won 7-5 in the fifth."* I remember that Volkov grabbed his head with both hands in disbelief. Why did he take it so seriously? He was unbroken since the end of the 3rd set, I don't know, he was a very strange player. Anyway, he acted like the combination of Stich's net-cord and sideline (after his forehand the ball was going into the doubles valley) decided the entire match. Stich continues his memorial: *"Definitely in your subconsciousness it creates something like, 'You should have been out, but you're still here so just relax!'. When I was relaxed and I felt good about myself, then the timing was right, the timing was good, and things seemed to be easier for me."* Stich was so relaxed that defeated the three best players at the time in another three matches (Jim Courier, Stefan Edberg & Becker in the final) - not ranking-wise. Very peculiar was the match vs Edberg. Never before a player who won in a 'best of 5' format, failed to break an opponent's serve. It will happen several times in the future with serve-bots, but at the time it was underlined in all tennis news. Stich brought a novelty to tennis in the 90s, with that match and with another major skirmish, vs Richard Krajicek at the Aussie Open '92 - they played a tight five-setter with only three breaks of serve. The future will deliver similar matches, but at the time it was unprecedented. Stich belonged to the group of players in the early 90s (along with Pete Sampras, Goran Ivanisevic & Krajicek) who

could hold the serve for a very long time perfecting their serving skills on faster surfaces. Stich defeated them all in dramatic all-serve-and-volley battles at indoor finals in 1993 (Stuttgart, Stockholm and Frankfurt) becoming the first player of the Open Era to win at least 30 tie-breaks within a season. He was also involved in dramatic matches against two other great servers of the time (Forget at Hopman Cup - hit 31 aces in that match, never before seen to hit as many aces in just three sets, and Becker at Wimbledon). The year 1993 was remarkable for Stich, he was not only playing very well everywhere, he was also involved in as many tight situations as no-one before, and played as many matches representing his country as no-one before (15 in singles: three at Hopman Cup - title, four at World Team Cup - runner-up, eight at Davis Cup - title).

Career record:	385–176 [179 events]
Career titles:	18
Highest ranking:	No. 2 (November 1993)
Best GS results:	Australian Open (semifinal 1993) Roland Garros (runner-up 1996; semifinal 1991) Wimbledon (champion 1991) US Open (runner-up 1994)

Masters & Davis Cup champion 1993

Francisco Clavet (Spain)

Born: October 24, 1968 in Madrid
Height: 1.82 m
Plays: Left-handed (two-handed backhand)

Full name: Francisco Clavet González... He enjoyed a long, solid career, not too many players had an opportunity to play at the biggest tennis stadiums in three different decades. His career is impoverished by the lack of meaningful results in the biggest events. 43 Grand Slam appearances, but never passed beyond the fourth round, only two Masters 1K semifinals (Indian Wells '92 and Key Biscayne '99 - he didn't beat anyone from the Top 10 in those events though). Clavet showed himself to a broader audience at Roland Garros '90, being ranked 185 - on Centre Court he scared the local crowd almost ousting Yannick Noah. The 1983 champion needed seven match points to snap his own 7-match losing streak. Two months later Clavet as one of a few players, claimed an ATP title as lucky loser, it happened in Hilversum defeating in the final a qualifier Eduardo Masso for whom it would stay as a career-best result. Clavet never experienced a breakthrough, just a very firm baseliner, using a lot of top-spin, who can hurt you not only on clay, but also on hard. Clavet's last title is the most valuable - as a 33-year-old player he triumphed in Scottsdale having defeated Andre Agassi 6-1, 6-7, 7-5 in the first round. The American served for the match at 5:4 in the 3rd set. *"This is the happiest day of my tennis life"* said Claver after an easy passage in the final against Magnus Norman [5]. In the semifinal Clavet had defeated Lleyton Hewitt [5], so the title was special - three wins over Top 10 players in a tournament you could expect the appearence of only one player of that status.

Career record: 388–340 [348 events]
Career titles: 8
Highest ranking: No. 18 (July 1992)
Best GS results: Roland Garros (fourth round 1991, 96 & 98)
Wimbledon (fourth round 1998)

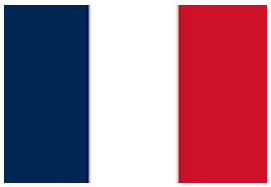
Jeff Tarango (USA)

Born: November 20, 1968 in Manhattan Beach, California
Height: 1.80 m
Plays: Left-handed (two-handed backhand)

He will be presumably remembered mainly for an incident at Wimbledon '95 when he was trying to achieve his biggest major success - the fourth round; and being long way from the loss to an inferior - albeit good on grass, former Steffi Graf's boyfriend - **Alexander Mronz** (b. 1965); he quarreled with the umpire Bruno Rebeuh at 6-7 *1:2 (15/40), got a penalty point which meant a break and he felt it as such a huge injustice that packed his racquets, called the umpire "the most corrupt official in the game" and left the court which turned into the default. Bizarrely, one year later he was involved at Wimbledon in a match with disqualification again, that time he benefited (along with Henrik Holm) as the young Tim Henman (partner of Jermy Bates) hit a ball-girl after the point was finished. Tarango became some sort of doubles specialist in the second part of his career (14 doubles titles; nothing until 27 y.o.) and it helped him to be an awkward opponent. He could raise his game facing the big boys, he was lefty which always helps; his game stylized on Jimmy Connors, so rather inadequate to the 90s, but doubles helped him to improve the volley game & he was able to sufficiently apply serve-and-volley without any pattern. He played 3.5 hour, four-set matches vs Jim Courier at Paris (when Courier appeared as a double defending champion) and vs Patrick Rafter in Melbourne when the Australian was fresh after triumphing in New York, perceiving as a main title contender. When Pete Sampras was at his best, in 1994, he needed two tie-breaks to outlast the unruly Tarango.

Career record: 239–294 [296 events]
Career titles: 2
Highest ranking: No. 42 (November 1992)
Best GS result: third round (eight times, everywhere)

Arnaud Boetsch (France)



Born: April 1, 1969 in Meulan
Height: 1.83 m
Plays: Right-handed

A favorite of the French crowd, who displayed it in a particular way during his match against Boris Becker at Paris-Bercy '93. The chauvinistic crowd couldn't agree with an adverse decision, whistling & interrupting two points for 5 minutes 48 seconds (!), not allowing the play to continue. Becker led 4:3 (40/0) in the deciding set, but the forced break helped Boetsch to concentrate well and he won the match 3-6, 6-3, 7-6. The following day he didn't sustain the pressure and lost the semifinal despite leading against Andrey Medvedev 6-2, 5:3 on serve. Boetsch is some sort of an underachiever. he lost four semifinals at this level ("Mercedes Super 9", the predecessor of "Masters 1000"); beside the mentioned Paris, also Monte Carlo'92, Essen '95 and Key Biscayne'96, and never passed the fourth round at majors, despite making attempts in Melbourne, Paris, London and New York. Taking into account all those fourth round matches, he was a favorite only at the US Open (1996) when he faced Javier Sanchez, a clay-court specialist. All those disappointments were rewarded in the Davis Cup '96 final in Malmo, when he survived an incredible thriller against Nicklas Kulti to give France another title (the first since 1991 when he was a team member as well). In the decisive rubber Boetsch was supposed to face Stefan Edberg. For the Swede it could theoretically be a dreamlike finish of the career - he had better H2H record against Boetsch than anyone else (10:1), but two days before Edberg had played rather poorly in the opening rubber against Cedric Pioline, moreover he was on a three-match losing streak, and retreated. Kulti, the substitute, played better than anyone could expect, optically he was a superior player over Boetsch, but it was the Frenchman who dealt better with all tight sets. After 4 hours 48 minutes of heroic battle, Boetsch triumphed 7-6, 2-6, 4-6, 7-6, 10-9 escaping from a 6:7 (0/40) deficit in the decider! If we think about the stake of that match, the win was really unbelievable. The 27-year-old Boetsch lost his motivation afterwards, he was already written in the history of sport, not only the history of tennis. In the following two years Boetsch didn't achieve any interesting results, and at the age of 30 he decided to quit... When Boetsch was in good shape, he was always good to watch, the technique of all his strokes couldn't be questioned, his one-handed backhand was beautiful, one of the few players able to hit the ball faster from the backhand side. One of my favorite

players in the 90s, partially responsible for my comeback to tennis. I had a break of interest between January and May 1995, in the period I didn't see any match, and suddenly I felt the rebirth of my passion seeing on TV, Boetsch facing Michael Stich in the third round. I felt emotions again when he came back from a 0-2 deficit, even though he ultimately lost in five sets. The best results he achieved indoors, especially in the French events.

Career record:	231–202 [200 events]
Career titles:	3
Highest ranking:	No. 12 (April 1996)
Best GS result:	fourth round everywhere

Davis Cup champion 1996 (won clincher)

Alberto Mancini (Argentina)

Born: May 20, 1969 in Misiones
Height: 1.79 m
Plays: Right-handed

At the time two icons of the Argentinian tennis (Guillermo Vilas & Jose-Luis Clerc) were in the twilight of their careers, three new talented Argies appeared on the big scene - Martin Jaite, and a few years later Mancini & Guillermo Perez-Roldan. Mancini seemed the most promising among those three born in the 60s. Unfortunately for his fans & himself, the progress was unexpectedly halted when he was just 20. The bulky, playing with heavy top-spin & looking much older, Mancini shocked the tennis world in the Spring of 1989 triumphing in two big tournaments which at the time still weren't called "Mercedes Super 9" - Monte Carlo & Rome. The titles were even more impressive considering the opponents he faced in the finals and the ways he defeated them: Boris Becker (tight four-setter) & Andre Agassi (saving a match point in the fourth set). *"To beat Wilander and Becker on center court in Monte Carlo… it's like a dream. I'm very happy."* said the young Argentinian. Out of nowhere he was among a few contenders for the title at the French Open, but couldn't handle bad weather & serve-and-volley style of Stefan Edberg in the quarterfinal - the Swede had easily beaten him in Munich (after the Monte Carlo title) and repeated it in Paris. Mancini had already won three titles, two big ones, and never added another, taking part in five more finals (two 'Mercedes Super 9" - in Miami on hardcourts which couldn't be expected). The truth is that he wasn't a favorite in any of eight ATP finals he played. Injuries forced him to retire at the age of 25 (one year after disappearance of Jaite & Perez-Roldan), later on he became the captain of the Argentinian Davis Cup team. Trivia: played five times against his Argie "sibling" Perez-Roldan, lost to him their first two matches, won the following three. He currently coaches Fabio Fognini (~twenty years after achieving very good results as a coach of Guillermo Coria).

Career record: 134–132 [121 events]
Career titles: 3
Highest ranking: No. 8 (October 1989)
Best GS result: Roland Garros (quarterfinalist 1989)

David Wheaton (USA)

Born: June 2, 1969 in Minneapolis (Minnesota)
Height: 1.93 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

A man with headbands always displaying a US flag & blinking eyes before the serve... Wheaton was the oldest player in the golden generation of American youngsters, which took the world by storm at the turn of decades (80s & 90s). He seemed to be a potential major finalist at least once when having already played two

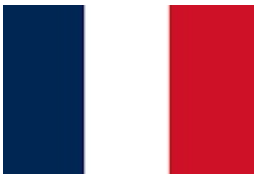
major quarterfinals at different venues, he reached the Wimbledon '91 semifinal after dramatic wins on Centre Court over Ivan Lendl & Andre Agassi, for whom Wheaton was one of the toughest rivals in the early period of his career (after the Wimbledon match Wheaton led 3:1, only to lose their another five meetings). Those results that had been anticipated from Wheaon, actually obtained Todd Martin, in some sense straling "Wheaton's soul" in their third round clash at Wimbledon '93. In the fourth round Wheaton led two-sets-to-one and 3:0 on serve in the 4th set. It was grass, Wheaton was a big server, it seemed impossible he would lose such a match, especially that Martin had defeated Goran Ivanisevic a round before from a similarly difficult position and Wheaton had defeated Martin twice in four-setters. Martin miraculously triumphed though: 6-4, 5-7, 5-7, 7-5, 6-3 - they both were Top 40 players at the time, but after that match Martin began his exponential rise while Wheaton his steady falling. Wheaton became a victim of his unexpected glory one and a half years before. There were two editions of one tournament that completely changed his life - Compaq Grand Slam Cup in Munich; the 22-year-old Wheaton had already earned more than three million dollars, and 3/4 of that only thanks to seven matches he played in the Bavarian capital (semifinal 1990, champion 1991) - crazy! Admittedly two years younger Pete Sampras won the first edition and it didn't spoil him, but he'd already triumphed at the US Open, so he knew that possessed a potential to become one of the most successful players of the 90s; Wheaton was not as much talented, so for someone like him, those first two Munich editions were like winning the lottery. *"I hope the money won't change me,"* Wheaton said after defeating Michael Chang in the final. *"I've been brought up with a certain set of values and ethics. I don't think I'm going to change. I'm not a materialistic person."* Wheaton was delusional, many years later he admitted that the enormous amount of money he earned between December '90 and December '91, spoiled him. He not only lost his dedication & motivation to train hard, but also many good friends leading a life of luxury. *"I didn't expect the lack of fulfillment I felt in accomplishing this. Here I had won a big title and a big paycheck but it*

was the first time I remember experiencing that winning more and earning more was not going to make me fulfilled as a human being because I wasn't at peace with God. Two years later, I finally came to understand that being in a right relationship with God through repenting of my sin and placing my faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ was the real way to have lasting fulfillment, hope, and joy in the good times and the bad." This is how Wheaton recalled that period many years later. Before he became a devoted Christian, he experienced two average years on the tour, but what's worth mentioning, at majors of 1993 he stunned Chang twice (Australia & England), leading 6:1 (!) in their rivalry before losing their last four matches easily. The new-born Christain, Wheaton was trying to revive his career in the years 1994-95 changing his service motion, but in vain, albeit he was very close to reach the Aussie Open '95 quarterfinal; Wheaton lost 8-10 in the 5th set to Andrei Medvedev. It was the last moment when Wheaton could be considered as an elite player. Injuries hindered his performances. He suffered a hip injury (1994), a right Achilles injury (1996), underwent an operation to remove a bone spur under his Achilles' tendon (1997) and hurt the medial collateral ligament in his serving elbow (1998). *"My biggest disappointment is looking back and thinking I could have done better if I had had a better perspective on life and tennis,"* said Wheaton. *"At the same time, I learned valuable lessons through the ups and downs of tennis that continue to guide me today."* During his best years Wheaton was considered as a big-server, but I wouldn't put him in the same quotation with Goran Ivanisevic & Richard Krajicek, so the guys of the same size actually. Wheaton's distinctive shots were his backhand (his groundstrokes were natural because he decided to become a serve-and-volleyer when he turned pro) and half-volley, very tough shot for 6'3 feet players or taller, but a piece of cake for Wheaton. In the early 90s he was always wearing a headband representing the American flag, despite his patriotic attitude he had no impact on the success of the Davis Cup team in the years 1990-92 (two triumphs and final) as racket no. 5 in his country. In 1993 he had finally a privilege to represent the United States, but was beaten in four sets by Mark Woodforde in the second rubber, and the USA lost to Australia on grass at Kooyong 1-4. Curiosities: # Wheaton edged 5-3 his rivalry over the best player of the 80s Lendl, but the best player of the following decade (Sampras) was Wheaton's toughest opponent. Wheaton lost all eight of their official meetings, but in an exhibition event in Atlanta '91 he defeated Sampras twice within a week (!); first 6-1, 7-5 in a 'round robin' match, then 7-6, 6-1 in the semifinal. He's a record holder in number of consecutive sets lost in tie-breaks; in 1989 he lost 6-7, 6-7 in Bristol, 6-7, 6-7, 6-7 in his another match (Wimbledon), and lost 6-7 the 1st set of his next match (Washington), but the subsequent two sets he won 6-4, 6-0.

Career record: 232–191 [193 events]
Career titles: 3
Highest ranking: No. 12 (July 1991)
Best GS results:
Australian Open (quarterfinal 1990); Wimbledon (semifinalist 1991); US Open (quarterfinal 1990)

Compaq Grand Slam champion '91

Cedric Pioline (France)



Born: June 15, 1969 in Neuilly-sur-Seine
Height: 1.89 m
Plays: Right-handed

Arguably the best Frenchman in the 90s, but not the crowd favorite; I remember his Toulouse '93 final when he lost to two-months older Arnaud Boetsch - almost the entire stadium was cheering for Boetsch while neither of the Frenchmen came from the south of France (they both were born in cities approximate to Paris). In contrast to other best French guys born in the 60s (Yannick Noah, Guy Forget, Henri Leconte & Boetsch), he hadn't won any professional matches as a teenager, thus it was tough to expect he'd achieve very good results. In my opinion the turning point in Pioline's career came at the US Open '92 when as a 23-year-old man he lost a tough four-set match (3 hours 22 minutes) to the best player at the time - Jim Courier. Pioline built confidence upon that loss. Soon afterwards he reached his first final (Lyon), followed by a sensational advancement to the Monte Carlo final. He was unlucky in the finals, needed to play as many as 148 main-level events to finally claim his maiden title (Copenhagen) on the 10th final attempt - in the nine lost final he was a clear favorite just once - and he was blown away from the court by super-serving **Jonathan Stark** (b. 1971) in Bolzano. Ultimately he finished his career with five titles, the last one the most valuable - Monte Carlo '00, admittedly he didn't beat anyone from the top, but all six defeated players had already established recognizable positions in the tennis world... Dwelling on his game-style it is worth mentioning that perhaps the toughest shot in tennis (excluding trick shots), namely backhand overhead, could be considered as his trade-mark. The son of volleyballers (mother from Romania) had the jumping using both legs in his genes, his overhead maybe wasn't as spectacular as Sampras', nevertheless it was a very efficient shot. Other basic shots were good, Pioline could apply serve-and-volley style reaching Wimbledon '97 final as well as rather defensive style reaching the French Open '98 semifinal. Curiosity: Pioline, just like Miloslav Mecir, quickly lost his both major finals to the best player of a decade... Mecir lost to Ivan Lendl (the best player of the 80s) at US Open '86 & Aussie Open '89 while Pioline to Sampras (the best player of the 90s) at US Open '93 & Wimbledon '97. The Lendl-Mecir finals combined lasted 3 hours 54 minutes, the Sampras-Pioline finals 3 hours 38 minutes.

Career record: 389–318 [306 events]
Career titles: 5
Highest ranking: No. 5 (May 2000)
Best GS results: Roland Garros (semifinal 1998)
Wimbledon (runner-up 1997; quarterfinal 1993, 95 & 99)
US Open (runner-up 1993; semifinal 1999)

Davis Cup champion 1996 and 2001 (played doubles in the final)

MaliVai Washington (USA)

Born: June 20, 1969 in Glen Cove, New York
Height: 1.80 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

He made a debut in 1988, but his good results are connected only to the 90s. He drew some attention in 1991 when lost tight matches to the best players of the 80s: John McEnroe in Chicago and Ivan Lendl at Wimbledon. In 1992 he was a revelation of the season along with two years younger Richard Krajicek & Wayne Ferreira - players who enjoyed much more successful careers. Anyway, the years 1992-1996 were fruitful in Washington's case. He could have been seeded in the majority of majors if 32 players had been seeded at the time. His three best results of those years are three finals of big events: Key Biscayne '93, Essen '95 & Wimbledon '96. Especially the last one is very intriguing because Washington just before the final (lost to Richard Krajicek in the most unexpected major final of the 90s) had won amazingly dramatic matches against Alex Radulescu (broke him in the last game of the match for the first time!) & Todd Martin (trailed 1:5* in the deciding set!). *"Ultimately in tennis, you want that elusive major - and I was in the finals of the biggest one of them all,"* said Washington. *"I had 13 great days at Wimbledon that year, but Richard had 14. I loved playing at Wimbledon and reaching the final. But my goal was to win the title."* A Davis Cup '97 rubber against Gustavo Kuerten (unknown at the time) initiated a process of Washington's decline. The 28-year-old American [24] won the match in four sets (3-6, 7-6, 7-6, 6-3), but injured his left knee in the 3rd set tie-break. He underwent left knee surgery in Jacksonville on 30 April, and went onto play two further Grand Slams before retiring in November 1999. In 1998 he was playing with protected ranking, but far away from his previous form, at the end of that year he decided to play two Challengers - lost in both of them already in the first round. In 1999 he participated only in two events.

Career record: 254–184 [186 events]
Career titles: 4
Highest ranking: No. 11 (October 1992)
Best GS results: Australian Open (quarterfinalist 1994)
Wimbledon (runner-up 1996)

Byron Black (Zimbabwe)

Born: October 6, 1969 in Salisbury (Rhodesia)
Height: 1.75 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed both sides)

The brothers Byron & Wayne Black (their younger sister - Cara - was also a professional tennis player), as opposed to the surname & representing African country, are white people. They were raised on a farm near the Zimbabwean capital - Harare. Their father, Don, played at Wimbledon during the amateur era when Zimbabwe was still Rhodesia, and he built four grass courts for his family at home. Black is one of the few professional players to have played with a double-handed forehand; in the 90s he was the most successful player depending on this style (other players worth mentioning: Fabrice Santoro & **Michael Tebbutt**). The older Byron achieved much more, especially in doubles - for a short time he was even no. 1 in the mid 90s despite modest physical conditions. It was quite shocking because in the early pro years Black was focused on playing doubles almost exclusively representing Zimbabwe in the Davis Cup. Sometimes the right partner is extremely important, and it was Black's case - he co-created the pair with a big-serving Jonathan Stark and they began the cooperation winning their first two events, losing just one match in the first twenty they played together. The Black brothers made a huge Davis Cup upset in 1998 eliminating Australia in the first round. That tie on paper looked like 4-1 or 5-0 for the Australians, but Patrick Rafter wasn't in perfect shape (viral infection) - Black defeated him 3-1 as well as Jason Stoltenberg in the decisive rubber. *"I will remember this for the rest of my life,"* said Black *"Winning it with my brother, too, is pretty unbelievable."*

Career record: 257–246 [232 events]
Career titles: 2
Highest ranking: No. 22 (April 1996)
Best GS results: Wimbledon (quarterfinal '00)
US Open (quarterfinal '95)

Guillermo Pérez-Roldán (Argentina)

Born: October 20, 1969 in Tandil
Height: 1.78 m
Plays: Right-handed

Similarly to five months older compatriot (Alberto Mancini), Roldan enjoyed the best period of his career as a teenager. It was the year 1988 when Roldan triumphed in Munich, easily defeating all five opponents, the following week not dropping a set again, he reached the final of very prestigious event in Rome where being supported by the crowd as a local guy, he led 4:3 in the decider against the best player in the world - Ivan Lendl, who won after 4 hours 37 minutes (one of the longest ATP finals in history). The Czechoslovak was outplayed from the back of the court in the opener and it forced him to serve harder and attack the net with unusual frequency as far as clay-court is concerned. Out of nowhere, Roldan was among favorites to win the French Open, he advanced to the quarterfinal in which in a duel of two super-talented teenagers he was severely beaten by Andre Agassi's astonishing performance. After Roland Garros, Roldan was keeping good results on clay for several months, but didn't advance to the Top 10. For another few years he was still among the best clay-courters, but never returned to the 1988 form and a series of injuries forced him to retire at age of 24 (the '93 season, the same year also retired his collegue, five years older Jaite). After the three-year break Roldan came back to the circuit in 1996 to play a few events and the only good one he notched in Scheveningen (Challenger) reaching the semifinal. He popped up a few times later in meaningless events... Trivia: Roldan triumphed twice at Roland Garros as a junior (1986-87). No other junior defended his title in Paris.

Career record: 241–137 [138 events]
Career titles: 9
Highest ranking: No. 13 (September 1988)
Best GS result: Roland Garros (quarterfinal 1988)

...Born in the 70s...

Franco Davin (Argentina)

Born: January 11, 1970 in Pehuajo
Height: 1.73 m
Plays: Left-handed

Davin is mainly associated with very good players as their coach (the biggest successes - Gaston Gaudio won Roland Garros '04 and Juan M. Del Potro won US Open '09 under the Davin guidance). But he was to some degree a South American counterpart of Michael Chang. He was winning events of all age categories in his country, as a 13 year-old boy he could already defeat boys five years older. *"He had a very special ability and above all he was a responsible and obedient boy,"* recalled Carlos González, Davin's first tutor. He became the youngest Open Era player (15 years 1 month) to win a main-level match - it happened in Buenos Aires as he stunned Hans Gildemeister 4-6, 6-3, 6-4 as a 'wild card'. The same year, Davin reached major quarterfinals of two junior events. One year later, still competing in junior events, he reached his first "adult" final (Buenos Aires) defeating inter alia the best Argentinian player at the time - Martin Jaite. Exceptionally gifted left-handed Davin was too slim (around 60 kg) to conquer the tennis world, and like many other Argentinian players of that generation, unable to continue career as a young man. Actually, struggling with a shoulder injury, he was done already turning 25 (Guillermo Perez-Roldan 24 y.o., Alberto Mancini 25 y.o.) Trivia two out of three titles he collected destroyed Juan Aguilera in Italian finals (6-2, 6-2 in St. Vincent '89 and 6-1, 6-1 in Palermo '90). In 2020, Davin became one of the hundreds of thousands of COVID-19 victims: *"On the fourth or fifth day, I started coughing and short of breath. At night you start to despair a little. I had a bad time and you feel like you're dying.*

Career record: 153-155 [155 events]
Career titles: 3
Highest ranking: No. 30 (October 1990)
Best GS result: Roland Garros (quarterfinal 1991)

Magnus Larsson (Sweden)

Born: March 25, 1970 in Olofström
Height: 1.95 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

Very skillful player with inclination to choose unconventional solutions. His two main assets: serve and forehand. He had a great potential, displaying it in 1991 when defeated in the 3rd set tie-breaks the two best players in the world then: Boris Becker (Adelaide) and Steafn Edberg (Monte Carlo). Winning deciding tie-breaks was his domain in the first few years on the tour; in Estoril '93 he lost to Karel Novacek (6-7, 6-4, 6-7) his first match after winning twelve matches of this type in a row at the main-level. Larsson was a threat for the best players in the world of the early 90s, but he needed to wait until 1994 for his breakthrough. He advanced to the French Open semifinal winning an incredible match against the tournament sensation **Hendrik Dreekmann** (b. 1975), saving six match points in a 3rd set. That result allowed him participation in the season-ending Grand Slam Cup in Munich - the tournament of his life. Larsson, fresh after helping Sweden to beat Russia in the Davis Cup final, defeated the two best players of the 90s (Andre Agassi, Pete Sampras) as well as two other top players (Stefan Edberg, Todd Martin) and earned $1.625 million dollars for a four-match effort. It was plausible he would lose his motivation repeating David Wheaton's case. Larsson continued his great form in 1995. He hadn't achieved anything spectacular, but in the middle of the season he was a strong candidate to play at Masters. Unfortunately on June 15, 1995, he broke his leg in an exhibition match in Sweden against **Jan Gunnarsson** (b. 1962, Aussie Open '89 semifinalist). That injury sidelined him for six months, he dropped in the ranking and never regained his 1994-95 form, playing for another eight years. His movement was a bit limited, but the combination of miscellaneous serve and powerful forehand, made him a dangerous player mainly indoors. After a six-year drought, he won his last title in Memphis '00. There was a hope of restoring his career when the following week he reached the Copenhagen final eliminating a young Roger Federer, but the broken leg reminded itself. On August 14, 2000 he required another surgery to his right knee, and missed almost one year of competitive tennis. The years 2001-02 meant a slow going towards the end, in his last major Larsson played very good tennis taking a favorite to the title (Lleyton Hewitt) to five sets.

Career record:	310-221 [225 events]	Davis Cup champion 1994 & 1997
Career titles:	7	Grand Slam Cup Cup champion 1994
Highest ranking:	No. 10 (April 1995)	
Best GS results:	Roland Garros (semifinalist 1994), US Open (quarterfinalist 1993, 97 & 98)	

Jason Stoltenberg (Australia)

Born: April 4, 1970 in Narrabri
Height: 1.85 m
Plays: Right-handed

He began playing tennis relatively late, at age 10 on a court where his father owned a cotton farm in the Far West (the bush) of New South Wales. He learned quickly though, and was among the best juniors of the world in singles & doubles (along with Todd Woodbridge). In 1987 he played at least semifinal in all biggest junior events. The following year he began to play quite regularly on the professional tour, and paradoxically it was his less successful year in juniors. In the US Open '88 he reached the third round, also in the Aussie Open '89 having defeated in those events top players of the 80s like Yannick Noah & Anders Jarryd so it seemed that it'd be a matter of time seeing him regularly in the major quarterfinals or better. Nothing like that happened, his very promising career slowed down in 1989 after he played his first main-level final in Livingston. He needed to wait until 1994 to finally deliver results expected from him already in 1989 or 1990. There were two important factors that stopped his smooth progress: serious back problems & worsening sight. Stoltenberg decided to play in glasses (later on in contact lenses), it decreased his self-confidence. He was the hottest player in the Summer of '94 winning 19 out of 24 matches; in the meantime he defeated top guys like Jim Courier & Andre Agassi, but in the US Open he was beaten by **Andrei Olhovskiy** (b. 1966) in the first round despite easily winning the first two sets. It was the third consecutive Slam when he lost in five sets within a few points of winning. Unfortunately, Stoltenberg had a similar problem to his countryman and friend from the junior years - Richard Fromberg. These two Australians couldn't properly deal with tight situations on a regular basis. Fromberg was haunted by demons against inferior guys, he hadn't skills to put himself in a position to beat the best players in the world just like Stoltenberg. There were matches lost by Stoltenberg 8/10, 10/12 or 11/13 in deciding tie-breaks (twice lost that way to Daniel Vacek). Achievemophobia - fear of success, I suppose it affected him a lot. Excellent technician, one of the most beautiful one-handed backhands of the 90s; he could apply serve-and-volley tactics or stay back to give you an impression that both styles were very natural for him. In his long career, extended over three decades, he played almost thirty five-setters, defeated many excellent players (three consecutive, tight wins over Goran Ivanisevic), took part in the Davis Cup final (1993) and notched one Grand Slam semifinal - the majority of players may only dream about career of this type, but in

his case it's actually a minimum he could achieve given his skills and results obtained in his teenage years. Trivia: Stoltenberg played eleven main-level finals in his career on three different continents, but always in cities with English as a predominant language.

Career record: 303–267 [264 events]
Career titles: 4
Highest ranking: No. 19 (October 1994)
Best GS result: Wimbledon (semifinalist 1996)

Jan Siemerink (Netherlands)

Born: April 14, 1970 in Rijnsburg
Height: 1.83 m
Plays: Left-handed

Once I heard that he was supposed to be an excellent footballer, ultimately he chose tennis though, and turned to an Ajax Amsterdam supporter. In 1988 he became the Dutch champion in singles and soon afterwards, along with other young players: Paul Haarhuis, Jacco Eltingh & Richard Krajicek, he co-created "golden age of Dutch tennis". In collective consciousness, the players like Stefan Edberg, Tim Henman and Patrick Rafter were the most frequent visitors at the net in the 90s but Siemerink was there even more often. I remember him as the most attacking player of the 90s, he used to apply serve-and-volley tactics also behind the second serves on clay, and in the returning games he loved to play cheap & charge; it was very natural for him because during baseline rallies he was using an open backhand only from time to time, when attacked by an opponent. Fantastic volley skills allowed him to beat the best players in the world, or playing tight matches against them; Siemerink never beat Pete Sampras (five meetings), Jim Courier (three meetings) & Thomas Muster (five meetings), but played against them tight matches; vs Sampras a decisive tie-break in Hong Kong '96, the Dutchman was twice within several points from defeating Courier in "the best of five" format, vs Muster he played an all-tie-break three-setter in Cincy '97. Siemerink's mediocre forehand, and stable, but insufficient backhand prevented him from achieving bigger results. Trivia: Siemerink was relatively close to becoming the only Open Era man to win a match saving six straight match points! In an all-Dutchmen duel of the US Open '94 first round on court no. 16, he won the 4th set tie-break against Krajicek 10/8 despite a 0:6 deficit (seven match points in total), and in the decider he led 1:0* (40/0) when Krajicek seemed distraught, ready

to lose it 0-6. Krajicek mentally recovered with the help of big serves and survived it 7-6, 6-4, 6-7, 6-7, 6-4 winning the last three games of the match!

Career record: 273–272 [266 events]
Career titles: 4
Highest ranking: No. 14 (October 1998)
Best GS result: Wimbledon (quarterfinalist 1998)

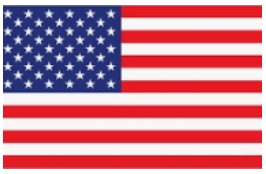
Richard Fromberg (Australia)

Born: April 28, 1970 in Ulverstone
Height: 1.95 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

Untypical Australian - the shortest characteristic of the tall guy from Tasmania. Until the appearance of Lleyton Hewitt, all Australians were automatically associated with serve-and-volleyers, it had been a very long tradition reaching the times before the Open Era. The eleven years older than Hewitt, Fromberg was an exception, the more surprising that he was tall, thus serve-and-volley could seem more natural for him than for example for Todd Woodbridge, who belonged to the same generation of talented youngsters from Down Under, along with Jason Stoltenberg & Patrick Rafter. It's interesting that in that group Rafter was the only one who didn't successfully enter the main-level as a teenager, but enjoyed the most profitable career. Once, I heard that Fromberg developed his gamestyle as a baseliner because he wasn't tall until turned sixteen. Thanks to the defensive mode, in the early 90s he achieved better results on clay than his compatriots. Rather clumsy, drowsily moving on the court, his serve was not impressive, but with a good geometric implementation, sometimes he was serving many aces with the speed of just 150-170 kph. Better results were foiled by changeable mentality, similarly to Stoltenberg, Fromberg (both surnames of similar origins 'berg' - "mountain" in Germanic languages) had periods in his career when was losing tight matches more often than winning them. Both "Bergs" represented Australia in the Davis Cup '93 final against Germany. They were heavy underdogs, but Fromberg won his singles rubber after an amazing 4-hour 32-minute battle against Mark-Kevin Goellner (saving match points in sets three & five); two days later had no chance though against the inspired Michael Stich. For Fromberg it was a second Davis Cup final (following against the United States in 1990) which is remarkable for someone who never advanced to the Top 20.

Career record: 256–287 [287 events]
Career titles: 4 **Highest ranking:** No. 23 (August 1990)
Best GS result: Australian Open (fourth round in 1993 & 1998)

Andre Agassi (USA)



Born: April 29, 1970 in Las Vegas
Height: 1.80 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

A prodigy, he was just 4 years-old when was hitting the ball with the top players in the world at the time: Ilie Nastase, Harold Solomon & teenage Bjorn Borg. His father (Emanoul Aghassian, former professional boxer who represented Iran at the Olympics in 1948 and 1952) put the balls already to his cradle. Aghassian described his three older children as "guinea pigs" in the development of the methods he used to mold Andre into a world-class player. The young Agassi was the most exciting player to watch in the late 80s, he was so good at the age of 18 (six titles of 1988) that many could perceive him as the best player in history. His baseline shots off both wings were furious, he brought a big novelty to the tour, no-one before him was able to play so aggressively standing inside the court, longer balls flying towards him made no problem due to his awesome coordination, he could be labelled as the most offensive baseliner ever. The year 1989 meant a setback though; instead of winning his first majors, Agassi dropped in the ATP ranking, and some imperfections were visible in his tennis:

- landing on right leg after the serve
- very chaotic game-style (low % of first serves in, unprepared attacks to the net, receiving 2nd serves going backwards, too much energy in the first two hours)
- front-runner; he was winning many matches easily, but once he had a worse day, he was discouraged, reluctant to change anything in his tactics, reluctant to fight... he was giving an impression "I want to win on my terms: if I cannot, I prefer to lose instead of winning ugly". I have no doubt that Agassi is the second best player of the 90s (behind Pete Sampras) and arguably a Top 5 Open Era player among those who have retired, mainly given his longevity - he's a multiple Grand Slam champion, but looking backwards there are two different options of his career quite possible:

1) he could indeed become the best in history (at least for the time he finished his career)
2) he could have achieved much less if hadn't found inside himself the will to seek new solutions, and start again

The setbacks of the year 1989 meant nothing comparing to that what happened to Agassi in 1993 (he dropped to No. 31) and in 1997 (he dropped to No. 141 - appeared in Challengers for the first time since his teenage years which must have been quite

humiliating for someone who just two years before became the best player in the world!) Agassi virtually reached the tennis pinnacle for the first time at the end of 1990 - in impressive style he conquered 'Masters', in the last two matches defeating the two best guys at the time, then he won the opening rubber of the Davis Cup final and the USA defeated Australia already on Saturday. There was no question that Agassi with improved serve would be destined to win his maiden Grand Slam title, it was not meant to be though. It was not so easy also because of Agassi's schedule - in the first few years of his career, he was avoiding trips to Australia (skipped the event in the years 1988-94!) and Great Britain (skipped Wimbledon in the years 1988-90). Paradoxically, his first major triumph came on the surface Agassi was afraid of after a lesson he got from Henri Leconte at Wimbledon '87. In 1991 he signaled that he mastered his ground-strokes from the baseline, almost advancing to the semifinal (dramatic, strange defeat to David Wheaton). The following year he defeated the grass-court elite in his last three matches, first Boris Becker & John McEnroe - former multiple champions of the event, then the future champ - Goran Ivanisevic, even though the Croat seemed unstoppable serving better than anyone in the past during the fortnight. Two separate years of Agassi's career that deserve special mention are 1995 & 1999. In 1995, his second coach (Brad Gilbert replaced Nick Bollettieri) finished his career, fully focusing on his first of three "Andrews", and finally Sampras - after the years of his total domination (1993-94) - had a serious rival. Their amazing rivalry of the mid 90s began in Paris' 94 and lasted until the US Open '95 final when Agassi was a slight favorite, but lost in four sets and that defeat pushed him away from finishing the year on the top. In 1999, triumphing at Roland Garros in amazingly dramatic circumstances as far as the entire event is concerned, Agassi became the first fully Open Era player to win all four majors! The others to win all Slams in a career were Fred Perry, Don Budge, Roy Emerson and Rod Laver. Budge and Laver (twice) did it in the same year. Laver came down to the court to present the trophy to Agassi. *"To be assigned a place with some of the game's greatest players is an honor I'll have the rest of my life."* Agassi said in tears, *"I never dreamed I'd ever be back here after so many years, I'm so proud. I'll never forget this, I'll never forget this. I'm very blessed."* There are two blocks in Agassi's splendid career distinguished by his hair or the lack of it: 1986-94 when he was long-haired and chaotic in almost everything he was doing on court, and 1995-2006 (under Darren Cahill, who had replaced Gilbert, became the oldest player ever to be ranked world no. 1 in May 2003) when he was bald and merciless in enforcing tactical assumptions; regardless of two-faced Agassi, he was always admired all over the world at times very controversial (defaulted twice, should have been defaulted a few times more).

Career record: 870–274 [320 events]
Career titles: 60
Highest ranking: No. 1 (April 1995)
Best GS results:
Australian Open (champion 1995, 2000-01, 2003; semifinal 1996 & 04; quarterfinal '05)
Roland Garros (champion 1999; runner-up 1990-91; semifinal 1988 & 92; quarterfinal 1995, 2001-03)
Wimbledon (champion 1992; runner-up 1999; semifinal 1995, 00-01; quarterfinal 1991 & 93)

US Open
(champion1994, 99; runner-up 1990, 95, 02, 05; semifinal 1988-89, 96 & 03; quarterfinal 92, 01, 04)

Masters champion 1990
Davis Cup champion 1990, 92 & 95 (didn't play in the final)
Olympic Gold medal 1996

Year-end ranking 1986-2005: 91-25-3-7-4-10-9-24-2-2-8-110-6-1-6-3-2-4-8-7-150

Renzo Furlan (Italy)

Born: May 17, 1970 in Conegliano
Height: 1.75 m
Plays: Right-handed

Untypical surname for an Italian because of Slovenian origin. Small town were Furlan was born belongs to the Veneto region which doesn't border to Slovenia though (*Friuli Venezia Giulia* separates those lands; *Furlanija Julijska krajina* in Slovenian, actually bears a certain resemblance to the surname of the Italian player)... A few years ago I juxtaposed more than hundreds of players with specific criteria, trying to find the answer to this question: "Who's mentally the toughest?" I wasn't surprised that at the top of the list were players like Bjorn Borg, Rafael Nadal, Novak Djokovic & Andy Murray, but it struck me that Furlan was among them. If he had been mentally so tough, why wouldn't he have achieved better results? There's some paradox involved in replying to this question. A logical assumption is that it's more difficult to defeat a better player at higher stakes, but this logic doesn't apply to Furlan. The Italian had a fantastic 10-2 record in deciding 3rd set tie-breaks as far as main-level is concerned, but an abysmal 2-10 when we look at his Challenger matches! So... 10-2 in those tie-breaks, 10-3 in five-setters and 23-12 in 'two-game away matches' made Furlan a 'mental giant'... in the tennis second league. But... for example he won his maiden title (San Jose '94) defeating [9] Michael Chang 3-6, 6-3, 7-5, in Davis Cup rubbers he defeated in five sets Albert Costa [12] and Thomas Enqvist [15] thus it's not that he built some meaningless good numbers only on players of his calibre or inferior. Furlan once advanced to a Grand Slam quarterfinal, the draw helped, he defeated three out four players who were outside the Top 100, including two qualifiers. Elegant player in terms of his style, generally baseliner, but I remember his match in Antwerp '96 against Jan Siemerink when he figured out that slice backhand of the Dutchman was weaker as a return that a stroke during rallies and won in straight sets attacking the

net constantly behind the serve pointing the weaker side, even the second serve! In the mid 90s when Furlan and Andrea Gaudenzi were the best Italian players, a left-handed **Gianluca Pozzi** (b. 1965, one title) was improving despite his arachic tennis, rather evoking the 80s. Pozzi is a rare case of player who made some highlights of his career after he turned 35: best major appearance (fourth round at Wimbledon 2000), highest ranking (no. 40 in 2001), and defeating the best player in the world (Andre Agassi at Queens Club '00, Agassi retired in the 2nd set, but a win is a win, regardless of how you look at it.

Career record:	223-239 [235 events]
Career titles:	2
Highest ranking:	No. 19 (April 1996)
Best GS result:	Roland Garros (quarterfinal 1995)

Andrei Cherkasov (Russia)

Born: July 4 1970 in Ufa (Soviet Union)
Height: 1.80 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

Андрей Черкасов

Big wasted talent, an example of someone who suddenly disappeared in a way tough to explain not knowing details of the private life. Cherkasov was a very successful junior, in 1987 he played two big finals (US Open, Orange Bowl) and smoothly made a transition to the adult tennis. Already a 20-year-old player, he had won his maiden title and reached two Grand Slam quarterfinals. *"It is very good that I managed to win at home and I think my victory will attract more people to the sport,"* said the 20-year-old Cherkasov after claiming the first of his two Moscow titles. *"I hope that more courts will be built and more people will now have the opportunity to play."* The career slowed down in the next two years, but still he could count on becoming a Top 10 player defeating the best guys in important events: Boris Becker (Brussels), Guy Forget (Indian Wells), Stefan Edberg (Roland Garros), finally Pete Sampras (Olympics in Barcelona) - that dramatic win (Cherkasov was two games away from a 0-3 defeat) helped to get the bronze medal - the biggest achievement in his career. He was just 24 when a sudden decline occurred and he spent the rest of his career mainly participating in the Challenger events until he got his 30s. Trivia: Cherkasov saved three match points in a 3-hour, 54-minute quarter-final victory over Andrea Gaudenzi in Tel Aviv, surviving 6-7,

7-6, 7-5 in what was the longest best-of-three set match in tour history for a long time. He also fend off two match points in the final of Moscow (7-6, 3-6, 7-6 over Jakob Hlasek), defending the title, second and last title in his career, in 1993 he added two ATP finals to his resume.

Career record:	193–214 [202 events]
Career titles:	2
Highest ranking:	No. 13 (June 1991)
Best GS results:	Australian Open (quarterfinalist 1990) Roland Garros (quarterfinalist 1992) US Open (quarterfinalist 1990)

Bronze medal at the Olympics 1992

Todd Martin (USA)

Born: July 8, 1970 in Hinsdale, Illinois
Height: 1.98 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

I watched that almost two-meter guy for the first time at the US Open '92. At the main arena, during the night session he lost to one year younger, but much more experienced Pete Sampras, but my overall impression was that Martin should have won, simply the crucial points separated them. I was surprised how a 22-year-old player with such a good serve, good net coverage and exquisite returns entered the Top 100 for the first time just before the US Open. The following year confirmed Martin's big potential, he moved from no. 90 to 13 notching good results on each surface (including American clay; on clay in Europe he played only in Paris). Martin was a top 10'er in the years 1993-97 having defeated all the best players in the world in those years, but the lack of winning at least one big title spoiled his career. A serious elbow injury forced him not to play for eight months, he dropped from no. 12 to 81. Generally speaking clay was Martin's worst surface, yet he won his arguably biggest title on that surface after a two-year break from the previous title - Barcelona '98. What's more astonishing, he convincingly defeated in Barcelona six players who could say "clay is my fave surface". Martin was a hell of a fighter, he came back nine times from 0-2 in sets, but he also suffered almost unimaginable two defeats on Centre Court at Wimbledon: against fellow Americans: MaliVai Washington (1996) and Andre Agassi (2000), Martin lost those matches despite double break advantage in fifth sets. With his serve? Admittedly his height was a bit misleading (big head), anyway he knew how

to win on serve games quickly with a mix of aces, service winner & volleys. He could be even a leader in the stats of the fastest servers for a while as he struck 220 kph in Paris-Bercy (1993), the contemporary record was 5 kph slower, Martin's serve landed outside the service box though. Well-liked among other players, in 1998 he was chosen a president of ATP. It was the time of his second opening; he couldn't be as consistent as before the injury, but as a veteran he reached his second Grand Slam final - US Open '99, in which he led 2-1 in sets vs Agassi.

Career record:	411–234 [230 events]
Career titles:	8
Highest ranking:	No. 4 (September 1999)
Best GS results:	Australian Open (runner-up 1994) Wimbledon (semifinalist 1994, 1996) US Open (runner-up 1999)

Davis Cup champion 1995 (played doubles in the final)

Slava Doseděl (Czechia)

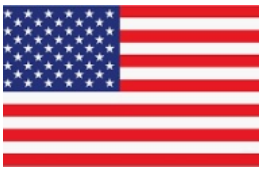
Born: August 14, 1970 in Přerov (Czechoslovakia)
Height: 1.82 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

The real name - Ctislav, but he modified it to 'Slava' because people outside Czechoslovakia couldn't get close to pronounce it correctly. The first few years as a pro, he was playing at the Challenger level - for example in Poznań he showed his fighting spirit defeating **Dimitri Poliakov** from a 1-6, 1:5 deficit! Clay-courts suited him the most which was quite surprising given his interesting game-style: he was playing flat shots off both wings, attacking the net quite often directly behind the return which was unusual for someone constructing the majority of points from the back. He finally achieved a very good result on hardcourts at the US Open '99 - eliminated inter alia Jim Courier and Jiri Novak, before losing a tight four-setter to Todd Martin. His other best results are semifinal in Rome '94 (defeated respectively: Arnaud Boetsch, Andrei Medvedev & Courier - all Top 20 players at the time) and triumph in Munich '96 after a semifinal victory from a match point down against Boris Becker. Two serious injuries restrained him from advancement to the Top 20 - shoulder in 1995 and back the following year. Not lucky in the Davis Cup ties, four times lost the decisive rubbers (vs Russia, Italy, Belgium & USA). Trivia: always

playing in a headband, using a racket with a painted smile... 4-1 H2H against Courier... two of his three titles collected defeating Carlos Moya in the finals (Munich '96, Amsterdam '97)... appeared in a 1999 Czech movie titled *"Voda života"*, telling the life of Vincent Priessnitz who found a cure for high fever during the 19th century... quite peculiar was Dosedel's service motion because before tossing the ball he didn't touch it to the frame of the racquet.

Career record:	196–193 [188 events]
Career titles:	3
Highest ranking:	No. 26 (10 October 1994)
Best GS result:	US Open (quarterfinal 1999)

Jim Courier (USA)



Born: August 17, 1970 in Sanford, Florida
Height: 1.85 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

Courier grew up in Dae City, very small town (population of 6.5 thousand) and was introduced to tennis by Emma Spencer, a great aunt who ran "Dreamworld Tennis Club" in Sanford. *"Tennis was a fun thing to do with my family and I didn't dream too far in the future in the early days,"* Courier said. *"We watched some tennis on television, but it wasn't something that I had an early idea of pursuing as a profession. I wasn't one of those kids pretending to hit a shot to "Win Wimbledon" on the wall like you hear about."* At the age of 14, Courier moved to Nick Bollettieri's realm, and became one of the most promising boys of his academy along with his roommate Andre Agassi, and one year older David Wheaton. Even though Courier was an accomplished junior (won Orange Bowl twice: under 16 in 1986 & under 18 in 1987), at the turn of the 80s and 90s the media attention was drawn to three other amazing U.S. teenagers: Agassi, Michael Chang & Pete Sampras - Courier's doubles partner. The man from Florida occupied no. 4 among those youngsters when the year 1990 was finished, but the beginning of the 90s belonged to him... Courier was the best player in the world, actually for more than two years while his ranking reflected it by 58 weeks on the top at four different periods of the years 1992-93. Courier's rise to the top initiated a combo Indian Wells-Key Biscayne in March of '91. The American won back-to-back titles, then shockingly lost two matches in his Davis Cup debut against Mexico (**Leonardo Lavalle**, b. 1967 and **Luis Herrera**, b. 1971 - both from the Top 50 level);

the USA team won the tie 3-2 anyway, and for another 13 ties the Americans never lost with Courier as a team member (he would lose another two rubbers in the 1995 final against Russia), until 1999 when they were beaten by the Australians. Courier became the youngest player (aged 22) to reach finals of all four majors, and the first man since Rod Laver in 1969, to reach the finals of the Australian, French and Wimbledon in the same season; the feat was not matched until 2006 by Roger Federer. There were two main factors that contributed to Courier's ascendency: his top-spin forehand and great physical preparation. He was like a mental hammer for his opponents, he could hurt them consequently with his forehand for a long time during a match; either from the back of the court wearing them down, or passing them - Stefan Edberg, the ranking leader of the years 1990-91, suffered four major defeats to Courier at three different venues (always in four sets), in the years 1992-93, even at Wimbledon where it seemed Courier's returns and passing-shots wouldn't be as efficient as on slower surfaces, meanwhile Courier defeated Edberg in those 4-setters everywhere in similarly convincing style. 1992 was owned by Courier, who reached the top advancing to the San Francisco final. *"I was stressed out about it,"* recalled Courier in his semifinal against Derrick Rostagno. *"I was very aware of the situation. I just wanted to get there for one week. Derrick was a tricky, dangerous fast-court player and I had to grind my way through that match to get to No. 1. I was battling Derrick as well as the ranking and it was as much of a relief as it was a thrill to win the last point and get to the top of the rankings mountain."* But already the first two weeks on the top, showed some weaknesses, I mean his inability to win matches in very dramatic circumstances. On one hand he was cool & collected like Bjorn Borg, pretending that nothing would distract his focus, on the other hand something was missing in his game, something which is very difficult to describe, but Courier's MP-up defeats in back-to-back events to Boris Becker (Brussels) and Goran Ivanisevic (Stuttgart) were very telling. Nevertheless, Courier was able to avoid the tightest scenarios on clay in 1992, and after winning two Asian titles on hard, Rome & French Open (for the second straight year), he was perceived as a title contender at Wimbledon - was ousted by a qualifier **Andrei Olhovskiy** (b. 1966) losing his 25-match winning streak. It was a huge blow for his morale, especially that other baseliner Agassi, won the title. That year conditions were favorable, the edition being relatively poor in rain slowing the game down. In the second part of the season Courier was struggling with his form (shocking loss to the eventual champion Marc Rosset at the Olympics in Barcelona on clay; Courier was a huge favorite to get the golden medal), but the end of it was successful (final in Masters, Davis Cup triumph - Courier won the clincher) and the year 1993 kicked off just like a year before, with an Australian Open title after another final victory over Edberg. Courier advanced to the Wimbledon '93 final which he lost to Sampras, and was never the same afterwards. Borg and Mats Wilander were burn out as 24-year-olds, Courier being one year younger, however, to a lesser extent. In 1994 the man from Florida reached two major semifinals, but he didn't win a title that year (only two finals in average events) and dropped outside the Top 10. The following year

marked some sort of Courier's resurgence, but his former doubles partner Sampras, who'd overthrown him, was already beyond reach. Between Hong Kong '93 and Rome '97, they met ten times and Sampras left the court nine times as a victor. The following decade would bring something similar in Federer's confrontations against Lleyton Hewitt & Andy Roddick; there are examples when a more gifted player simply has all the answers against very tough opponents who try everything, only to fail, even when the score is tight. In the second half of the 90s, Courier turned into a very solid, yet predictable player. Actually after Roland Garros '94 when lost his status of the King of Clay after a defeat to Sergi Bruguera, he was never considered as a major threat, to the end of career he was claiming titles only in tournaments corresponding with today's ATP 500 & ATP 250. He decided to quit at the beginning of 2000 when he turned 30. In the years 2010-18 he served as a captain of the Davis Cup team for America. Courier had led his country with a modest 10-8 record during his captaincy (two semifinals). Trivia: Courier lost his first five meetings with Andrei Chesnokov, 4-6 in the end (four of those defeats when Courier was within a few points from winning).

Career record: 506–237 [241 events]
Career titles: 23
Highest ranking: No. 1 (February 1992)
Best GS results:
Australian Open (champion 1992-93; semifinal 1994; quarterfinal 1995-96)
Roland Garros (champion 1991-92; runner-up 1993; semifinal 1994; quarterfinal 1996)
Wimbledon (runner-up 1993; quarterfinal 1991)
US Open (runner-up 1991; semifinal 1992 & 95)

Masters runner-up 1991-92
Davis Cup champion 1992 & 95

Year-end ranking 1987-2000: 346-43-24-25-2-1-3-13-8-26-21-77-32-290

Jacco Eltingh (Netherlands)

Born: August 29, 1970 in Heerde
Height: 1.88 m
Plays: Right-handed

Eltingh, despite relatively modest singles achievements, is an interesting figure because he won all his four titles on four different surfaces (in all finals he participated!). Not every successful player is able to win events on grass and clay, even some of the best players in history couldn't do that: Boris Becker on clay, Jim Courier & Thomas Muster on grass, Parick Rafter on clay & indoors. Eltingh's career was short and actually cursed at the beginning of 1996 when he was only 26 and suffered an injury (patella tendinitis in both knees). After a three-month break he came back to play occasionally in singles, but still remained one of the best doubles players partnering Paul Haarhuis - they won together all Grand Slam tournaments and Masters. With Masters '98, Eltingh finished his career at the age of 28 firing an ace on match point against **Mark Knowles** (three major doubles titles) / Daniel Nestor (eight major doubles titles). Awesome farewell given the fact he became the best doubles player in the world thanks to that triumph. *"I think I'll go out and have five, six or seven beers. Who cares? I don't have to stay in shape anymore"* he stated. Earlier in 1998 he became a father, it contributed to his decision to quit at the peak of his doubles career... In contrast to his doubles partner Haarhuis, in singles Eltingh was a persistent serve-and-volley guy, just like his peers Jan Siemerink & Richard Krajicek. Regardless of the surface he was eager to attack the net after first and second serves, displaying great volley skills, especially his forehand stop-volley is worth mentioning. Thomas Muster called him "clown" after losing a third round match at Australian Open '95. The Austrian was furious because the Dutchman was attacking the net often with a forehand slice as an approach shot. Trivia: he defeated Pete Sampras twice with the same scoreline (7-6, 6-4) when the American was No. 1 (Atlanta '93 & Philadelphia '94). Really remarkable feat for someone who lost more matches than won...

Career record: 127-147 [145 events]
Career titles: 4
Highest ranking: No. 19 (February 1995)
Best GS results: Australian Open (quarterfinal 1995)
Wimbledon (quarterfinal 1995)

Mark-Kevin Göllner (Germany)

Born: September 22, 1970 in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil)
Height: 1.95 m
Plays: Right-handed

I watched him for the first time during his Bundesliga match in 1992. He must have been somewhere outside the Top 100 then, with a little main-level experience, and I thought "how is it possible that this guy with such a powerful serve & forehand doesn't regularly play in the ATP tournaments?". From that perspective I wasn't shocked when Goellner claimed his maiden title in April '93 triumphing in Nice as a qualifier, having defeated two great Top 10 players in his last two matches (Stefan Edberg & Ivan Lendl). Suddenly he established himself as the third player in Germany behind Boris Becker & Michael Stich. He was the first player with a baseball cap wearing backwards, Adidas signed a contract, showing an advertisement with him. There was a media hype about Goellner inside and outside Germany. In a big event in Hamburg he defeated another Top 10 player (Michael Chang) and within a few tournaments from a guy who had been trying to avoid playing qualies at Roland Garros '93 he got the Centre Court for his first round match against David Wheaton! Very unusual situation that the main attention was created around players ranked 33 & 48 when neither of them was French. Goellner survived it in five to get another Top 10 win (Petr Korda, the '92 runner-up). Ultimately Goellner was eliminated in the fourth round by another contemporary sensation (Andrei Medvedev) and for another eleven years of his career he never played the last 16 at majors again! A star of one season, the magic evaporated after 1993, similar case with Carlos Costa a year before, who achieved more being less desired by the media though. Nevertheless Goellner won something bigger than Costa - Davis Cup, mainly thanks to Stich's amazing form that year. Despite a very bitter defeat in the final (wasted match points in two different sets against Richardf Fromberg), Goellner highly contributed to the Davis Cup triumph, defeating in four sets Korda (quarterfinal) and Edberg (semifinal).

Career record: 160–194 [191 events]
Career titles: 2
Highest ranking: No. 26 (April 1994)
Best GS result: Roland Garros (fourth round in 1993)

Davis Cup champion 1993

Marc Rosset (Switzerland)

Born: November 7, 1970 in Geneva
Height: 2.01 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

Similarly to David Wheaton, to me Rosset is a heavy underachiever as far as the 90s are concerned. He could belong to the strict elite with his potential, he could participate in a few "Masters" events, maybe he could become a Grand Slam champion. In Wheaton's case it was Munich '91 - an event which caused the lack of motivation for the years to come, Rosset celebrated the biggest success of his life a few months later when he triumphed at the Olympics in Barcelona. Since 1990 Rosset was considered as one of the most promising youngsters, but he was disappointing, especially at majors, so rather no-one could expect that in the "best of five" format, the lazy Swiss would advance to the medal zone, especially that in the third round Rosset was supposed to face Jim Courier, a man who had won Rome & French Open that year. The scoreline was much more shocking than the fact Rosset left the court as a winner: 6-4, 6-2, 6-1. Asked if it appeared to him that Courier gave up toward the end, Rosset nodded and said: *"Yeah, I think so. The first set was pretty close, then I won the second. When I broke him to go up, 4:0, in the third, he didn't try hard anymore. He was just trying to get the points over with."* Regardless of Courier's mental problems in Summer '92, it must have been a huge confidence booster for the 22-year-old Rosset, who won another three matches against dangerous opponents, and kissed the most precious medal. Generally it was an amazing, patriotic year for Rosset, in doubles with fellow Swiss (Jakob Hlasek) he won his only major title in doubles, and actually only these two players helped Switzerland to reach the first Davis Cup final, in which Rosset defeated the best player in the world, Courier, once again, that time in a dramatic five-setter. That year gave Rosset much more that he could wish for when the season 1991 was finished because that year he didn't reach even one ATP final having won two titles as a teenager, and towards the end of the year, he was losing quick matches indoors to average players, despite possessing one of the fastest serves. Watching Rosset many times in the 90s, I usually had an impression that he was treating tennis like a good entertainment; he used to interact with the crowd, liked to be applauded for his football skills... his two most basic shots (serve & forehand) were in loose Top 10 of the 90s, so even when he didn't try too much, those two

shots won for them plenty of matches. Sometimes his serve was very problematic because the nonchalant Rosset, similarly to Goran Ivanisevic, had an inclination to risk the second delivery a lot... the best example comes from Stuttgart '93. In the 3rd set against Michael Stich, Rosset led 5:4 (40/15) and committed two double faults in a row, evidently trying to fire an ace in the end, and lost 6-7, 6-3, 5-7! Two years later Rosset avenged that loss, upsetting Stich 3-6, 7-6(11), 7-6(8) in the Halle final; in the 2nd set Rosset saved three match points in the tie-break at *5:6, 7:8 & 9:10... in the 3rd set he escaped from *5:6 (15/40), saved another MP in that game & the seventh (last one) at *6:7 in the decisive tie-break! After 1992, Rosset played his best tennis just twice, and on both occasions it happened in Paris, first at Paris-Bercy '94 when he reached the final on carpet, then at Roland Garros '96 on clay when advanced to the semifinal - in both events having defeated several top players. Towards the end of his career, he was playing mainly in Challengers, so something rather not seen from older players who felt the atmosphere of the biggest tennis arenas. Especially interesting was a Challenger held in Prague '03 - Rosset won the title with the last two wins after identical scorelines (7-6, 6-7, 7-6). Trivia: the Swiss won the most matches of his career in a row in 2000, when he claimed back-to-back titles indoors (Marseille & London) - after them he lost four successive matches.

Career record:	433–351 [350 events]
Career titles:	15
Highest ranking:	No. 9 (September 1995)
Best GS results:	Australian Open (quarterfinal 1999) Roland Garros (semifinal 1996)

Olympic Gold medal (Barcelona '92)

Sergi Bruguera (Spain)

Born: January 16, 1971 in Barcelona
Height: 1.87 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

Full name: Sergi Bruguera Torner... The Spanish tennis waited eighteen years for another major title (Manuel Orantes won the US Open 1975). In the meantime the best Spanish players Jose Higueras & Emilio Sanchez reached the top 10, but they were never considered as serious contenders to triumph at Slams, Bruguera wasn't actually considered either. Admittedly the Catalan showed up as a teenager, in Hamburg 1989 he almost defeated a nineteen years older Jimmy Connors (5-7, 6-3, 5-7), and already a week later he avenged that defeat crushing the 38-year-old legend 6-1, 6-1 in Rome. *"It is the very best result of my career,"* said Bruguera, *"I am super happy. It's a wonderful feeling. I always dreamed of playing and beating Connors. He was No. 1 for so long and when I was a child he was my idol."* That scoreline clearly suggested big potential as well as Bruguera's sensation straight-set first round win over top seed Stefan Edberg in the French Open '90. Bruguera was struggling with consistency though, in Monte Carlo '91 he claimed his first big title, but at Roland Garros the same year he left the event already after two rounds (injury), the following year an agering Ivan Lendl destroyed him in the opener. In 1993 he was finally consistent in the clay-court tournaments after five straight defeats (two very painful vs the Netherlands in the Davis Cup first round): quarterfinal in Estoril, final in Barcelona, title in Monte Carlo, final in Madrid, quarterfinal in Rome & three matches won at World Team Cup led him to the second major in the year. So before Roland Garros' 93 he had lost four tournament-matches on clay, but only to quality opponents. In Paris his potential exploded, he reached the final in style characteristic for the great Bjorn Borg at the turn of 70s/80s, including a triple bagel over the former quarterfinalist Thierry Champion! That easy route certainly helped him in the final - Bruguera had spent 5.5 hours fewer than the double-defending champion Jim Courier. Bruguera snapped Courier's 20-match winning streak at Roland Garros after a four-hour battle. When he quite comfortably defended his title in 1994, it seemed he'd rule in Paris the entire decade. There was absolutely nothing impressive in Bruguera's tennis though, just patience and heavy top-spins off both wings. He's a tall man, but his serve (especially the second one) usually worked as an introduction to a rally (average 1st serve around 150 kph when

the guys of his height were serving 30 kph faster), his volley skills just average. I'd say that another Spanish top dog Juan Carlos Ferrero was "Bruguera 2.0", Rafael Nadal? - "Bruguera 4.0", even Alex Corretja who never won a major, in my opinion had more to offer than Bruguera. Yet the Catalan somehow found a golden formula of efficiency in the mid 90s. Well, I'd say that from a point of view of his tennis weaponry, he's the weakest double champion at Slams. He was constructing the majority of his points 3-4 meters behind the baseline, hitting the ball with moderate top-spin pace 2-3 meters over the net with an attitude "I want to play one more ball over the net more than you, and if you are not so patient, I'll pass you". His passing-shots (off both wings) were his only asset. His records against the best serve-and-volleyers of the 90s speak for themselves - he defeated several times them all, even though his returns couldn't hurt them, especially from the forehand slice (he was using the slice a lot just to keep the ball in play). Ultimately the best records Bruguera created against Patrick Rafter (6-2, a win even on grass!) and Pete Sampras (3-2) as far as attacking players are concerned. Among Bruguera's 14 titles there's only one claimed on a surface other than clay; it happened on hardcourts in Bordeaux '93, in the final against "lucky loser" Diego Nargiso (b. 1970, very talented Italian junior, who failed as a pro), for whom it was a career-best result. I have to admit Bruguera tried to adjust his clay-court game to other surfaces, and he reached the final stages of big events on hard and carpet, nonetheless, apart from Roland Garros, he never played a major quarterfinal... In 1995, as a double defending champion, he lost in the semis, rather unexpectedly to Michael Chang, and afterwards he was never the same. Enough said, that after 1994 he never won another title, playing professional tennis until 2002. I don't know how to explain it, maybe with his technical/tactical limitations he needed to play all the time with maximum of his physical and mental reserves, and being aware of that as a teenager he was dreaming - like all distinctive clay-courters - to triumph one day in Paris, at age of 23 he already had two French Open titles under his belt. It could contribute to decreasing his dedication & motivation. Anyway, in the times of his steady downhill, everything clicked for him thrice, up to the big finals: he lost them in straight sets at the Olympics in Atlanta '96, Key Biscayne '97 and Roland Garros '97. In the aftermath of his third Parisian final, he was just a casual player until retirement. At Roland Garros '98 after a shocking (mainly by its scoreline) defeat to Hernan Gumy (b. 1972), Bruguera said: *"Currently nothing goes my way, on and off the court."*

Career record:	447-271 [267 events]
Career titles:	14
Highest ranking:	No. 3 (August 1994)
Best GS result:	Roland Garros (champion 1993-94; runner-up 1997; semifinal 1995)

Olympic Silver medal in Atlanta (1996)

Wayne Arthurs (Australia)

Born: March 18,1971 in Adelaide
Height: 1.90 m
Plays: Left-handed

From a historical point of view (just analyzing singles events) a rather meaningless player, but his career is very interesting. The son of the Irish representative in Davis Cup (1962-66) - Derreck Arthurs. Wayne began playing late, at age of 12, regularly five years later. The delayed full commitment caused a lot of hardships in the first few years of the professional career. He debuted in the ATP tour at age of 25 (Bjorn Borg was done at the same age!) as a qualifier in Hong Kong '96, but soon afterwards suffered another setback - elbow injury sidelined him from June to the end of the year. In the breakthrough 1999 season, Arthurs stunned almost everyone interested in Wimbledon, holding his serve 111 times in a row (counting three qualifying matches), and playing 14 tie-breaks out of 19 sets! The years of hard work on the serve finally paid off. Arthurs, to the end of his career, remained raw from the baseline, but displayed a new quality of the service power, being a prototype of guys like Ivo Karlovic & John Isner. Between 1999 and 2006, Arthurs kept the status of a main-level player with sporadic Challenger romances. In the meantime he defeated guys like Yevgeny Kafelnikov, Alex Corretja, Pete Sampras & Gustavo Kuerten. As someone with a generally modest number of matches won and the highest ranking, he was particularly successful at majors. I don't know how to explain it, perhaps he somehow felt more comfortable playing tie-breaks which weren't decisive. Enough said, he never won an MP-down match on the tour, but lost nine times losing match points and eight of them were concluded in decisive tie-breaks. Trivia: he advanced to his first major (Australian Open '98) on the 18th attempt before losing in the first round to **Jens Knippschild** (b. 1975) 6-3, 6-4, 6-7, 5-7, 6-8, not being broken until 5-all in the 4th set... In the Davis Cup '01 final, Arthurs replaced Patrick Rafter in the fifth and decisive rubber, and lost in four sets to Nicolas Escude.

Career record: 131–158 [154 events]
Career titles: 1
Highest ranking: No. 44 (July 2001)
Best GS results: Roland Garros (fourth round 2001)
Wimbledon (fourth round 1999 & 2002)
US Open (fourth round 2000)

Daniel Vacek (Czechia)

Born: April 1, 1971 in Prague (Czechoslovakia)
Height: 1.91 m
Plays: Right-handed

Vacek, not related to **Jan Vacek** (b. 1976, one title), just like **Martin Damm** (fellow Czech, b. 1972 & frequent doubles partner) appeared in five ATP finals and... lost them all. The second similarity between them it's the best Grand Slam result, achieved the same year (1994): Vacek - 4th round at Wimbledon, Damm - 4th round at Australian Open. The third similarity: both were brilliant doubles players, and at the end of their careers they participated mainly in doubles events (Vacek got 25 titles it total, Damm 40 titles, but Vacek 3 Grand Slams while Damm only 1). In contrast to Damm, Vacek was close to obtaining the maiden singles title twice. In the Moscow '95 final, as he faced Carl-Uwe Steeb, two points separated him from the title in three different games. "Close" is a relative term in tennis if we remember how many matches have been lost from a match point up and in how many of them, the ultimate loser didn't even touch the ball being a point away from victory. The short-haired Vacek was always playing in a classical, white costume. Perhaps the most risking player as far as the second serve is concerned in the 90s. Admittedly he didn't try second serve bombs like Mark Philippoussis, but in some games, especially on faster surfaces, it was tough to recognize which his serve (first or second) was faster because all his serves were around 160-180 kph. Because of that, quite often he ended matches with more double faults than aces. In the ATP ranking kept progressing until 1995, two years later he became a father of Daniel Jr., since January 1999 married to Swiss woman - Renee Bolland, and moved to Sarnen - a city in the heart of Switzerland. An underachiever in my opinion, should have enjoyed a similar career to one year older Jan Siemerink. Vacek claimed three major titles in doubles (all pairing Yevgeny Kafelnikov against whom played the most matches in singles, 4-15 record). He currently trains **Tomáš Macháč** (b. 2000) who won his first main-level match at Australian Open '21.

Career record: 176–225 [220 events]
Career titles: 0
Highest ranking: No. 26 (January 1996)
Best GS results: Wimbledon (fourth round 1994 & 1996)
US Open (fourth round 1995 & 1997)

Todd Woodbridge (Australia)

Born: April 2, 1971 in Sydney
Height: 1.78 m
Plays: Right-handed

The second round of Wimbledon '89, Centre Court, two blonde guys with perfect serve-and-volley styles and nice manners fight over two days, the defending champion Stefen Edberg prevails in four sets, but the 18-year-old qualifier Woodbridge [244] wins more total points. The youngster looks like someone with almost identical skills compared to the six-time Grand Slam champion. So the question, many many years later, is - why didn't he even reach a major final? My answer is plain and simple - the height... Edberg is ~10 cm taller, a very important factor as far as the serve is concerned and reaching the balls with stretch volleys. Perhaps it's a risky thesis, but I think that Woodbridge could have been as successful as a legendary **Ken Rosewall** (b. 1934, eight-time Grand Slam champion) if he had been born in the 30s or 40s. His great technique, ability to concentrate well, and make good tactical decisions were good enough in the 90s only to reach the Top 20. That Wimbledon '89 is quite telling, in the first round Woodbridg had defeated his peer, the future seven-time champion of the event – [86] Pete Sampras 7-5, 7-6, 5-7, 6-3; three years later losing to Sampras after almost a copied scoreline. So basically in pure serve-and-volley tennis he wasn't worse than the best player of the 90s, but when they played at Wimbledon '97 it was an execution... simply as Sampras physically matured around the year 1993, his serve dominated his game, Woodbridge couldn't allow himself to have the privilege of winning game by game with service winners and aces. Anyway, he was in the 90s in doubles, someone like Sampras at the same time in singles. In doubles, Woodbridge won 16 Grand Slam titles (eleven with Mark Woodforde, five with Jonas Bjorkman), Olympic Gold medal (1996) and contributed to the Davis Cup triumph in 1999.

Career record: 244–236 [233 events]
Career titles: 2
Highest ranking: No. 19 (July 1997)
Best GS result: Wimbledon (semifinalist 1997)

Davis Cup champion 1999 (played doubles in the final)

Fernando Meligeni (Brasil)

Born: April 12, 1971 in Buenos Aires (Argentina)
Height: 1.80 m
Plays: Left-handed

The beginnings were very promising - as a junior he won Orange Bowl '89 representing Argentina. Soon afterwards he switched his nationality to Brazilian. For quite a long time he remained a typical "Challenger guy". His breakthrough occurred at Roland Garros '93; he went through qualifying rounds and got the fourth round where he succumbed to the champion of the event - Sergi Bruguera. Also in Paris he achieved his best result, reaching the French Open semifinal of 1999; he lost in four sets to Andrei Medvedev, but had his chances in all sets he lost, especially in the 1st one when he led 4:0 (15/0), then wasted six set points... won more total points (147-145), which is a rarity in 4-set matches, so he could think "if only I played the end of those sets better I'd be in the final..." During the event he became the crowd favorite, defeating on Philippe Chatrier court two Spanish pretendents to the title (Felix Mantilla & Alex Corretja). *"Some people think that at the age of 28 you are close to retirement, but I can play for another 10 years"* he enthusiastically said leaving Paris, but in the following seasons he was playing decently, at best, and four years later he decided to quit... He managed to do this in very good style, he gained a gold medal in the Pan American Games defeating in the final 5-7, 7-6(6), 7-6(5) Marcelo Rios, for whom incidentally, it was the last tournament too.... Rios decided to come back in 2004, but after losing two second rounds at the Challenger level, he realized the comeback was not a wise decision.... Like the vast majority of South American players, Meligeni preferred clay-courts, and won on them a couple of events in both singles and doubles. Worth mentioning is his Pinehurst '96 title; in the second round he saved five match points against Todd Woodbridge, four MPs more than in the next round against Patrick Rafter. The lanky and a bit diabolic Meligeni looked like one of a few underweight players, nevertheless he was able to accelerate the ball tremendously with his heavy-topspin forehand. Meligeni's second best result behind the French Open semifinal, it's the semifinal of the Olympic games in Atlanta '96 (he lost to Bruguera, then a Bronze medal match to **Leander Paes**, b. 1973, one of the greatest doubles player of all-time (eight major titles) especially considering his uncanny longevity (active for thirty years).

Career record: 202–217 [203 events]
Career titles: 3
Highest ranking: No. 25 (October 1999)
Best GS result: Roland Garros (semifinal 1999)

Nicklas Kulti (Sweden)

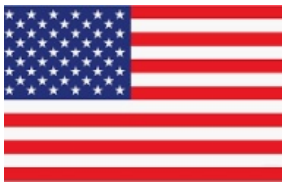
Born: April 22, 1971 in Stockholm
Height: 1.91 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

At the end of 80s in Sweden, Kulti was predicted as a successor of Bjorn Borg & Mats Wilander. Admittedly at the age of Kulti being the best junior in the world (won Australian Open & Wimbledon '89; US Open runner-up, French Open quarter finals), his older compatriots had already triumphed in Paris as professionals, anyway other great Swede (Stefan Edberg) had also enjoyed amazing junior career before became the best player among the adults. Kulti like Borg & Wilander (and other very good Swedes) was cool & collected, his game-style based on ground-strokes, but as a much taller guy he could rely more on his serve which could give the Swedish fans even bigger belief in his potential. Unfortunately for them, Kulti's development was quickly stopped. At the age of 21 he almost advanced to the Roland Garros semifinal (led 2-0 in sets against Henri Leconte) having defeated Michael Chang in a thriller on the ninth match point, but never returned to that stage at Slams, successively dropping in the ranking. After several years of disappointments he could become a national hero in 1996, but wasted a triple match point in the Davis Cup final against Arnaud Boetsch missing backhands on every opportunity. He was crying after that loss, it would have been a nightmare haunting him to the end of his life if he hadn't won the deciding point in a Davis Cup final a year later, partnering Jonas Bjorkman in doubles. More or less at the time when Kulti realized he couldn't be another Borg or Wilander, he focused on doubles as well, and captured 13 titles in total, ten more than in singles. Regular doubles performances helped him to be more confident at the net, and he took advantage of that unexpectedly winning his last singles title in Halle '96 as a serve-volleyer [90] off the qualifying draw, defeating Yevgeny Kafelnikov in the final, who was fresh after claiming his Roland Garros title. Trivia: Kulti lost twice similar second round matches in Stockholm to then-current US Open champions; in 1988 he was beaten by Wilander 6-0, 4-6, 1-6 leading 3:1 in the 2nd set, and six years later lost to Andre Agassi 6-0, 5-7, 3-6 despite double mini-match point at 4:2 in the 2nd set.

Career record: 154–182 [182 events]
Career titles: 3
Highest ranking: No. 32 (May 1993)
Best GS result: Roland Garros (quarterfinal 1992)

Davis Cup champion 1997 (played the final in doubles)

Pete Sampras (USA)



Born: August 12, 1971 in Washington, D.C.
Height: 1.84 m
Plays: Right-handed

Πέτρος Σάμπρας was an extraordinary tennis player, a great athlete, the best one of the 90s. At the time considered by many tennis experts as the greatest player in history. Sampras' parents Georgia and Sam were children of Greek immigrants (Sampras mother was born in Greece, she emigrated from her homeland in the 1960s). Pete grew up in the settlement of Rancho Palos Verdes, California, and never visited the country of his ancestors, however, on the Eve of the 21st Century he said that would finish his career during the Olympics in Athens 2004 . He started playing tennis at the age of 3 hitting the ball against the wall. On his 14th birthday, his father gave him two videotapes of the matches of the Australians Rod Laver and Ken Rosewall as a gift. *"I watched these tapes several times a day. Their style of playing, especially Laver, fascinated me. I wanted to play like him!"* he said. Influenced by Laver's game, Pete decided to switch from two- to one-handed backhand and use similar tactics as the grand champion - rushing the net. Career course at a glance: his first major success was in 1988, reaching the semi-finals in Schenectady. A year later he reached the final of the doubles tournament in Forest Hills along with Jim Courier and won a title in Rome (these two results helped them in advancing to Masters '89 - remarkable given they both would become the best players in singles just a few years later!). In the same year he made his first big "scalp" - at the US Open in five sets he defeated the title defender Mats Wilander [5]. He committed a double fault on his first match point. *"Then everything went up to my throat with nerves. Fortunately, it ended well."* admitted Sampras, who would be in similarly dramatic circumstances a dozen of times in his

career. March '90 it was time for the maiden title - in a place where he made his debut two years earlier - Philadelphia. He defeated Andres Gomez in the final. *"I don't know why there is so much hype around Andre Agassi, Michael Chang and Jim Courier? Sampras is better than them!"* - said the defeated Ecuadorian. Half a year later, Pete was a sensation at the US Open. Seeded with number 12, he defeated i.a. a future No. 1 Thomas Muster, then two great champions in back-to-back matches (Ivan Lendl and John McEnroe) and then he defeated Agassi in the final (Sampras will beat Agassi in their another two New York finals), thus becoming the youngest winner in the history of the U.S. championship (19 years and 28 days). In November of the same year, he took control over the first edition of the Compaq Grand Slam Cup (Munich), thanks to which he earned 2 million dollars in a week (unimaginable amount of money for any Grand Slam champion in the 80s). The astronomic financial success didn't spoil him, yet he disappointed several times in the '91 season. He lost, for example, the Mercedes Super 9 finals of Cincinnati and Paris-Bercy (to Guy Forget). Soon after, he made a bad debut in the Davis Cup, losing both singles in the final match (beaten by Forget yet again!). In 1992, he recorded his first title on a clay court - Kitzbuhel. (In general, clay turned out to be the most difficult surface for him. Despite many efforts, he did not win Roland Garro.) He won as many as three tournaments in the season being a point being eliminated. On April 12, 1993, he became the eleventh ATP number one in history after triumphing in Tokyo after phenomenal display of versatile tennis. In June '93 he won the most prestigious tournament in the world - Wimbledon for the first time (it was expected from him already in the years 1991-92). *"I can kind of appreciate what it takes to win a Grand Slam. In my mind this is the biggest one in the world, and now that I've done it I feel as happy as I've ever felt."* he said. He won 85 matches that year, the most since Lendl, who grabbed 107 wins in 1982... He was the first tennis player in history to serve more than 1000 aces in a season (1011 in total). It was a year of his full maturity, the serve, the forehand, the volley - everything was way above the average, the year could have been even more successful if he hadn't lost several matches being within a few points of winning them. In 1994, he won 10 out of 12 finals and was the first tennis player since Lendl (1987) to maintain the "Number 1" position for the calendar year. He triumphed in the Australian Open for the first time, although in the second round only two points separated him from the defeat to 19-year-old Yevgeny Kafelnikov - the Russian was leading 5:4* (30-30) in the fifth set. In May 1996 his trainer and friend, former pro Tim Gullikson died of brain cancer. It was a huge setback mentally which contributed to a very weak season on clay-courts. Pete became a member of the Society for Fighting Cancer - he declared to pay $100 for each ace served to the society's account. Again he was the best in the stats of untouchable serves - this time he sent 974 aces. He also supported the Vitas Gerulaitis Youth Association and the Arthur Ashe Society for Fighting Aids. In the years 1996-97 he won two Grand Slam tournaments in a row, but Magnus Norman prevented the chances to claim four major titles in a row, something what was expected from Sampras since he triumphed at Wimbledon '93: no-one had done it in

the 70s and the 80s, but people were expecting it from Sampras, obviously the dirt didn't belong to his natural environment, but he played the quarterfinals in Paris a couple of times, claimed a title in Rome '94, so in the years 1994-97 his triumph in Paris couldn't be shocking. The 1997 season Sampras ended for the fifth year in a row as No. 1, thus matching Jimmy Connors' achievement of the years 1974-78. Players, journalists and the organizers of ATP tournaments chose him (on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the Professional Tennis Association) as a quarter-century best tennis player. In 1998, he broke the Connors record and won Wimbledon for the fifth time, thus catching up with Bjorn Borg. The following year he improved the Swede's result; the victory in Wimbledon '99 came with great ease (only one four-set match!). For health reasons, he limited the number of tournaments. At the end of the year, he was dethroned in the leader's position by his greatest rival Agassi, with whom he co-created 34 matches throughout his career. 2000: by winning Wimbledon (seventh time!) he set a new all-time record - 13 Grand Slam titles (overcoming **Roy Emerson**'s 12 titles of the pre-Open Era). After winning the match point in the final against Patrick Rafter, he cried looking at his parents who hadn't visited Sampras' matches since junior times. It was a very special moment in history, the game was so even in the 90's that it was believed that Sampras' record wouldn't be beaten and he would win Wimbledon many more times. Very strange from the perspective of 2021 when three active guys (Roger Federer, Rafael Nadal & Novak Djokovic have won more major titles). The 2001 season was completely unsuccessful. For the first time in eleven years, he didn't win a tournament, signs of getting older were visible already in the 90s when Sampras lost his hair on the top of his head. The serve was still great, but his movement nowhere near to the mid 90s, and that's partly explanation that his solid backhand turned into his hole, especially on clay-courts (Sampras' defeats in Paris of the years 1998-02 were surprising, in those years he had a 3-5 record, and two of those matches he barely survived in fife-setters facing players he should have defeated in straights. He was also not successful beginning his US Open '02 campaign. From the beginning of this tournament, Sampras played like he was in his best years and went through the event undefeated in fantastic style, beating his eternal rival Agassi in the final. *"To beat a rival like Andre, in a storybook ending, it might be nice to stop,"* he said. *"But I still love to compete. I'll see in a couple of months where my heart is and my mind. My head is spinning."* After this unexpected success, 31-year-old Sampras in 2002 did not appear in any tournament anymore. A year later, he announced his official retirement, he finished his career better than any other great champion in history.

Career record: 762–222 [265 events]
Career titles: 64
Highest ranking: No. 1 (April 1993)
Best GS results:
Australian Open (champion 1994 & 97; runner-up 1995; semifinal 1993 & 00; quarterfinal 1998)
Roland Garros (semifinalist 1996; quarterfinalist 1992-94)
Wimbledon (champion 1993-95, 1997-00; semifinal 1992; quarterfinal 1996)
US Open (champion 1990, 1993, 1995-96, 2002; runner-up 1992, 2000-01; semifinal 1998; quarterfinal 1991)

Masters champion 1991, 94, 96-97 & 99
Davis Cup champion 1992 (played doubles in the final) & 1995
Grand Slam Cup champion 1990 & 97

Year-end ranking 1988-2002: 97-81-5-6-3-1-1-1-1-1-1-3-3-10-13

Younes el Aynaoui (Morocco)

Born: September 12, 1971 in Rabat
Height: 1.93 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

The oldest & most successful among three "Morroccan Musketeers" (two others: Hicham Arazi & Karim Alami). El Aynaoui was a late bloomer, actually he showed his big potential for the first time at the age of 25 when as a guy outside Top 100 he began the 1996 season reaching two consecutive finals (Doha, Jakarta). Unfortunately he injured his ankle preparing for the Australian Open '96 and it bothered him for two years (two surgeries in the meantime, in 1996 he retired in five matches). The year 1998 meant a new opening for him; if there was a ranking for the best Challenger player of the year, El Aynaoui would be no. 1 - he won six titles at that level, reaching two more finals. That season, the taste of winning matches regularly, prepared him for the best years of his tennis life approaching 30 y.o. - as a veteran he reached all his four Grand Slam quarterfinals and won all his five titles. He had a match point in a memorable Australian Open '03 quarterfinal when he lost 19-21 in the decider to Andy Roddick - it was the longest decider in the Open Era before the legendary Isner-Mahut clash... Growin' up El Aynaoui was a fan of Ivan Lendl, just like the Czech, he developed very good serve & forehand, but he needed to spend many years on the tour to build a comprehensive game; his double-handed backhand was actually no-existent, he was operating with backhand slice most of the time so he needed to develop very efficient one-two punch pattern allowing to regularly hold the serve. The best exemplification of his efficiency came at the mentioned Aus Open '03 when he stunned Lleyton Hewitt in the fourth round being unbroked in twenty-three games against the player who had been considered then as the best receiver - El Aynaoui struck 33 aces & 25 forehand winners against him in a 6-7, 7-6, 7-6, 6-4 victory. The

same year with the help of two tie-breaks El Aynaoui ousted a teen Rafael Nadal at the US Open, supposedly a very sweet result for the Moroccan in retrospect. This is how El Aynaoui explained better results in the second part of his career: *"I made a big push late in my career. It took time to organise and have the correct staff: a physical coach, physio and my whole family were travelling with me. It was a reward for many years of effort, not giving up, and I achieved what I'd been fighting for since the age of 16 or 17."*

Career record: 265–227 [226 events]
Career titles: 5
Highest ranking: No. 14 (March 2003)
Best GS results: Australian Open (quarterfinal 2000, 2003)
US Open (quarterfinal 2002-03)

Goran Ivanišević (Croatia)

Born: September 13, 1971 in Split (Yugoslavia)
Height: 1.93 m
Plays: Left-handed (two-handed backhand)

One of the most psychologically intriguing players of the 90s. He was constantly changing his outlook: long hair or short (at the beginning of 1992 he was almost bald "mohawk hairstyle"); stubble, full beard or clean-shaven. On his head a cap or a headband; in 1996 a plume gathered up from just above his forehead. *"I think young people like it. Old people, you know, are not so happy. It's tough to please old people. They are complaining too much."* he commented on that eccentric hair-style. Actually he didn't show up in one T-shirt longer than a month (but always the "Sergio Tacchini" brand). So he was giving an impression of someone emotionally incoherent. His on court jokes and positive attitude towards people all over the place suddenly could be replaced by an eruption of anger. Like every experienced player, he played dozens of dramatic matches, but in the 90s he was involved in them more often than any other player. In matches involving Ivanisevic, simply everything was possible: he won 15-13 in the 5th set (Richard Krajicek), lost 12-14 in the 5th set (Magnus Norman); he equalled twice a record of the longest tie-break (20/18) within four years (winning them against fellow left-handers, Daniel Nestor & Greg Rusedski). He won other marathon tie-breaks: 15/13 (Guy Forget), 14/12 (Jason Stoltenberg, **Sebastien Lareau**) or 13/11 (Hendrik Dreekmann, **Cyril Saulnier**). He found his way to lose a tie-break leading

5:0. In 1998, he collected major three-setters consisted of three tie-breaks (lost to Marzio Martelli, one month later won over Jan Siemerink - one of a few Open Era matches in which the winner saved set points in all sets he won). His matches were like a roller-coaster leading to extremes. His amazing serve, arguably the best one in the 90s was the key - usually that weapon was leading to his victories, but from time to time it was a double-edged sword. Analyzing that stroke, I drew - perhaps - controversial conclusions. I had an impression that quite often, even facing top players, he provoked difficult situations, just to check his mentality under pressure. How many times I witnessed matches when at 4:5 or 5:6 in a set and 5:6 or 6:7 in a tie-break he gifted a set point for an opponent just to erase it with an ace (also off the second serve). He loved the thrill, winning sets being a point away from losing them. The serve saved him so many times, but quite often caused his bitter defeats. His big problem was that the serve deserted him a few times in the most important moments of the most important matches - three times in the Wimbledon finals (once lost to Andre Agassi being a favorite, then twice to his most difficult opponent - Pete Sampras) as well as twice in the Masters semifinals. One of examples - his match against Sampras in Hannover '96 - Ivanisevic was phenomenally serving that day (35 aces in three sets); a deciding third set tie-break seemed inevitable; he led 30/0 in the 12th game, but three causal points gave a match point to Sampras - Ivanisevic fired 186 kph his second serve, the fastest on that day - out... Sampras just looked at the speed measurement and shaked his head in disbelief. Ivanisevic, just a month younger than Sampras, was ranked higher after their first two years on the tour. In 1990 they had similar season ranking-wise, Sampras won the US Open, the Croat reached the Wimbledon semifinal, but when they faced each other in the Munich quarterfinal, the future seemed wide open. The American prevailed an enormously tight contest and built a mental advantage over his opponent. Even though Ivanisevic was dealing very well with tight situations in general, against Sampras many times, few points here and there separated him from winning very important matches. At the end of 1995, Ivanisevic changed his coaching staff, and finally began winning matches with consistency - between December '95 and March '96, Ivanisevic was competing with astonishing frequency, he collected five titles in the meantime, finally he ousted Sampras in the Key Biscayne semifinal, and when it seemed that he would overthrow the American (three straight years on the top then), the intensity of appearances took its toll, and the left-hander must have retired in the final. Nonetheless the rest of the year was good enough to call it the best in his career. The end of the 90s brought stagnation, many spectators would expect that Ivanisevic would be remembered as the best player of his generation deprived of a major title. Wimbledon '01 - an event of miracles. Ivanisevic [125] took part only to 'wild card', his second round win over Carlos Moya was already a bit surprising - a seven-time champion Sampras was defeated in the 4th round by a young Roger Federer, and the route to the title for the Croat was wide open. He was phenomenally serving like in the mid 90s, the luck was on his side (back-to-back matches won being two points away from defeat), and at the age of 30, similarly to

Andres Gomez & Petr Korda, Ivanisevic raised the most precious trophy in the air. *"I don't care now if I ever win a match in my life again,"* Ivansievic said after a memorable Monday final against Patrick Rafter (Ivanisevic's semifinal against Time Henman was extended over three days due to rain!). *"Whatever I do in my life, wherever I go, I'm always going to be Wimbledon champion."* He won matches afterwards, but not too many... Wimbledon '01 meant Ivanisevic's beautiful swan song. After retirement Ivanisevic was one of the best players on the senior tour, then he helped fellow Yugoslavs (Marin Cilic & Novak Djokovic) to win Grand Slam titles.

Career record:	599–333 [337 events]
Career titles:	22
Highest ranking:	No. 2 (July 1994)
Best GS results:	Australian Open (quarterfinal 1989, 94 & 97) Roland Garros (quarterfinal 1990, 92 & 94) Wimbledon (champion 2001; runner-up 1992, 94 & 98; semifinal 1990 & 95) US Open (semifinal 1996)

Grand Slam Cup champion 1995
Olympic Bronze medalist (Barcelona 1992)

Wayne Ferreira (South Africa)

Born: September 15, 1971 in Johannesburg
Height: 1.83 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

Along with Richard Krajicek, (and Carlos Costa, MaliVai Washington to a lesser extent) Ferreira was the biggest revelation of the 1992 season. They were both 21-year-olds when they reached the Australian Open '92 semifinals. Krajicek pleased the tennis world with terrifying serve and great volley skills, while Ferreira displayed a lethal forehand. Ferreira's career was long and fruitful, in some sense he was an icon of Grand Slam events, never missing a major between Australian Open '91 and US Open '04 (as many as 56 consecutive Grand Slams - a record at the time) when he knew it would be his not only last tournament at that level, but also the last main-level event altogether (332nd in total). Despite so many appearances at majors, and a very good five-set record, he never enjoyed such a successful year at

Slams like in 1992 when he backed up the Aussie semifinal with the US Open quarterfinal and fourth round at Wimbledon (in all those events he was ultimately defeated by great players on Centre Courts). By me, he is considered as the best Open Era player to never play a major final. He wasn't even close; in 1992 as well as in 2003, he had no chance in Melbourne facing Stefan Edberg & Andre Agassi respectively in the semifinals. Agassi was actually Ferreira's nightmarish opponent. They met eleven times, and just once Ferreira was close to winning it - at the Olympic games in Atlanta '96. The South African led 5:3 in the decider before losing 5-7, 6-4, 5-7. Against the other best player of the 90s - Pete Sampras - Ferreira was quite successful. He lost their H2H 6-7, but in the years 1995-1998 Ferreira won all their four encounters (always '6-3' in the 3rd sets), and what's quite funny the first two wins had the same pattern as well as the following two. Apart from Agassi and Michael Chang (H2H: 0-7), Ferreira defeated all players who were a showpiece of the decade; as a veteran he was still a dangerous opponent for the young guns (two very dramatic wins over Lleyton Hewitt - in five meetings, also two against Roger Federer - in three meetings). Ferreira was an offensive baseliner, yet playing at the net was his natural surrounding (he was regularly participating in doubles competitions). Serve-and-volley tactics meant something obvious for him on grass while on hardcourts and indoors, he was applying this style depending on the needs. I think his inability to defeat Agassi at least once, may be explained by this - he couldn't match Agassi from the baseline, but his serve-and-volley skills weren't good enough to defeat the great American implementing the plan B, he could only count on a worse day of his nemesis, and it happened in Atlanta... Who knows, maybe if he had defeated Agassi then, he would have been a gold medalist which could give him fulfillment. I assume that two Mercedes Super 9 titles (Toronto '96 and Stuttgart '00) compensate to some degree for not winning anything bigger. *"I had on occasions felt that I lost to players who I should have beaten and this (is) something I became aware of much later in my career. Often I would take the first set easily and then I became bored. I would lose interest and then sometimes didn't recover sufficiently to win the match."* Ferreira reflected on his career. Trivia: Ferreira was the hottest player after the US Open in two consecutive seasons, in 1994 he won three titles in his three consecutive starts; the following year he won back-to-back European events indoors, then reached the semifinal at Paris-Bercy.

Career record:	512–330 [332 events]
Career titles:	15
Highest ranking:	No. 6 (May 1995)
Best GS results:	Australian Open (semifinalist 1992 & 2003; quarterfinalist 2002) Wimbledon (quarterfinalist 1994) US Open (quarterfinalist 1992)

Richard Krajicek (Netherlands)

Born: December 6, 1971 in Rotterdam
Height: 1.96 m
Plays: Right-handed

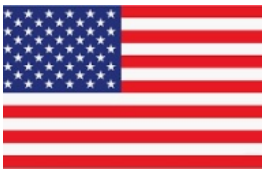
Born in Rotterdam, but began playing tennis in Amsterdam (as a three year-old kid, like Pete Sampras!) where he lived with his Czech parents (Peter & Ludmila Krajíček) who fled from Czechoslovakia in the aftermath of the invasion of five Warsaw Pact countries (the Soviet Union, Poland, Bulgaria, East Germany and Hungary). The father was crazy about sport, had professionally played handball in his native country. The little Krajicek must have trained hard from the time hie

picked the racquet and was known in the Netherlands as a prodigy already in the early 80s (there's a London photo of him with John McEnroe of 1982 in which Krajicek is ~30 cm shorter; ten years later they would professionally play a few times with Krajicek ~15 cm taller). When Richard was 12 changed his backhand from two-handed to one-handed (Sampras & Stefan Edberg did the same at similar age); for several years he remained a defensive player though, because until he turned 16, he had not been tall among his peers (very similar with Krajicek's namesake - Fromberg, who, as opposed to Krajicek, didn't change his style suddenly growing ~20 cm). The junior period of transition from one style to another determined by the height, could have interfered with Krajicek's reasonable plans of becoming a top player in the future. He became a member of a group created by Stanley Franker of Surinam, and training with a bit older Jan Siemerink & Jacco Eltingh, Krajicek improved his volley skills; in the early 90s they all three became the Top 100 players presenting a very similar, attacking style. Krajicek won his Challenger debut as a qualifier (Verona, defeating Eltingh in the final - Eltingh's first final too, in his 8th Challenger). Once they all won their first ATP matches it was clear that Krajicek would achieve much more than two other Dutchmen thanks to his fantastic serve and powerful forehand (especially cross-court on the run!). For a few years Krajicek couldn't win anything big despite having defeated all the best players in the world. Two factors contributed: numerous injuries (shoulder, knees) and weak offensive backhand, the shot which separated Krajicek from other best servers of the early 90s (Goran Ivanisevic, Michael Stich & Sampras); paradoxically Krajicek was successful against the best of them - Sampras (he led 6:2 in their H2H, ultimately finished at 6-4). Finally everything clicked for Krajicek during rainy Wimbledon '96. It was a

very strange tournament for him; he was ranked no. 13 but initially unseeded as a first round loser of the two previous editions. When the event kicked off, he got no. 17 seed due to Thomas Muster's withdrawal. During the fortnight, Krajicek's uncertain backhand was working tremendously well (something similar would experience Greg Rusedski two years later in Paris-Bercy), and it helped him to beat the two champions of the event in back-to-back matches (Stich, Sampras), not dropping a set against them! All of a sudden, Krajicek was a heavy favorite in the semi- and final against players for whom reaching those stages were more surprising (Jason Stoltenberg, MaliVai Washington). Krajicek completely outplayed them, and fulfilled his expectation of the early 90s, perversely in a year no-one expected him to triumph. The runner-up Washington said: *"If he continues playing like this, he'll be the best in the world."* Three years later, five matches separated Krajicek from Washington's prophecy. The Dutchman arrived in Hamburg as no. 4 in the ranking, the top seed, and he needed to win the title - it didn't seem out of his reach even though clay was his least favourite surface (he had played French Open '93 semifinal, Rome '96 final and triumphed in Barcelona '94). Krajicek's dream was over already in his first match as he lost to an unpredictable Hicham Arazi despite winning their two previous meetings. Following that defeat, Krajicek had problems with his body again, and mediocre results prevented him from creating another opportunity in the years 1999-2000 when Sampras lost his charm, and as many as five players reached the no. 1; Krajicek could be easily one of them with better timing to avoid health issues. Krajicek missed the entire 2001 season in singles, he returned after missing twenty months following two elbow surgeries. Already in his second event after the comeback he did something similar to Guy Forget in 1994 - with very low ranking, reached the Wimbledon quarterfinal (after a remarkable three-day contest against Mark Philippiussis, consisting of four tie-breaks). A few weeks later heel injury forced him to retire at the US Open. Krajicek planned to finish his career at Wimbledon '03, but the draw was the worst among possible ones - Lleyton Hewitt, no. 1 in the world, the defending champion. Krajicek's recent 1-6, 2-6 humiliation on grass to Andre Agassi made him realize a similar disaster on Centre Court. He preferred to avoid it, he was replaced by another big server, little known at the time, the Croatian giant - Ivao Kralovic, who eliminated Hewitt in four sets producing one of the biggest upsets in Wimbledon history... Trivia: all three Franker's boys made Slam debuts in the same event, and for them all it was a success - Australian Open '91: Krajicek [113] and Siemerink [132, qualifier] reached the fourth round, Eltingh [125] advanced to the third round.

Career record:	411-219 [222 events]
Career titles:	17
Highest ranking:	No. 4 (March 1999)
Best GS results:	Australian Open (semifinal 1992) Roland Garros (semifinal 1993) Wimbledon (champion 1996; semifinal 1998) US Open (quarterfinal 1997, 99-00)

Michael Chang (USA)



Born: February 22, 1972 in Hoboken, New Jersey
Height: 1.74 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

Chang's father was born in Taiwan. He went to the United States in 1966, six years later Michael was born, a younger brother of Carl (b. 1969) who was a successful junior. When Carl realised that Michael was better than him, he decided to finish his university (San Dieguito High School in Encinitas) becoming a coach of his younger brother. Carl was awarded 'wildcards' in a few ATP events, once he even advanced to the main-event after qualifying rounds, but finished his career with a 0-5 record

(4-20 in doubles, playing 17 out of 20 tournaments with brother, which meant to help Michael in improving his volley skills)... Back to Michael - he was a prodigy. Despite very modest height, he was able to beat much taller boys from higher age groups (more or less at the same time Franco Davin was Chang's counterpart in South America). As a 13 year-old boy (looking younger than his age indicated) he was winning events for 16 year-old boys! There were three things that made him an exceptional teenager: sturdy legs, high tennis IQ, and what's the most important - unbelievable fighting spirit. The young Chang was the best example of the 'never say die' attitude. Every point, every game, every set were precious to him, he could play from first to last point of the match at 100% of physical & mental dedication. He was 15 when claimed his first Challenger title. It was his debut at this level, but he already had played four events at the main-level! At the US Open '87, he became the youngest player at 15 years, 6 months to win a main draw match in history of the event (d. veteran Paul McNamee). *"When things around me get to be too much,"* said Chang, *"my parents take me away. We relax or go fishing, take my mind off everything."* One year later, Chang captured his first Tour title, in San Francisco at 16 years, 7 months. *"I just hope that a lot of young kids who can relate to me because of my age will look up to me. I hope that I will never be conceited and will remain humble because nobody is going to like you if you give them a hard time."* stated Chang after defeating Johan Kriek in the final. French Open '89. Many 18-year-old boys participated in the junior event, i.a. **Nicolas Pereira** of Venezuela (b. 1970, one of the greatest junior players ever who failed on the tour, but defeated Stefan Edberg, Boris Becker & Thomas Muster), who lost in the final, but Chang at the age of 17 years 3 months was seeded with no. 15 in the main-draw. He advanced to the fourth round (reached that stage at US Open '88) when was

supposed to play on Centre Court in Paris for the first time, against the three-time champion, and unquestionably the best player of the decade - Ivan Lendl. As expected, Chang lost the first two sets, but the three-time French Open champion needed to play his best. Instead of losing the 3rd set easier, and getting words of consolation for brave display, Chang produced one of the most memorable comebacks in tennis history, using all the tools in the box, including underarm serve and waiting for Lendl's serve standing close to the service line! Chang won another three matches and became the youngest Grand Slam champion in history. And there was a huge twist - he not only never captured another major playing for the following 14 years, he also didn't win any of the biggest titles (from prestigious or financial point of view). How was it possible given the fact Chang improved a lot as a tennis player over the years? I think there are two important things that may explain this phenomenon:

- Chang used a chance that he won his lone major just before a shift in men's tennis when a bunch of big seevers appeared on the tennis map, with Pete Sampras as the leading force (before Sampras fully developed his serve, he was regularly losing to Chang; first in juniors, then in the first few years on the Tour)
- he lost his greatest assets over the years: speed, steely determination and inclination to improvise

He lost it all, considerably improving his serve, the rise of his average aces per match was significant: 1991 - 1.9 aces; 1992 - 2.7; 1993 - 3.1; 1994 - 4.3; 1995 - 6.0 and 1996 - 8.4. In those years Chang played six big finals (Grand Slam Cup in years 1991-92 lost to big serving David Wheaton & Michael Stich respectively, Masters '95 and Aussie Open '96 lost to Boris Becker, finally US Open '96 to Sampras - arguably the most important match in Chang's career because if he had won it, he would have become the best player in the world). The only opponent who didn't overwhelm him with a powerful serve was Thomas Muster when they faced each other in the final at French Open '95. It was a year when the Austrian repeated winning of "lost sets" time and time again. He did it also in the opener against Chang, and it proved to be crucial. It doesn't mean that Chang couldn't deal with big serving guys, simply in a "best of five" format it was somehow more difficult for him. Nevertheless, Chang collected seven Mercedes Super 9 titles, all on hardcourts outdoors, in North America. Indian Wells was his beloved event, he triumphed there thrice. Many players reach their peaks around the age of 25. For Chang, that age meant a downhill. US Open '97 it's the last event when Chang was considered as a Slam title contender. Chang lost in the semifinal in straight sets to Patrick Rafter, not a big server, but at times a big one, and it was one of those days when the Australian didn't need to deliver his brilliance at the net, the serve settled the matter. After retirement, Chang withdrew from attention for several years, then came back as a coach of a fellow Asian player - Kei Nishikori. With the Japanese as his pupil, Chang experienced a similar fate to his career in the 90s: they were cooperating in the years 2014-19, Chang helped Nishikori to become an elite player, but the Japanese lost all his biggest finals - 1 Slam and 4 Masters 1K.

Career record: 662–312 [330 events]
Career titles: 34
Highest ranking: No. 2 (September 1996)
Best GS results:
Australian Open (runner-up 1996; semifinals 1995 & 97)
Roland Garros (champion 1989; runner-up 1995; quarterfinalist 1990-91)
Wimbledon (quarterfinalist 1994)
US Open (runner-up 1996; semifinalist 1992 & 97; quarterfinalist 1993 & 95)

Davis Cup champion 1990

Mikael Tillström (Sweden)

Born: March 5, 1972 in Jönköping
Height: 1.85 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

In 1997 he won his lone title, defeating in the final **Alex Radulescu** (b. 1974; shocking Wimbledon quarterfinalist in 1996 thanks to mind blowing serving performance) in extraordinary circumstances - the Romanian-German was already enjoying his maiden title after one of two match points he wasted. After winning the opener, Tillstron led 4:1* (30/15) in the 2nd set when Radulescu began dominating; he led 5:3 in the 3rd set, then at 5:4 he was serving for the title. On the first match point netted the forehand; second match point - noise of the crowd accompanied the rally, a linesman called Tillstrom's backhand 'out', but Romano Grillotti - the chair-umpire - immediately overruled. Radulescu did not hear and with raised arms went towards the net, then he realized the point must have been replayed. The Swede saved the second match point on repeat with a volley, and Radulescu completely lost his mind as well as 11 out of the last 12 points, breaking his racquet and not trying to win the points, committing two straight double faults in the end. *"I'm sorry I behaved like that,"* he said. *"I don't know what happened to me. I was completely shattered the moment the point was overruled by the chair umpire and that affected my game. It was impossible to continue after such a decision, but in my heart I have won this title."* Tillstrom's second big result, chronologically first, worth mentioning - it is the Australian Open '96 quarterfinal after stunning Thomas Muster in the fourth round. The Swede, aware of Muster's slight right-ankle injury, implemented a great tactic harassing Muster with constant backhand dropshots – it paid dividends at the end – Muster led 2:1* in the 4th set, but lost five games in a row. Trivia: Tillstrom faced Pete Sampras in all majors, more or less repeating the scenario in four of their five meetings, here are scorelines of

those matches: Australian Open '00 (3-6, 6-7, 1-6); Roland Garros '94 (4-6, 4-6, 6-1, 4-6); Wimbledon '97 (4-6, 4-6, 2-6) and '98 (4-6, 4-6, 6-7); US Open '98 (2-6, 3-6, 1-6).

Career record: 112–113 [110 events]
Career titles: 1
Highest ranking: No. 39 (October 1996)
Best GS result: Australian Open (quarterfinal 1996)

Filip Dewulf (Belgium)

Born: March 15, 1972 in Mol
Height: 1.93 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

The best Belgian player of the 90s, an enigma. Usually those players who create some attention, yet finish career with a modest win/loss record, are restricted to only one impressive result; it's either winning a big title - "big" understood by its prestige (Roberto Carretero, Albert Portas) or the quality of the overcome opponents (Mark-Kevin Goellner); or reaching a major semi-final (Vladimir Voltchkov, Jerzy Janowicz). Dewulf doesn't fit any of those groups. He was losing very often in the first round of main-level events, but exploded a few times. For the first time in Vienna '95 - ranked no. [119], he arrived in Vienna, and had problems to beat there **Mikael Stadling** (a man who won just one ATP match) in the first round of qualies; ten days later he stunned the local crowd outplaying on carpet in the final Thomas Muster, who was in tremendous form and extremely determined to finally win a title in the Austrian capital. Two years later, Dewulf [122] exploded again, that time on clay in Paris - again as a qualifier he managed to win eight consecutive matches which meant his advancement to the semifinal where he wasn't doomed to failure facing the other revelation of the event - Gustavo Kuerten (the Brazilian won in four sets). I had an opportunity to watch a dozen of Dewulf's matches in the second half of the 90s, and he gave me an impression of someone who didn't care - "if I lose - no problem, if I win - ok, nothing special happened." It was pretty careless tennis, a lot of flair in ground-strokes (especially the forehand), but the serve couldn't help him as well as the volleys. Very loose attitude probably helped him to beat Top 10ers in similar four-setters: Muster in Vienna and Alex Corretja in Paris, he didn't choke when losing the 4th set from a match point up hung in the air, but this specific attitude couldn't be helpful on a bad day when the will to win and some tactical adjustments are necessary. A good example of Dewulf's indifference comes from Zagreb '96 quarterfinal against Cedric

Pioline. The Belgian led on return 40/15 at 4:3 and 5:4, but wasted all four chances like nothing happened, and acted the same way being a few minutes later on verge of defeat (Pioline won it 6-4, 3-6, 7-5).

Career record: 96–125 [111 events]
Career titles: 2
Highest ranking: No. 39 (September 1997)
Best GS result: Roland Garros (semifinalist 1997; quarterfinalist 1998)

Jonas Björkman (Sweden)

Born: March 23, 1972 in Alvesta
Height: 1.84 m
Plays: Right-handed

Bjorkman was a heir of two different schools of Swedish tennis: one represented by a bunch of players inspired by Bjorn Borg, who were using two-handed backhands having based their tactics around baseline game, and the other one represented only by Stefan Edberg, so the serve-and-volley style. Bjorkman was trying to combine these two schools (similarly to Anders Jarryd in the preceding decade) even though his volley skills were nowhere close to Edberg's, and his forehand was nowhere near to the power of three Magnuses (Larsson, Norman & Gustafsson) who played more or less at the same time. In his first few years on the tour he established himself as one of the best doubles players partnering Jan Apell (b. 1969). The constant attacking the net in doubles and improving the return skills in doubles, he successfully transfered into his singles career in 1997. At the age of 25, as a serve-and-volley player following only his first serve, he enjoyed a great season from the beginning (title in Auckland) to the end (Davis Cup triumph with him as a leader in singles and doubles, p/Nicklas Kulti). The magic gone after Australian Open '98, but until the end of his career ten years later, Bjorkman was a permanent Top 100 guy, who was able to surprise from time to time in big tournaments (Wimbledon semifinal for instance at the age of 34), taking advantage of his huge experience, especially in 'best of five' matches. In the 90s he was the only player - along with Guy Forget - who participated in Masters events in both, singles (semifinalist '97) & doubles (champion '94). He was very good at imitating other players, there was a time when Europosrt was regularly showing a video in which he was imitating John McEnroe, Emilio Sanchez & Edberg among others. In his

post-playing career, he joined forces with former Swedish ATP pros Thomas Johansson and Simon Aspelin to set up the club league for amateur players.

Career record: 414-362 [349 events]
Career titles: 6
Highest ranking: No. 4 (3 November 1997)
Best GS results:
Australian Open (quarterfinalist 1998, 2002)
Wimbledon (semifinalist 2006)
US Open (semifinalist 1997)

Davis Cup champion 1994, 1997 & 1998 (twice in doubles, once in singles/doubles)

Christian & Casper Ruud (Norway)

Born: August 24, 1972 and December 22, 1998 in Oslo
Height: 1.88 m and 1.83 m
Play: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

Father and son who are the best Norwegian players in history. The son is probably going to be better overall, he has already won a title - something the father didn't do... **Christian** Ruud is one of the weakest players introduced to the book, but I wanted to include him; as far as Scandinavia is concerned, there were so many great Swedish players in the 80s and 90s, but only one good Dane (Kenneth Carlsen) and one good Norwegian in the 90s. Carlsen's career is more impressive, yet somehow Ruud achieved a higher career-best ranking. It happened in 1995, his first full main-level season (at the age of 23), when his patience paid off on clay - that year he reached his lone ATP final in Bastad. As a 20-year-old player, Ruud had quite a remarkable debut at the main-level: with ranking no. 312, on an extremely hot day (40 degrees Celsius) he almost defeated Boris Becker in the first round of the Olympics in Barcelona! The German ultimately survived 3-6, 7-6(2), 5-7, 7-6(2), 6-3 after 4 hours 42 minutes trailing 2:4 in the 4th set. *"Was I intimidated? Was I nervous?"* Ruud asked rhetorically in the aftermath. *"Of course I was. I had never before been on such a big court, with such a big crowd, or against such a big name."* Even though Ruud was known as a clay-court player, his best result comes from Australian Open '94 when he reached the fourth round, and led 2-1 in sets against Goran Ivanisevic, who had defeated in their first meeting (in five sets) in the Davis Cup three years before...

Ruud's son, **Casper** doesn't convince me that he may be a threat this decade. Just like the father, he has a patient baseline game, he was training in Rafael Nadal's academy and perhaps thanks to that he moves better than his predecessor; in the Covid-19 year as he turned 22, he certainly made progress. Before the six-month virus break he claimed his maiden title (Buenos Aires), after the break reached the semifinals of two big clay-court events (Hamburg, Rome). Regardless of how far he's going in the next few years, clay should definitely be his favourite surface. I don't see him farther than French Open quarterfinal though.

	Christian	**Casper**
Career record:	115–143 [131 events]	65–55 [50 events]
Career titles:	0	1
Highest ranking:	No. 39 (October 1995)	No. 24 (February 2021)
Best GS result:	Australian Open (fourth round 1997)	Australian Open (fourth round 2021)

Davide Sanguinetti (Italy)

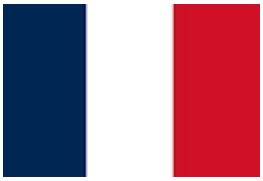
Born: August 25, 1972 in Viareggio
Height: 1.87 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

A player with very delicate tennis, slight reminiscence to Miloslav Mecir, so I'd say Sanguinetti's game-style suited more to the turn of the 80s and 90s than 90s & 00s when he was playing on the tour. That archaic, flat strokes were quite harmful anyway. Sanguinetti was no match-up for guys like Andre Agassi or Pete Sampras, but for younger players, Sanguinetti could be a pain in the ass with his unorthodox style. The best exemplification - late Winter '02 - the almost 30-year-old Sanguinetti, within two months, got his two ATP titles defeating in the finals (Milan & Delray Beach) very promising youngsters who were the best in the world one year later (Roger Federer & Andy Roddick). In the meantime Sanguinetti won a big Challenger in Wroclaw, he had a 20-3 record then. Sanguinetti was similarly dangerous on all surfaces, but felt the most comfortable indoors. His Wimbledon '98 quarterfinal being ranked 65 was shocking because it was his first grass-court event! The draw was very favorable, en route to the last eight (no chance vs Richard Krajicek) he defeated three lower ranked opponents and Francisco Clavet, a clay-courter, in the fourth round. *"I'm surprised because I didn't know how I would respond to grass,"* Sanguinetti said after the Clavet match. *"But as soon as I came here and started to practice I felt really good."* In 1998 Sanguinetti helped Italy to stun

the United States in the semifinal of Davis Cup in Millwaukee (Sanguinetti defeated in straight sets Todd Martin) which was one of the biggest upsets of the 90s. The court was slow because the American team expected to put into play Andre Agassi & Jim Courier, they were replaced by Jan-Michael Gambill & Martin. *"We were in Italy and we practiced on a really, really fast surface and we were thinking, 'Gosh, we hope it is not that fast,'"* Sanguinetti said. *"Because it is not good for the public. It is no fun to play and watch. When we got here, it was so slow. We could have practiced on clay."*

Career record: 170–244 [235 events]
Career titles: 2
Highest ranking: No. 42 (October 2005)
Best GS result: Wimbledon (quarterfinalist 1998)

Fabrice Santoro (France)



Born: December 9, 1972 in Tahiti (French Polynesia)
Height: 1.76 m
Plays: Right-handed on serve (two-handed both sides)

For many years, "Le Magicien" was the man who lost the most main-level matches (lately that infamous record has been overcome by Feliciano Lopez). The Frenchman was the first man to play matches in four different decades (Roger Federer has done the same too). One of the most bizarre styles of the Open Era; he was serving with right hand, but very often was using the left hand (holding the racquet at its throat) to play backhand slices, either from the back of the court or at the net (left-handed backhand volleys)! So he's the only player I know for who I would count backhand winners off both wings. He loved to change the rotations during longer rallies; he could always interrupt the rhythm, regular slowing down could be entwined with a sudden acceleration at every moment of the match, hitting dropshots (also as returns) & lobs during a rally was something Santoro loved to do. Many top players had very tough times dealing with Santoro's unusual style. Thomas Muster & Marat Safin finished their careers with negative H2Hs against Santoro, Pete Sampras trailed 2:3 in their H2H after one of his bitterest defeats as Santoro outplayed him 6-1, 6-1 in Monte Carlo '98! Among the best three Frenchmen who played the entire 90s (Santoro, Arnaud Boetsch, Cedric Pioline) Santoro is the only one who never achieved anything distinctive, he

hasn't engraved his name in the history of sport for casual observers, but as opposed to Boetsch & Pioline, Santoro was a tennis prodigy. He won the French championships in all age categories and in 1989 after saving two match points against **Jared Palmer** (b. 1971) he became a French Open junior champion (the same year he debuted in the main event losing dramatic five-setter to David Wheaton). Santoro was within a point of winning an Olympic medal. At the Olympics in Barcelona '94 he led 5:2* in the 5th set against Goran Ivanisevic, but wasted two match points at 5:4* and lost 7-6, 7-6, 4-6, 4-6, 6-8 after 4 hours 25 minutes. He was 19 years-old, at the time it seemed that he'd be a multiple major quarterfinalist. It didn't happen, he was waiting very long to get his first title, then another few years to reach the only major quarterfinal, and surprisingly it happened in Melbourne, not in Paris. In 2006 the 33-year-old Santoro, with his long established *"too good to never reach a Grand Slam quarter-final"* status, finally managed to appear in the last eight of his 54th major (three times lost in the fourth rounds before). It had cost him a lot of energy though, two tough back-to-back matches against much higher ranked opponents in dazzling Sun (Gaston Gaudio – 3:47 hrs, David Ferrer – 2:13 hrs) contributed to his exhaustion after the opening set vs Nalbandian, and he experienced a double bagel, total rarity in the second weeks of Slams. Trivia: Santoro is a co-creator of the longest French Open match which was the longest in history for six years. In the first round of 2004 he defeated his countryman Arnaud Clement 6-4, 6-3, 6-7, 3-6, 16-14 after 6 hours 33 minutes. Santoro had saved a match point on serve at 4:5 in the decider just before the match was suspended due to darkness... finished the following day (4:38h + 1:55h). *"I only took one litre of water out with me today,"* Santoro said after the match, *"I told myself we'd play maybe 10 or 15 minutes. I didn't think I had another two hours in my legs."*

Career record:	470–444 [441 events]
Career titles:	6
Highest ranking:	No. 17 (August 2001)
Best GS result:	Australian Open (quarterfinalist 2006)

Davis Cup champion 2001 (played doubles in the final)

Patrick Rafter (Australia)

Born: December 28, 1972 in Mount Isa
Height: 1.85 m
Plays: Right-handed

It was a strange career with a couple of unexpected twists:
1] sudden improvement - there was absolutely nothing special about him in the first two years since his ATP debut, Rafter was not only unimpressive at the main-level (lost his first seven matches), he also didn't impress at Challengers winning just one

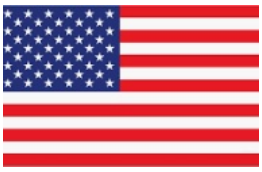
title, at the age of 21 he looked like another ordinary serve-and-volleyer, there were plenty of them in the 80s, and all of a sudden as a player ranked 139, he reached the Indianapolis semifinal eliminating i.a. Pete Sampras after an all tie-break three-set thriller surviving ten break points in the final set, it was a game changer, soon afterwards Rafter collected wins over other top players (Jim Courier, Michael Chang, Ivan Lendl, Thomas Muster as well as Goran Ivanisevic & Andre Agassi at exhibition events)
2] disappointing slump - he became a popular figure in Australia, signed good contracts with Reebok, and when it seemed that his advancement to the Top 10 it'd be a matter of time, he experienced two, relatively poor years (1995-96)
3] resurgence - in Autumn '96, Rafter won the biggest at the time exhibition event in Hong Kong, and instead of going to Europe trying to play qualies in big events (Stuttgart & Paris), Rafter decided to finish the season to have more time for the 1997 preparation; he made the right choice, admittedly Rafter disappointed the local fans in Aussie tournaments like in two previous seasons, but won a dramatic five-setter against Cedric Pioline in the Davis Cup first round, and said it was his best performance ever; the upcoming months rather confirmed that statement - Rafter began achieving these results that were expected from him two years earlier - finals in ATP events, first Grand Slam semifinal, finally something what seemed even a bit above his potential - the Grand Slam triumph (US Open '97)
4] premature retirement - during his best years (1997-99), Rafter was an example of great athleticism, unfortunately suffered an injury just before the US Open when he was a two-time defending champion... bitter defeat to Pioline (this time he led 2-0 in sets) changed the trajectory of his career, he lost his aura of the best hardcourt player, but on grass he was still very dangerous, played two Wimbledon finals... in

2001 he decided it'd be his last season even though was only 29 and playing very good tennis, he was ranked No. 8 at the end of the year when he played his final match in the Davis Cup final vs Sebastien Grosjean... noone before him decided to quit being ranked so high. Trivia: Rafter, the back-to-back US Open champion, lost the first round in New York '96 and the first rounds of his two trips to NYC in the years 1999-2000. *"The toughest player I played against was definitely Pete Sampras - he did everything I did, only better."* Rafter recalled his career. *"His record was the best so there's no doubt about it Sampras the stand-out. I enjoyed playing Andre Agassi the most - I thought we had a really good battle, I really enjoyed playing him."*

Career record:	358–191 [187 events]
Career titles:	11
Highest ranking:	No. 1 (July 1999)
Best GS results:	Australian Open (semifinalist 2001) Roland Garros (semifinalist 1997) Wimbledon (runner-up 2000-01; semifinalist 1999) US Open (champion 1997-98)

Davis Cup champion 1999 (didn't play in the final)

Chris Woodruff (USA)



Born: January 2, 1973 in Knoxville, Tennessee
Height: 1.88 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

Chris turned professional a bit later than other US guys born in the 70s because he attended the hometown University of Tennessee where his father taught marketing. As a representative of that school, Woodruff became the NCAA champion in 1993; in that year he made his ATP debut, but needed to wait another three years to get the first final (Philadelphia, lost to Jim Courier, who'd helped Woodruff during the pre-season inviting him to his home in Florida as a sparring partner). One year later, Woodruff stunned the tennis world in a similar fashion to Robert Carretero a year before in Hamburg... in Montreal, Woodruff eliminated in back-to-back matches several distinctive players: Jan Siemerink, Goran Ivanisevic, Mark Philippoussis, Yevgeny Kafelnikov and Gustavo Kuerten! More shocking the success considering that Woodruff came to Montreal having lost three straight matches; he saved a match point vs Siemerink (I heard that the Dutchman had an

easy put-away volley). *"This is my biggest tennis accomplishment so far,"* said the 24-year-old Woodruff, *"The first win is the toughest. I had a couple of chances last year. Now, hopefully, I'll get a few more titles."* After the tournament Woodruff advanced to No. 29, and never went higher. In 1998 he played just one main-level match (Indian Wells) being sidelined due to serious injury. He didn't forget how to play tennis though, and almost exactly one year after the comeback, he reached the Indian Wells semifinal after defeating Tim Henman 7-5 in the decider, he repeated that score against the Brit in the deciding set of the Australian Open '00 fourth round - his last result worth mentioning. Bulky & sturdy, nicknamed "Country", he used to lick his lips before each serve.

Career record: 109–104 [108 events]
Career titles: 2
Highest ranking: No. 29 (August 1997)
Best GS result: Australian Open (quarterfinal 2000)

David Prinosil (Germany)

Born: March 9, 1973 in Olomouc (Czechoslovakia)
Height: 1.85 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

The German player, who, in some sense, belongs to very good Czechoslovaks (Přinosil) born in the 60s and 70s; he was 14 when moved from his native country to West Germany where he shortly after became a German citizen; following his retirement he came back to Czechia and lives in Prague. From the perspective of German tennis, he was drifting in places 3-5 of his adopted homeland between two different generations (he was younger than Boris Becker & Michael Stich, but older than Tommy Haas & Nicolas Kiefer) - with all of them Prinosil represented Germany in the Davis Cup, mainly as a doubles player, but three times appeared in the quarterfinals as singles player, always losing the ties. The 2000 quarterfinal against Australia was particularly painful for him because he lost the deciders 9-11 in singles and 8-10 in doubles. Much better player in doubles (two Grand Slam finals), but in singles he was usually dangerous for Top 20 players, and in each ATP final he won, defeated distinctive names; perhaps playing the best tennis of his life in the finals of his two countries (6-3, 6-2 over Petr Korda in Ostrava '96 and 6-3, 6-2 over Richard Krajicek in Halle '00). Good from the baseline, but not patient enough to be a

threat on clay, good at the net, but not good enough to call him "very good serve-and-volleyer". The lack of one distinctive shot caused seven defeats to the two symbols of the 90s (Andre Agassi, Pete Sampras), but was relatively close to beat Sampras in straights (!) in Hong Kong '96. *"I did not really think I was in control of the match at any time. I had a lot of break points in the first set but did not convert them."* admitted Sampras. Prinosil had his good moments also once against Agassi, on Centre Court in Melbourne '01, he was leading 6:2 in the 1st set tie-break, but wasted six set points, lost in 11/13 and retired at 0:5 in the 2nd set due to fatigue.

Career record: 169–221 [213 events]
Career titles: 3
Highest ranking: No. 28 (April 2001)
Best GS result: Wimbledon (fourth round 2000)

Kenneth Carlsen (Denmark)

Born: April 17, 1973 in Copenhagen
Height: 1.91 m
Plays: Left-handed

Lanky, light blonde just like a Swedish player with a very similar name (Kent Carlsson). The best Danish player in the Open Era, but an underachiever. The first few years of his career indicated that he'd achieve much more. In his first match on the tour [893] he stunned the no. 1 seed Alexander Volkov in Copenhagen, already in his fourth main-level event he reached a final (Brisbane '92); first major - fourth round and a competitive four-setter on Centre Court vs Michael Stich - one of the best players in the world. As a prospect he was in the mix with guys like Thomas Enqvist & Andrei Medvedev (both born 1974). It's really remarkable that with that career-opening he never entered the Top 40 & never played another 'last 16' match in Slams! His progress was suddenly halted after that match vs Stich at the age of 19 (soon afterwards he got his career-high ranking). There was a promise on a new opening - at Wimbledon '94 when he upset the two-time champion Stefan Edberg on Centre Court - it didn't happen. His results showed that as a serve-an-volleyer he was losing tie-breaks too often, at the end of 1994 he had an abysmal 3-18 record (counting qualifying rounds & Challengers). He missed the entire 2000 season due to left shoulder injury; he didn't play professionally for almost two years, he seemed to be finished, but after the comeback at the age of 28 he was paradoxically better than

ever. The Slams didn't reflect it, but he improved physically & claimed two valuable titles (Tokyo '02 and Memphis '05). He was always eager to participate in Asian events, actually without any interesting results on clay even though he grew up on that surface (as a junior reached French Open semifinal of 1990). Trivia: Carlsen lost his infamous record of 30 first round Grand Slam defeats in 2015. *"Haha, then I'm out of the record books,"* Carlsen said with a laugh to Metroxpress newspaper. *"It wasn't the best record to have. It doesn't make much of a difference to me, but it's nice that there is someone else who has lost more [grand slam] matches than me now."* Will **Holger Rune** (b. 2003) achieve more than Carlsen? At the age of 16 he won French Open boys' singles title (2019, the same year he became the best junior in the world). He hasn't played an ATP event yet. He'll do this in Rotterdam, a few days after my book is finished.

Career record: 266–288 [278 events]
Career titles: 3
Highest ranking: No. 41 (June 1993)
Best GS result: Australian Open (fourth round 1993)

Karim Alami (Morocco)

Born: May 24, 1973 in Casablanca
Height: 1.85 m
Plays: Right-handed

You beat the best player in the world when no-one knows you, and 22 years later you're a tournament director of the tournament in which you have done it. That's in brief a story of Karim Alami, who had only won two tournament matches at the main-level before he qualified to the main-draw in Doha 1994. In the first round he faced Pete Sampras, who'd enjoyed a brilliant 1993 season finishing it as the best player in the world without any doubts. Actually anyone could expect something like 6-3, 6-2 for Sampras against a player ranked 204, including the 20-year-old Alami himself, who later said: *"When I discovered I was going to play Sampras I made my flight reservation to leave Doha to fly to Jakarta to take part in qualifiers there."* But miracles in tennis sometimes happen, and it was one of those days... Alami shocked everyone winning 3-6, 6-2, 6-4. *"I let him off the hook,"* Sampras said. *"I had the match under control but for a set and a half my serve just vanished. I'm very disappointed but upsets happen every day in sport. Today it happened to me."* That stunner didn't turn Alami into a very good player, but he became a solid Top 100'er for several years. He was accompanying

more talented compatriots, Hicham Arazi & Younes El Aynaoui, at majors and in the Davis Cup competition. Quite surprisingly, he was the first among these three best Morrocan players in history, to claim an ATP title - he did it in Atlanta 1996. Because his forehand was much better he tended to take unusual positions before returns on deuce-court, moving towards the centre mark. Very athletic player, with his baseline game reminding me of Yannick Noah, but nowhere near to the serve-and-volley skills of the famous Frenchman. His son, Yanis, died in 2019 due to a motorcycle incident in Indonesia when he was just 16 years old.

Career record: 156–186 [181 events]
Career titles: 2
Highest ranking: No. 25 (February 2000)
Best GS result: a few times third round in Melbourne & Paris

Sargis Sargsian (Armenia)

Born: June 3, 1973 in Yerevan
Height: 1.80
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

The only Armenian player in the Top 100, nicknamed "Sarg". He began playing tennis at the age of 7. At the age of 20, he moved to the United States and studied at the University in Arizona between August '93 and May '95. Just before beginning his studies, without experience at the Challenger level, he won his first main-level match when as a qualifier defeated **Richard Matuszewski** in New Haven. In 1995 he became ASU's first NCAA singles champion, defeating in the final Brett Hansen-Dent, Taylor Dent's brother. Then he turned pro, and made a shocking upset at the US Open '95, when ranked no. 392, he ousted Andrei Medvedev in five sets. Despite such a big win, he needed to work hard in the entire 1996 to finally break into the Top 100, it happened in January '97. The same year he claimed his lone ATP title, triumphing in Newport. *"I don't know what happened with my serve today. It just clicked,"* said the fifth-seeded Sargsian, who had 17 aces and just two double-faults in the 7-6, 4-6, 7-5 final over **Brett Steven** (b. 1969, his third and last final; the best New Zealander of the 90s, who finished his career with a positive win/loss record). *"I was serving harder than I have all week."* Sargsian reached the last 16 at majors twice, but his fourth round at the US Open is much more memorable

because in back-to-back matches he survived five-set marathons against better players: first he saved two match points against Paul-Henri Mathieu (4 hours 44 minutes), then escaped from two points away from defeat eliminating the Olympic '04 champion - Nicolas Massu after 5 hours 9 minutes - one of the longest matches in the US Open history. After two marathons, the 31-year-old Sargsian had run out of gas, but he was happy having an opportunity to face on the biggest arena in tennis not only a legend of the sport - Andre Ag(h)assi(an) - but also his virtual compatriot & best friend on the tour. *"He's absolutely a great guy,"* Agassi said on Sargsian in 1997 after one of their countless trainings together. *"I always want the best for him."*

Career record:	155–209 [209 events]
Career titles:	1
Highest ranking:	No. 38 (January 2004)
Best GS results:	Australian Open (fourth round 2003) US Open (fourth round 2004)

Alberto Berasategui (Spain)

Born: June 28, 1973 in Bilbao
Height: 1.72 m
Plays: Right-handed

Alberto Berasategui Salazar it's his full name. Was he a typical Spanish clay-courter of the 90s? Yes, I'd say so. Characteristic for his game-style & very unusual, was his grip - the same for hitting the ball off both wings! Nothing strange about that talking about the players of the previous generations, who grew up with wooden racquets and adjusted themselves to the continental grip, but this type of play with modern equipment has been very difficult. Berasategui somehow found a way to do it; obviously with such an extreme forehand grip, his topspin was enormous, in the mid 90s heavy topspins weren't as popular as in the following decade. The Basque took advantage of it on clay-courts. He got attention in the Fall of 1993 as he reached as many as four finals in small ATP events. He sent a serious message in Nice '94 defeating in the final Jim Courier 6-4, 6-2, so the guy who had played three consecutive French Open finals at the time. Berasategui's great form in the French south, he transferred to the French north - at Roland Garros he was impressing for two weeks, before had never even played a major 3R and all of a sudden he advanced to the final eliminating only quality opponents: Wayne Ferreira, Cedric Pioline, Yevgeny Kafelnikov, **Javier Frana** (b. 1966, three titles), Goran Ivanisevic and Magnus Larsson to face fellow

Spaniard and defending champion Sergi Bruguera. He was defeated in four sets, Bruguera managed to totally neutralize Berasategui's kick-serve and was simply more patient. That final was a huge boost of confidence - in the aftermath he claimed six titles (seven counting with a Challenger) which allowed him to participate in "Masters", becoming a whipping boy; he was destroyed by Michael Chang, Andre Agassi & Bruguera - the last of them felt such an advantage that I saw him for the first time applying serve-and-volley on a regular basis. Berasategui was never the same after 1994, others figured him out - his tendency to hit the vast majority of serves to the backhand of right-handed opponents, his running the backhand around to play those vicious top-spin forehands. Strangely enough, his second best major appearance it's Australian Open '98 - he advanced to the quarterfinal winning on hardcourts three successive matches being an underdog (Andrei Medvedev, Patrick Rafter, Agassi). Between June 2nd and August 31st he lost nine consecutive ATP matches. Before the humiliating streak, he experienced something which could seem as exceptionally unlikely - had lost two matches within a few weeks leading 5:1 in the deciders (vs Felix Mantilla & Cedric Pioline).

Career record: 278–199 [207 events]
Career titles: 14
Highest ranking: No. 7 (November 1994)
Best GS results: Australian Open (quarterfinalist '98) and Roland Garros (runner-up '94)

Andrea Gaudenzi (Italy)

Born: July 30, 1973 in Faenza
Height: 1.84 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

He was an excellent junior, in 1990 as a 17-year-old boy he won French Open and US Open (defeating Swedes: one year younger Thomas Enqvist & one year older Mikael Tillstrom, after dramatic matches), so there was no point to play with juniors in 1991, he decided to focus on Satellites and qualifying matches to Challengers. The transition was not easy, he needed two years to begin regular participation at the Challenger level, in the meantime winning his first ATP matches, Summer '92 was successful - after triumphing in a Polish Challenger (Poznań), the following week Gaudenzi advanced to his first ATP quarterfinal (Kitzbuhel), a few weeks later to his first ATP

semifinal in San Marino. Two months later co-created a long lasting record of the longest "best of three" match as he lost to Andrei Cherkasov 7-6(6), 6-7(2), 5-7 in Tel Awiw after 3 hours 54 minutes. Within the next two seasons he accomplished an advancement to the Top 20, and when it seemed he would be there for many years, a serious injury thwarted his aspirations. In 1998 he played well again, helping Italy to advance to the Davis Cup final, but in the first rubber of the final against Sweden, Gaudenzi was forced to retire at 6-all in the 5th set (!) facing Magnus Norman. Probably one of the five most dramatic, amazing matches I've seen in the 90s, concluded with the latest retirement as far as the Open era is concerned… Italy advanced to the final for the first time since 1980 mainly to Gaudenzi, who won his all four singles rubbers that year. In the semifinal vs USA, he suffered a right shoulder injury during the weekend, winning tough matches in both singles & doubles. He had arthroscopic surgery on the shoulder the following week, but two months later returned for the Davis Cup final – his shoulder didn't sustain the five-hour thriller though, and he underwent another operation on December 6, 1998 which sidelined him for the first three months of the 1999 season. Gaudenzi was a defensive player, his backhand technique quite similar to that presented by the great Bjorn Borg, so releasing one hand in the moment of hitting the ball. But his tennis was quite heavy, I mean grunting, lack of variety. His best results came on clay-courts; in Monte Carlo 1995 he defeated Petr Korda, David Rikl (ok, nothing special), Yevgeny Kafelnikov and Sergi Bruguera, respectively. The Italian lost in the semifinal to his friend and sparring partner Thomas Muster (they shared the same coach, Ronnie Leitgeb), who finished the match dehydrated and needed to go to the hospital right after the match concluded. Therefore we can assume that if Gaudenzi had won the 2nd set he could have played one really big final in his career. Similarly to David Wheaton in the 90s, Gaudenzi was playing with a headband of national colors. Trivia: within a few weeks of 2002, he defeated the best players of two different decades; first in Rome (1R) he easily outplayed Roger Federer [11], then in the the first round of Roland Garros, he survived a four-set match on Centre Court against Pete Sampras [12] - unquestionably the most important major win in Gaudenzi's career.

Career record:	219–231 [224 events]
Career titles:	3
Highest ranking:	No. 18 (February 1995)
Best GS result:	Roland Garros (fourth round 1994)

Greg Rusedski (Great Britain)

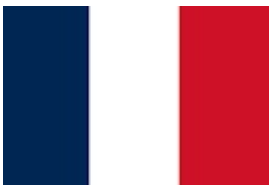
Born: September 6, 1973 in Montreal (Canada)
Height: 1.93 m
Plays: Left-handed

It was 1992 when I heard for the first time about Rusedski. He was 19-year-old, his fellow Canadian (also left-hander) **Daniel Nestor** just one year older. They had very similar experience at the main-level with one huge difference (Nestor stunned Stefan Edberg in the first round of Davis Cup '92, and almost eliminated Sweden barely losing to Magnus Gustafsson in a deciding rubber). Nestor was no. 235, Rusedski no. 153 when they entered the Canadian Open '92 - Agassi outplayed them in round 2 & 3 respectively. The lanky, tall youngsters were introduced as new faces of Canadian tennis, a similar future was ahead of them, in theory. Soon afterwards, Rusedski developed one of the fastest serves in the world and made incomparable progress in the ranking, Nestor cannot complain about his career too, because he became one of the most successful & longest playing doubles specialists. Rusedski advanced to the Top 100 in 1993, in his first Wimbledon he played a tight four-setter against one of two biggest specialists on grass Stefan Edberg, and it was a confidence-booster; in his following event, Rusedski got the title (Newport) - in the last two matches, Rusedski played five-tie-breaks in six sets. It was clear that he would be very tough to break on faster surfaces, nonetheless, the luck from Newport wasn't easily transferred to other courts. Rusedski was actually known as a super fast serve for another four years, but his ground-strokes, especially backhand were only average, so he had to put a lot of effort to improve his volley & forehand to increase the probability of breaking better players & winning vital tie-breaks against them. On the day following his only (among 27 in total) clay-court final, Rusedski changed his nationality, from Canadian to British thanks to English mother. He could count on special treatment during English grass-court season, but the years 1995-96 didn't take his career to another level, he was still losing tight matches more often than winning them. The year 1997 it was his breakthrough, actually that year he did more than could have been anticipated when he had won his maiden title in Newport '93 - within twelve months from a Top 50 guy who was overcoming his own record in fastest serves, Rusedski became no. 4 in Autumn! The new-born Brit was successful indoors, on grass and on hardcourts (with pinnacle at the US Open '97 when he reached the final, and had an

open match against one year older Patrick Rafter, who had enjoyed very similar '97 season, turning from a Top 20 aspirant to one of the best players in the world. Rusedski stayed in Top 10 for more or less two seasons, in the meantime he began to work with Tony Pickard, who was jobless after Edberg's retirement. Pickard helped Rusedski to improve his backhand, but they separated after Wimbledon '98 when the British player retired in the first round and accused his coach of forcing him to take part in the event despite an injury. Sven Groeneveld replaced Pickard, and with the Dutchman, Rusedski celebrated his two biggest titles (Paris-Bercy '98 & Munich-Grand Slam Cup in the last edition of that luxury event). Rusedski earned $1.3 million for his four matches won in Munich, admittedly it was $0.7 million fewer than the champions of the years 1990-92, but still a huge amount of money, comparable to that had won Masters champions in the 90s. It was like winning the lottery for Rusedski, he couldn't expect to participate, but as many as five players withdrew and he entered the main draw! Shortly afterwards he added to his resume a title in Vienna trailing 0-2 in sets to Nicolas Kiefer (two years after blowing a 2-0 advantage against Goran Ivanisevic in the same event), but since the beginning of 2000 he wasn't the same, so I cannot exclude that like in cases of David Wheaton & Magnus Larsson, winning the Grand Slam Cup title could have a negative impact on his motivation. In singles, Rusedski finished his career with a Davis Cup win after saving a match point in the 5th set, so it was a fitting end for a guy who was constantly involved in tight situations.

Career record:	436–287 [293 events]
Career titles:	15
Highest ranking:	No. 4 (October 1997)
Best GS results:	Wimbledon (quarterfinalist 1997) US Open (runner-up 1997)

Jerome Golmard *(France)*



Born: September 9, 1973 in Dijon;
Died: July 31, 2017 in Dijon (aged 43)
Height: 1.87 m
Plays: Left-handed (two-handed backhand)

Entertaining player to watch with quite an unconventional style, who unfortunately prematurely passed away. Golmard announced in 2014 that he was diagnosed with motor neuron disease, which causes muscle paralysis, died three years later after spending the last years of his life on a wheelchair... During his days on the tour he defeated many Top 10 players. Perhaps his biggest win comes from the Canadian Open '00 when he ousted Andre Agassi in two tie-breaks. One year before, Golmard had his tremendous period when he could be perceived as a potential Top 10 player (never advanced to the Top 20). First he won his maiden title in Dubai playing superb tennis, winning four consecutive matches against Top 10 players! Afterwards he played quarterfinal in Miami and semifinal in Monte Carlo (i.a. stunned a contemporary French Open champion - Carlos Moya) , so he showed that would be menacing on clay & hard. Between Dubai and Monte Carlo he won nineteen matches losing five and advanced from no. 63 to 22 within three months. His progress was halted by an injury; he suffered bursitis in his right knee during spring which ended his season already in mid-June before Wimbledon. Admittedly he won his first event after a six-month break, but the magic of Spring '99 never returned. Trivia: one of the players who were retiring with the biggest frequency, in the years 1997-2004 he left the court 19 times not waiting until the match point, thrice he did it after the first few games.

Career record: 144–143 [144 events]
Career titles: 2
Highest ranking: No. 22 (April 1999)
Best GS results: Australian Open (third round 1998 & 2002)
Wimbledon (third round 1998 & 2000)
US Open (third round 2000)

Hicham Arazi (Morocco)

Born: October 19, 1973 in Casablanca
Height: 1.73 m
Plays: Left-handed

When he was just two-years-old, emigrated with his father and three brothers to Paris where he received the French citizenship in 1992. As a junior he didn't achieve great results, and the beginnings in the professional weren't successful either. He was mainly playing in Challengers and Satellites (won them in Spain & Tunisia). At the beginning of 1994 he was ranked at the end of Top 200, having played just one ATP event, in the city of his birth. The turning point occurred in the mid-1996 when Arazi began working with the Italian coach Alberto Castellani. It made an impact on Arazi's mentality, and the Moroccan found a way to display to the world his awesome talent in the late 90s as well as in the early 00s... He was very flexible, moving around the court with grace, playing all strokes effortlessly, quite soft, but you never knew when he would accelerate the pace of the rally. His skills I'd compare to Marcelo Rios, whom Arazi defeated 3-1 in the fourth round of Roland Garros, actually destroying him in the opening two sets. Arazi never advanced even to the Top 20 because he wasn't a tournament player. He was able to play his best tennis facing higher ranked opponents on the biggest arenas; the special atmosphere and the feeling that he was an underdog could elevate him to a "Rios' level". But the following day he could play much beneath his standards against theoretically inferior opponents if the match was scheduled onto a court with not impressive capacity. He loved to juggle with his Head racket, doing it exceptionally well. After losing a second consecutive year in the French Open quarterfinal he split up with his Italian coach who had been reading poetry to him. *"I still read, but not poems anymore. Sometimes it's worth changing something"* stated Arazi. The change didn't turn the Moroccan magician into a reliable player, but his third and last ATP final was big (Monte Carlo '01 after eliminating four seeded players).

Career record:	221-226 [216 events]
Career titles:	1
Highest ranking:	No. 22 (November 2001)
Best GS results:	Australian Open (quarterfinalist 2000, 2004) Roland Garros (quarterfinalist 1997-98)

Albert Portas (Spain)

Born: November 15, 1973 in Barcelona
Height: 1.88 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

Full name: Albert Portas Soy. One of many Catalan players who helped to build the power of Spanish tennis. Actually he was an average clay-courter, but in contrast to many players of his level, he played an event of his life in Hamburg (similarly to Roberto Carretero five years earlier). It was the year 2001 when Portas as a qualifier, defeated six higher ranked opponents, including the hottest player on the tour then - Juan Carlos Ferrero after dramatic final in which Portas trailed *0:3 in the 4th set being bageled in the 3rd; Portas snapped a nine-game losing streak and escaped from defeat being two points away at 4:5 (30-all). The fifth set had also its dramaturgy, and ultimately Portas prevailed 4-6, 6-2, 0-6, 7-6, 7-5 after 3 hours 37 minutes. Ferrero lost his 16-match winning streak and never improved that achievement for the following eleven years of his career. Portas claimed his first and only ATP title, being nicknamed 'dropshot dragon'; in the final he played 32 dropshots, winning 18 points in their consequence. *"It's the happiest day of my life. It was a great match for everybody,"* said the 27-year-old from Barcelona. *"I like to play Spanish players as we are all friends. I knew it would be hard – but I did it."* Despite such a big success, Portas never even played the fourth round at Roland Garros. He was close once, in 1997, but lost a dramatic match (6-8 in the fifth to Filip Dewulf). Trivia: it's peculiar that Ferrero defeated Portas five times easily, but when he lost to him twice, those two defeats he suffered in very dramatic circumstances. The second one came in Umag 2006, in the first round (at night) as Ferrero lost to Portas 6-7(4), 7-6(5), 5-7 after 2 hours 48 minutes. Ferrero led 4:1* in the first tie-break, and squandered two break points leading 3:1 in the decider.

Career record: 142–198 [199 events]
Career titles: 1
Highest ranking: No. 19 (October 2001)
Best GS result: third round in Paris, London & New York

Andrei Pavel (Romania)

Born: January 27, 1974 in Constanţa
Height: 1.82 m
Plays: Right-handed

(Un)Lucky 13? Pavel's highest ranking in both, singles and doubles. Beside two icons of the Romanian tennis: **Ilie Nastase** (b. 1946, two-time Grand Slam champion, four triumphs at Masters - all in the 70s) and **Ion Tiriac** (b. 1939, French Open quarterfinalist '68), who led their nation to three Davis Cup finals (1969, 71-72), the most high-profile player of the land of Dracula. To be more precise, Pavel was born in a city close on the shores of the Black Sea - which didn't belong to Wallachia where Vlad the Impaler ruled in the 15th Century - a few months before Romanian's notorious dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu took the power... Pavel began his career promisingly, because as a 16 year-old (at the time of the collapse of the Ceaușescu regime), when he moved from Romania to Germany, he was already 460 in the ATP ranking (for example a 16 year-olds Hewitt was No. 550, while Federer No. 700) but needed another eight (!) years to advance to the Top 100! He was always very good to watch because of his technical skills, especially beautiful backhand, a pillar of the Romanian Davis Cup team through the whole pro-career (played 62 matches in the years 1991-2008). Even though never a Top 10 player, Pavel raised his tennis to "virtual Top 5" on three different occasions: first in the Australian Open '99 fourth round when he lost in five sets on Centre Court to the eventual champion - soon-to-be no. 1 - Yevgeny Kafelnikov, then at the Canadian Open '01 when he won five out of six matches against higher ranked opponents to claim the biggest titles of his life, and finally in Paris'-Bercy '03 when he came back after six-month injury (back) and with a ranking no. 191 he advanced to his second Masters 1K final which is unique for someone who won just three ATP titles. He's an underachiever in my book, versatile player, who was able to play very complex tennis basically on each surface. After 19 years of living in Germany, he moved to Arizona. Trivia: Pavel is one of a few player to participate in four Olympic games (1992, 96, 00, 04), but never won a match (he was close in 1996 when lost to the eventual Silver medalist Sergi Bruguera 6-2, 1-6, 6-8 and four years later when blew a match point before losing to one of the favorites to the Gold medal - Magnus Norman 7-6, 3-6, 8-10).

Career record: 277–261 [255 events]
Career titles: 3
Highest ranking: No. 13 (October 2004)
Best GS result: Roland Garros (quarterfinal 2002)

Yevgeny Kafelnikov (Russia)

Born: February 18, 1974 in Sochi
Height 1.90 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

When you enter the Top 100 for the first time and you're lucky enough to face two best players in the world, people rather expect you to win five games in a set to get important experience. Kafelnikov had other ideas about that. The 19-year-old Russian first defeated Michael Stich [2] in Lyon '93, then a few months later he was only two points away from eliminating Pete Sampras [1] of the Australian Open '94 second round. The fact the American had won two previous majors and everyone was talking that he'd become the first man since Rod Laver to capture the Grand Slam, didn't intimidate the blonde man from Sochi. Kafelnikov didn't possess very big serve, his groundstrokes weren't overwhelming either, how could he be two points away from defeating the two best players in the world within a few months as a player actually unknown to casual tennis fans? The following years proved that those matches hadn't been accidental, Kafelnikov developed himself as one of the best players of the 90s. He was a smart, very clever tactician. As an offensive baseliner he hadn't big strokes like Ivan Lendl or Andre Agassi; his game-style rather evokes Jimmy Connors. Kafelnikov knew how to spread the balls in all directions after returns of his opponents came back to his side, he knew how to finish the rally off a slow ball (especially down the line), finally he knew when to attack to the net. He wasn't an artist at the net, but similarly to Connors, Kafelnikov's volleys off both sides were very solid. They both, Connors & Kafelnikov, found different ways to rely on attacking to the net during rallies: at Connors' early times, playing serve-and-volley was almost mandatory, so the American was actually forced to play plenty of them while Kafelnikov became a doubles lover. He was the last player at the top, who could enter the same tournament in singles and doubles, participating successfully in them both. In 1999, rather unexpectedly he became the best player in the world for a short period of time, it happened when he had lost seven consecutive tournament matches! *"I think it's the ultimate goal for every professional tennis player, to be able to reach that pinnacle. That's what we play for,"* Kafelnikov said. *"It's one of the most enjoyable accomplishments from my career."* Trivia: he played as many as five three-set matches consisting of three tie-breaks and won them all.

Евгений Кафельников

Career record:	609–306 [300 events]
Career titles:	26
Highest ranking:	No. 1 (May 1999)
Best GS results:	Australian Open (champion 1999; runner-up 2000; quarterfinal 2001) Roland Garros (champion 1996; semifinal 1995; quarterfinal 1997, 00-01) Wimbledon (quarterfinal 1995) and US Open (semifinals 1999 & 2001)

Olympic Gold medalist 2000 and Davis Cup champion 2002, Masters runner-up 1997

Karol Kučera (Slovakia)

Born: March 4, 1974 in Bratislava
Height: 1.87 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

As a junior he was representing Czechoslovakia, member of Galea Cup in 1991-92. A protege of Miloslav Mecir, the gold medalist from Seoul '88. "Big Cat" was playing very intelligently as well as his pupil "little Cat" - Kucera. Sometimes it seemed that Kucera was proposing tennis in slow motion, yet with surgical precision. Despite not belonging to the fastest players on the tour, it was very difficult to outplay him from the baseline because he usually knew where the ball was coming which allowed him to be prepared for his flat, well placed strokes off both wings. In the first years as a pro, he was known as someone with a negative aces/double faults ratio. It changed when he began his cooperation with Mecir (1997). Kucera claimed his first title on grass (Rosmalen '95) even though he had not won a match on this surface before. One year later on the same surface, he played a balanced four-setter against the three-time defending champion Pete Sampras at Wimbledon, and it was a sign of good things to come. The year 1998 was the best in his career. In January he was the hottest player on the tour: triumphed at Hopman Cup (p/Karina Habšudová), won a title in Sydney & reached his lone major semifinal, at Australian Open having defeated Sampras in the quarterfinal (6-4, 6-2, 6-7, 6-3), with overwhelming advantage in the first two sets! At the US Open the same year he defeated Andre Agassi in the US Open fourth round (6-3, 6-3, 6-7, 1-6, 6-3). With those two wins he could have felt himself atop of the world. At the age of 31, in 2005, he played his farewell season because the previous one was the least successful since 1993; moreover for many years he was struggling with wrist & arm injuries. In a very bad last year of his career, all of a sudden he could finish it in the most beautiful, yet totally unexpected fashion. Slovakia advanced to the Davis Cup final thanks to Dominik Hrbaty & **Karol Beck** (b. 1982), but the latter was injured and Kucera appeared in the first rubber against Ivan Ljubicic which he lost quickly. On Sunday, in something which could have been

Kucera's last match in career, his former coach Mecir appointed totally inexperienced at that level Michal Mertinak (b. 1979 - the weakest player to have an opportunity to win the Davis Cup clincher), who lost in straight sets to Mario Ancic. It happened for the third time that a player finishing his career was not appointed to play a rubber that could have given a title to his country (Stefan Edberg - 1996 and Patrick Rafter - 2001).

Career record: 293–244 [237 events]
Career titles: 6
Highest ranking: No. 6 (September 1998)
Best GS results: Australian Open (semifinal 1998)
US Open (quarterfinal 1998)

Thomas Enqvist (Sweden)

Born: March 13, 1974 in Stockholm
Height: 1.91 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

Magnus Norman once allegedly said that Enqvist could have been the best player in the world if he'd been playing on the tour just like during practise sessions. I have no idea what was happening at Enqvist's workouts, anyway I can imagine him as the best player with serious modification of the tennis rules. I mean the Swede could be much more efficient if service boxes were designated only for the serve, so players couldn't attack the net and use dropshots. He was clumsy playing volleys and overheads, he also didn't belong to the fastest guys, so without chasing dropshots and possessing awareness that opponents won't attack the net either (forcing him to run from corner to corner), he would be in his comfort zone all the time. Except clay courts, during the baseline rallies usually he was better than anyone, spreading fast, flat strokes all over the place off both wings, similarly to Andre Agassi, attacking the ball always on the rise, but Enqvist as a bigger and stronger guy was able to do that in much more impressive style (!), especially on the hardcourts and indoors. They faced each other ten times with a 5-all outcome; Agassi stated: *"He has good serve and lethal groundstrokes. He is good mentally, and knows how to play under pressure."* He was supposed to be the successor of Bjorn Borg, Mats Wilander & Stefan Edberg. Became the best junior in the world as a 17 year-old boy. The following year jumped from No. 229 to 63 in the ATP ranking. The quick progress was halted by a serious injury of both knees which almost ended his career

in 1994. He collected five titles in 1995 and lost a dramatic semifinal in Masters (to Boris Becker). Injuries reminded about themselves. Enqvist was waiting for something huge and it almost happened at the Australian Open '99. He was in terrific form Down Under winning 14 consecutive matches (counting an exhibition event at Kooyong), but in the Melbourne final, his peer Yevgeny Kafelnikov - with the help of his coach Larry Stefanki - found an antidote. The Russian won that final 4-6, 6-0, 6-3, 7-6 having gathered nine straight games in the process which was ridiculous given Enqvist's performances in the previous rounds (i.a. impressive wins over the Aussie favorites: Patrick Rafter & Mark Philippoussis)... I think Enqvist is the only guy I've seen, who didn't bounce the ball at all before his first and second serve (sometimes he did just one lazy bounce before the first serve) - both serves were fast & flat like his groundstrokes. Exceptionally fast pace of play, many aces & double faults, plenty of winners & errors (never faced six years younger Fernango Gonzalez, their match it could be an amazing slugfest), Enqvist only once played a match that went beyond four hours... it occurred in the Davis Cup final 1996 as he defeated Cedric Pioline 3-6, 6-7, 6-4, 6-4, 9-7 being two points away from defeat at *6:7 in the final set. It could have been the sweetest victory of his career if Nicklas Kulti had converted one of his three match points in the deciding rubber against Arnaud Boetsch. Enqvist got his name after cross-country skier Thomas Magnusson who won three medals at the FIS Nordic World Ski Championships, including gold in the 30 km.

Career record:	448-297 [301 events]
Career titles:	19
Highest ranking:	No. 4 (November 1999)
Best GS results:	Australian Open (runner-up 1999) Wimbledon (quarterfinalist 2001)

Davis Cup champion 1997-98 (didn't play in the finals, better contribution in '97)

Àlex Corretja (Spain)

Born: April 11, 1974 in Barcelona
Height: 1.80 m
Plays: Right-handed

He was growing up in "La Salut" - the best club of Barcelona where previously trained i.a. Manuel Orantes & Juan Aguilera. Also two older brothers played tennis, but they weren't as passionate about this as Alex. The brother Ivan even won the national championships at the age of 14, but serious car injury caused the amputation of his leg. Alex won the Orange Bowl 16s title in 1990 and a year later turned to the professional circuit reaching a semifinal in his Challenger debut (Sevilla). In 1992 he notched valuable wins over very experienced older compatriots (Sergio Casal & Emilio Sanchez) in his first ATP events. Later that year he played his first ATP final (Guaruja) where lost to **Carsten Arriens** from Germany (b. 1969, his only mai-level final). The years 1993-94 stabilized him as a dangerous clay-courter who could be unpredictable on hardcourts too (in 1994 he defeated Jim Courier & Stefan Edberg in Indianapolis). The years 1995-96 brought disappointment, especially on clay - Corretja defeated a virtually unbeatable on that surface Thomas Muster in Gstaad '95 only to lose in the following round to Jakob Hlasek, who was talking about his upcoming retirement. The turning point in Corretja's career came at the US Open 1996 - he not only reached his first major quarterfinal, he had a match point in an astonishingly tight encounter against Pete Sampras! Each of them won 188 points, each struck 25 aces. It was a huge boost of confidence for the Spaniard, he realized that all the hard work put into the serve improvement paid off. Even though the '97 season Corretja began with seven consecutive defeats (including accidental Challenger appearance, the only one between 1994 & 2003), he enjoyed a very successful year putting himself into the Top 5 on clay-courts. The year 1998 was the best in his career by a country mile. He had won four titles (two on clay, two on hard) when arrived in Lyon to begin the indoor season with a humiliating 1-12 record for a player of his status - Corretja captured the title, withstanding a match point in the 2nd set vs Tommy Haas in the final. It was carpet-indoors, that title guaranteed him participation at "Masters" (Hanover) held hard-indoors. Corretja, already with the first indoor title under his belt, felt very well, he took advantage of quite lucky "round robin" circumstances - Andre Agassi's retirement & Marcelo Rios' withdrawal. Sampras seemed to be unstoppable, but Corretja found a way to make a sweet revenge for the New York loss - he saved three match points to win 4-6, 6-3, 7-6 - in my opinion the most valuable victory in his career. The final vs Carlos Moya

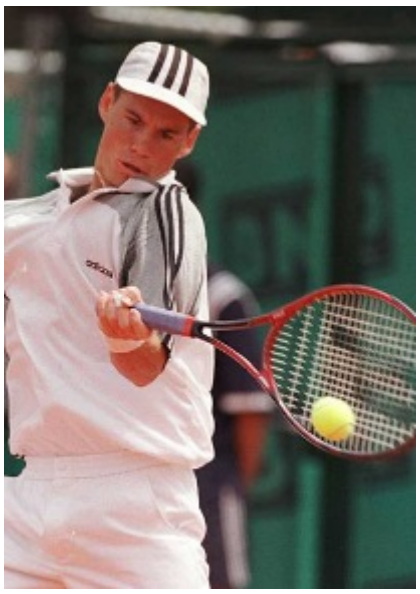
(a few months earleir they met in the French Open final) was wide open to different scenarios taking into account different aspects, but focusing on their H2H, the younger Spaniard was a heavy favorite - Moya had won all their three '98 meetings in straight sets, and was on his way to add another one as he easily grabbed the first two sets and created two mini-match point at 5-all - Corretja fought them off and came back from a 1:3* (30/40) deficit in the decider to survive the four-hour battle. That triumph unexpectedly opened for Corretja a possibility to become the best player in the world at the Australian Open '99. He needed the semifinal, yet he was already beaten in the second round by an average Christian Ruud. Similar opportunities didn't come again, but Corretja kept a high level on all surfaces for another few years. His movement and big topspins off both wings were his main assets. Certainly he could win Roland Garros, it didn't happen (at least quarterfinals five years in a row), but I think that magnificent triumph in Hanover compensates for the Parisian setbacks. Trivia: Corretja in the late 90s introduced an untypical shot to the tour, namely running to his backhand side, he was able to play the ball with the forehand area of his racquet with a sudden flick of the wrist. After retirement, Corretja coached Andy Murray (2008-11) and the Spanish Davis Cup team (2012-13).

Career record:	438–281 [293 events]
Career titles:	17
Highest ranking:	No. 2 (February 1999)
Best GS results:	Roland Garros (runner-up 1998, 01; semifinal 2002; quarterfinal 1999-00) US Open (quarterfinal 1996)

Masters champion 1998
Davis Cup champion 2000 (played doubles in the final)
Olympics Bronze medalist 2000 in doubles (p/Albert Costa)

Scott Draper (Australia)

Born: June 5, 1974 in Brisbane
Height: 1.77 m
Plays: Left-handed



Draper is one of those few players in this book who could be replaced by several others, but I decided to include him. There are two main reasons behind it:
- he's the only man born in the 70s who professionally played tennis (left-handed) and golf (right-handed); he made his professional golf debut in the 2005 Victorian Open, a 54-hole event; at the same time he advanced to his lone major final (in mixed-doubles along with Samantha Stosur, and they won it!)
- he won his only ATP title in one of the most bizarre grass-court events; it was Queens Club '98 and none of six grass-court specialists who had entered the draw (including Pete Sampras) advanced to the semifinal - Draper [108] suddenly faced in the final **Laurence Tieleman** [253, qualifier, b. 1972] for whom already quarterfinal two days ago meant career-best result... Draper didn't fail, and defeated the Dutch-Italian 7-6, 6-4 closing out with his 10th ace. Draper was very lucky in the quarterfinal too, as he ousted **Doug Flach** [222], but that title wasn't a total fluke because in the second round Draper upset his famous countryman, Patrick Rafter. Draper, 5ft 10in, explained that he nearly gave the tournament a miss in order to have surgery to his right knee after losing in the second round of the French Open. Before the event his wife Kelly went to hospital due to a stomach complaint, she died in 1999 from cystic fibrosis. Following his success in London, Draper was compared to his fellow great Aussie - Rod Laver. He commented: *"It's flattering, but it doesn't fit. You're talking about a guy who is the greatest legend in international tennis, and I'm a no one. It's frustrating to hear people always building you up, saying you've got all the shots, and you're losing in the first round."*

Career record: 107–129 [127 events]
Career titles: 1
Highest ranking: No. 42 (May 1999)
Best GS results: Roland Garros (fourth round 1995-96)
US Open (fourth round 1997)

Vincent Spadea (USA)

Born: July 19, 1974 in Chicago, Illinois
Height: 1.82 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

A patient (especially with cross-court backhand vs backhand exchanges) journeyman playing with a baseball cap and "Prince" racquet of green strings. This is a short characteristic of Spadea's long career. Towards the end of it he abandoned green strings, but remained loyal to the Prince & the cap which covered longer, dyed hair then. As someone who had defeated many top players over the years (including the giants Andre Agassi & Pete Sampras in 1999... beat the teenage Roger Federer the same year), Spadea remained for a long time a big underachiever, and could be easily remembered as a funny player who lost twenty-one straight matches (it happened in the years 1999-2000) without his best 2004 year when he hit "thirty" and made positive impressions. At the time it was an age of twilight for most of the tennis players, but Spadea somehow rejuvenated. He finally claimed his maiden title in his main-level event No. 223 (it's a record for the longest waiting), a few weeks later reached the Miami semifinal having beaten five very good players (four of them in three-setters) and established another record at Roland Garros - the most match points saved in a "best of five" encounter as he ousted **Florent Serra** 7-5, 1-6, 4-6, 7-6(7), 9-7 withstanding nine match points (!) after 4 hours 32 minutes. The American saved the first match point in the 4th set tie-break, then trailed 1:5 in the decider saving eight match points in a couple of games, escaping from 0/40 in one of them. Thanks to those wins and others, he entered the Top 20 in 2005, the achievement that was expected from him already ten years earlier. In the late years of his career, usually referred as Vince Spadea, the son of an opera singer (Vincent Sr) of Romanian origins, who made the main influence on the son's career, mother Hilda is originally from Colombia. Guided by his father since the age of 3, he was invincible in the United States at the age of 14. He won the 1992 Orange Bowl title with 7-6(9), 6-3 over **Gaston Etlis**, becoming the first American to win the title since Courier in 1987, in his final junior tournament of career. The transition to he ATP tour wasn't smooth despite an excellent debut - at Key Biscayne '93, not having almost any experience at Challengers, Spadea trashed the former French Open champion Andres Gomez 6-3, 6-1 in less than an hour, but needed two years to become a full-time ATP player. Seventeen years after his sensational ATP debut, Spadea played his last professional match.

Career record: 311–359 [351 events]
Career titles: 1
Highest ranking: No. 18 (February 2005)
Best GS result: Australian Open (quarterfinal 1999)

Adrian Voinea (Romania)

Born: August 6, 1974 in Focșani
Height: 1.85 m
Plays: Right-handed

6-4, 4-6, 2-6, 7-6, 8-6... after that punishing scoreline, fending off two match points, Vincent Spadea defeated the seventeen days younger Voinea at Roland Garros '02, avenging three previous defeats. Both guys with similar surnames by suffixes, sons of Romanian fathers, but representing different countries. Voinea moved to Italy at age 15 (his peer & fellow countryman Andrei Pavel developed as a player moving to Germany one year later) because his older brother, Marian, was coaching there... The second best Romanian player born in the 70s behind Pavel (Victor Hanescu replaced them), but in the mid 90s, the seven months younger Voinea made more havoc. As a qualifier he sensationally advanced to the French Open quarterfinal defeating Boris Becker in the third round. Voinea became the first Romanian to reach the QF at Roland Garros since Ilie Nastase in 1977. *"I had before the match a very good impression about Becker,"* Voinea said about the two-day clash with Becker.. *"He was, for me, the best one, as a person and a player. But I have to say now his behavior in the court, especially today… he wanted to intimidate me. At 3:3 in the third set, I had an advantage and break point, and I returned and he was looking at me and saying something in German. I didn't understand. But he was looking strong at me."* That result allowed him to jump from no. 128 to the Top 60, turning him into a regular ATP player. At the same time the 21-year-old Pavel was outside the Top 400! Voinea is basically connected to the second half of the 90s, in 1996 he played his first ATP final (the first Romanian player to do that since Nastase in 1981), three years later won his lone title, in Bournemouth. Trivia: Voinea defeated Thomas Muster (6-3, 7-5) in the second match which the Austrian played as no. 1 in the world (Key Biscayne '96); their meeting was suspended 3 hours 47 minutes because of rain after the first set, the Romianian saved a set point at 4:5 in the 2nd set with a service winner which was followed with two straight aces... Voinea's biggest

win in the "best of three" format. He seemed to me too focused, too tense to get better results.

Career record: 136–176 [169 events]
Career titles: 1
Highest ranking: No. 36 (April 1996)
Best GS result: Roland Garros (quarterfinal 1995)

Andrei Medvedev (Ukraine)

Born: August 31, 1974 in Kiev (Soviet Union)
Height: 1.93 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

Андрій Медведєв

Medvedev's career was fast... In 1990 he won the Orange Bowl as a 16-year-old (defeating Pilar Pérez in the final; he didn't appear on the main scene), so facing two year older boys. One year later he was ready to play at the main-level and reached the semifinal in Geneva where he lost to Thomas Muster. The year 1992 he began in April and notched valuable results; he won three titles, including Stuttgart Outdoor at the Rochusclub with the strongest draw in the tournament history. The teenager, ranked no. 100, needed nine wins in a row to rise the trophy (three qualifying matches, six in the main draw), defeating four seeded players: Alexander Volkov, Stefan Edberg, Muster & Wayne Ferreira in the final after five sets, having squandered a match point at 5:3 in the third set. Pundits began talking about him as a potential No. 1 in the world. The series of injuries dashed the plans. More or less during clay-court season '95, Medvedev stopped his development, it's difficult to explain what happened, my loose theory is that he grew up too fast, already in his early 90s he began to bald, but the same happened to other players (Andre Agassi, Nikolay Davydenko, Ivan Ljubicic) who enjoyed the best times of careers approaching 30. There was even a week when Medvedev dropped to No. 99 and paradoxically then he played the event of his life at Roland Garros. Neither Pete Sampras nor Gustavo Kuerten were able to defeat him before the final in which he was leading 6-1, 6-2, 4-all against Agassi when the American hit the line with his second serve on mini match point. Perhaps a few centimeters separated Medvedev from a straight set victory. That moment completely changed the momentum and the Ukrainian lost in five the most important match of his tennis life. Medvedev cried afterwards, his namesake was crying too - tennis melodrama created by two young, but already bad men. Medvedev stated that he regained the required self-confidence to play again at

the highest level and another Grand Slam final would be a matter of time, however, one year later he was totally outplayed in the fourth round by Magnus Norman, who was on his way to reach the only major final... Obviously, over the years Medvedev was the most sufficient on clay-courts where he had more time to play his flat groundstrokes & dropshots, but he had skills to make some damage on other surfaces too - everywhere advanced to the finals, at Wimbledon '94 played one of the tightest matches in the tournament history against the legend of those courts - Bors Becker; on carpet in Paris '93 he somehow survived four consecutive matches against players better suited to indoor conditions to be destroyed in the final by Goran Ivanisevic..... His mother Svetlana was a coach in Kiev - there small Andrei & his sister Natasha started to play tennis. Just like the older sister, he finished prematurely, i.e. a few years before turning 30, but before it happened he managed to participate in more than 200 events, hence it's tough to say he hadn't played enough to experience everything that tennis at the highest level has to offer. Trivia: in 1998, within a few months he defeated Ivanisevic twice saving match points in deciding tie-break sets, first at Indian Wells (7-6, 2-6, 7-6), then in Monte Carlo 4-6, 6-2, 7-6); despite "only" 11 titles, he collected 4 Masters 1K titles, three of them in Hamburg (1994-95 and 97).

Career record:	321–213 [221 events]
Career titles:	11
Highest ranking:	No. 4 (May 1994)
Best GS results:	Australian Open (quarterfinal 1995) Roland Garros (runner-up 1999; semifinal 1993; quarterfinal 1994) US Open (quarterfinal 1993)

Tim Henman (Great Britain)

Born: September 6, 1974 in Oxford (England)
Height: 1.85 m
Played: Right-handed

Some encounters separate the men from the boys, and for Henman such a match occurred in the first round of Wimbledon '96 against the new French Open champion Yevgeny Kafelnikov on Centre Court. They are peers, but in terms of serious results Kafelnikov was far superior at the time - he had already established himself as "the man" while Henman had been only recognized as a boyish-looking player, who was nice to watch with his classical style, perhaps too fragile physically and mentally to win the big things. In that skirmish in front of the supportive home crowd, Henman showed guts a couple of times though, and sensationally prevailed in five sets, suddenly becoming a national hero. His following matches at Wimbledon '96 aroused the greatest interest. It was an event of sensations, so when he advanced to the quarterfinal he would be even perceived as a potential champion, lost to Todd Martin. That tournament made him a new tennis star and bonded his career with Wimbledon for the years to come. A new phenomenon, called "Henmania" was associated with Henman's appearances in the most prestigious tennis event actually until 2004 when he experienced his most mature & stable year (it actually began in Autumn '03 when he triumphed in Paris - his biggest title). In the years 1996-2004, when Henman was the biggest attraction during Wimbledon, he lost four times in the semifinals, and four times in the quarterfinals. Undoubtedly, the closest to reach the longed-for final, he was in 2001 when lost an incredible, three-day match to Goran Ivanisevic - two points separated Henman from "failed destiny". Henman was a victim of unfavorable draw a few times, in the years 1998-99 he faced twice the unquestionably best grass-court player of the 90s - Pete Sampras, played good matches but details decided about his four-set defeats; in 2002 (another crazy Wimbledon following the year 1996), in the semifinal he lost to Lleyton Hewitt, who was merciless for the attacking players in the early 00s (in the second semifinal David Nalbandian faced Xavier Malisse then; Henman could have been an overwhelming favorite against each of them). Certainly I'd call the Brit "underachiever" if he didn't win the Paris-Bercy '03. In retrospect that triumph is sensational with the knowledge how Nikolay Davydenko, and especially Roger Federer developed afterwards. The defeated in the semifinal Andy Roddick, was the best player of the season then. So many disappointments and bad draws over the

years at Wimbledon, and in that Parisian final Henman met Andrei Pavel for whom it was a shocking result because he was coming back from an injury. *"It's been an unbelievable week for me,"* said Henman after the final. *"If you'd have told me six months ago that I'd win this title I'd have probably thought you were smoking something. Coming in here I'd never won a Masters Series title and I could count the matches I'd won here on one hand but from the word go I was in the right frame of mind."* In terms of the style, Henman was a prototype of an early Federer. Due to his classic game-style and overusing backhand slices, at the turn of Centuries he was mentioned many times in the same sentences with Stefan Edberg & Patrick Rafter, but as opposed to these two multiple Grand Slam champions, Henman wasn't a constant attacker behind the second serve on faster surfaces, even on grass at the times when serve-and-volley was a norm. Maybe this particular attitude of constructing the points may explain Federer's initial failures in encounters with Henman. The Brit won six of their first seven meetings (the only loss when retired), to some degree Federer was constantly losing to his more experienced copy. The year 2004 when Federer changed his tactics, becoming actually a defensive player, turned the tables and the Swiss won their last six matches not dropping even a set.

Career record:	496–274 [273 events]
Career titles:	11
Highest ranking:	No. 4 (July 2002)
Best GS results:	Australian Open Roland Garros (semifinal 2004) Wimbledon (semifinal 1998-99, 2001-02; quarterfinal 1996-97 and 2003-04) US Open (semifinal 2004)

Félix Mantilla (Spain)

Born: September 23, 1974 in Barcelona
Height: 1.80 m
Plays: Right-handed

Full name: Félix Mantilla Botella, the son of schoolteachers, who began playing at the age of ten... The late 90s was a great period for the Spanish tennis (reflected in their first Davis Cup title in 2000). Admittedly Sergi Bruguera lost his status of "King of Clay" while sensational French Open runner-up of 1994 - Alberto Berasategui - couldn't be so efficient on clay like a few years earlier, nevertheless they both were still dangerous while a new generation of young Spaniards appeared: Alex Corretja, Felix Mantilla, Albert Costa & Carlos Moya. When smaller ATP events kicked off on clay it was easy to predict that at least one of the Spanish youngsters would reach the final. In the end Mantilla achieved less than the other three guys of that generation - he's the only one of that group without a Grand Slam final & participation in "Masters". He didn't figure out how to adjust his style to faster surfaces, but on clay he was a similar threat like other best Spaniards. The year 1997 has to be considered as his best season - claimed five clay-court titles, reached his first big final (Hamburg) and played the equal role with A.Costa in Spanish conquest of the World Team Cup. It put him among favorites to win French Open '98 - lost in four sets the semifinal to Moya, who defeated... Corretja in the final. It was Mantilla's peak, but for the next few years, his patience & super confident top-spin backhand, allowed him to achieve many good results, also tremendous fighting spirit - he survived two matches saving nine match points with triple MP-down on both occasions (!) - first time he did it against Berasategui in Hamburg '98 trailing 1:5 in the 3rd set when began facing match points, for the second time against Albert Portas in Palermo '01 when found himself at 2-6, 3:5* (0/40). The year 2002 brought his downhill, and when it seemed that he'd be the only Spaniard of that gifted generation without a big title, he played tennis of his life in Rome 2003 as No. 47. Especially in retrospect his route to the title is impressive - he defeated six "Top 10 players", including Roger Federer in the championship match. After the triumph he said: *"When I come to Rome I always feel like a gladiator in the Colosseum. [...] The people enjoy watching me. I'm just running and fighting all the time. I don't have the serve of Sampras or the volley of Rafter or the talent of Agassi, but I am strong physically, I am strong mentally."* Understandably it was his swan-song at the age of 29. It seemed that Mantilla's last match took place at the US Open 2005 when he lost to Guillermo Coria - he finished the season due to shoulder problems, and in 2006 was discovered that he had skin cancer. He recovered from that and came back after a 1.5 year break

just to play a few events mixing Challengers with ATP events. The last two matches of his career played against Robin Haase, losing to him in back to back on clay (Amersfoort, Umag). Trivia: it's tough to say something clearly about his mentality; on one hand he produced extraordinary comebacks, at Australian Open 2003 won three straight five-setters; on the other hand he legitimates with one of the worst deciding tie-break records among respectable players, three of those defeats suffered to Juan Carlos Ferrero, whom never defeated in eight meetings.

Career record:	313–218
Career titles:	10
Highest ranking:	No. 10 (June 1998)
Best GS results:	Aussie Open (quarterfinal 1997) Roland Garros (semifinal 1998)

Highly contributed to the World Team Cup title for Spain in 1997, winning his all four singles

Bohdan Ulihrach (Czechia)

Born: February 23, 1975 in Kolin (Czechoslovakia)
Height: 1.88 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

A guy who once said that as a child he wanted to be an ice-cream seller or a truck driver... In the late 90s he was considered as the hardest baseline hitter (along with Thomas Enqvist); unemotional, rather dull tennis, I'd say a prototype of Nikolay Davydenko. Different coaches said that the Czech with his huge weapons from the back of the court, could have achieved more if he'd wanted to work on tactics - he didn't want to. He was always giving this impression that he wants to hit the ball as fast as possible off both wings - if it works - great, if not - not a problem at all. With this attitude he seemed to be a natural hardcourt player, but he grew up in Czechoslovakia, the country with clay as the most popular court, and for the first few years on the tour he was achieving much better results on the dirt, until Indian Wells '97 - the event of his life. In the second round he stunned Pete Sampras 7-6, 7-5, ending a twenty-match winning streak of the best player in the world (!), then he took advantage of a favorable draw to reach the final in which he played a solid four-setter against the defending champion, Michael Chang. Ulihrach's second biggest final also comes from harcourts. After disappointing years 1999-00 the unfulfilled truck driver dropped in the ranking significantly, he began the 2001 season as a player ranked no. 76, thus he had to play qualifying rounds in Doha and attained something quite unusual - within one week he won four matches being a few points away from defeat; saved match points against the French guys (qualies - Paul-Henri Mathieu & Nicolas Escude - semifinal) and was three points away from defeats to Nicolas Coutelot and Yevgeny Kafelnikov. A few weeks later Ulihrach perhaps played his best Grand Slam match losing a tight four-setter to Sampras in the Aussie Open first round. Trivia: just like three weeks younger Jiri Novak, Ulihrach played his first two main-level events in Prague (1993-94).

Career record: 230-246 [239 events]
Career titles: 3
Highest ranking: No. 22 (May 1997)
Best GS result: Australian Open, Roland Garros (fourth round 1999)

Jiří Novák (Czechia)

Born: March 22, 1975 in Zlin (Czechoslovakia)
Height: 1.91 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

A man with flushed cheeks. I'd say "a weaker version of Yevgeny Kafelnikov" - both Slavic speakers, the same height, nothing special about their serves & behaviour (the Russian more nervous, Novak almost never showed any emotions), intelligent baseliners not interested in exceptionally long rallies, sporadic attackers to the net despite regular participation in doubles events where they were implementing serve-and-volley style on a regular basis. Kafelnikov was inconsistent in singles, but somehow found his way to enjoy a much more successful career. Sometimes you look at particular players and it's really tough to explain the gap in their achievements. Novak was able to defeat all the best players of his generation, except Gustavo Kuerten (never faced either Jim Courier or Michael Chang), some of those wins were really sensational: 7-6, 6-3, 6-2 over Pete Sampras (Davis Cup in the United States!); 7-5, 6-1 over Andre Agassi; 6-1, 6-1 (!) over his imroved reflection - Kafelnikov! He was lucky/good enough to also beat a few times the young Roger Federer and teenagers: Rafael Nadal & Andy Murray, once each. It's worth mentioning that Novak was one of the toughest Federer's opponents in the first years on the tour of the Swiss maestro; Federer edged their H2H just 5:4, having always lost tighter battles they played against each other. Novak sniffed one big title in his career twice in 2002:

- the first time in the semifinal of Australian Open as he was six points away from defeating Thomas Johansson, who ultimately claimed the title... could he beat Marat Safin the final too? Why not, at the time they had a 1:1 record against each other with Novak winning their only Slam meeting;
- the second time in Madrid when he withdrew from the final against Agassi due to leg injury... could he beat the famous American? Why not, if he destroyed him a few weeks later in Shanghai. Trivia:
- he played his first two ATP events in Prague (years 1993-94) losing twice to Sergi Bruguera, who came to the Czech capital as a Roland Garros champion on both occasions
- within half of a year he defeated Carlos Moya twice saving match points, first in that already mentioned Madrid (indoors), then during World Team Cup (outdoors). He won 13 of his 18 doubles titles alongside **David Rikl** (b. 1971), the initial doubles partner of Kafelnikov, by the way.

Career record: 337-260 [259 events]
Career titles: 7
Highest ranking: No. 5 (21 October 2002)
Best GS results: Australian Open (semifinal 2002)

Thomas Johansson (Sweden)

Born: March 24, 1975 in Linköping
Height: 1.80 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

The Grand Slam champions from Sweden and the number of their titles? 11 - Bjorn Borg, 7 - Mats Wilander, 6 - Stefan Edberg... 1 - T.Johansson, who is not related to Joachim Johansson. There were so many distinctive players from the country of Three Crowns, yet somehow, aparat from the three titans, only Johansson claimed one of the four most desired titles in tennis. He got my attention for the first time in 1993 when as an unranked 18 year-old WC, beat in Bolzano experienced Karel Novacek who was No. 17 at that time, and advanced to QF where he lost to Andrei Olhovsiky after a tense three-setter. Such a result in debut (ToJo hadn't played earlier even a Challenger or Satellite!) was absolutely amazing, and I thought it would be an extraordinary player... I saw him for the first time in Vienna 1995 when he was playing against Michael Stich, and a couple months later against Boris Becker (Melbourne) and Goran Ivanisevic (Munich) - didn't impress me at all. When he devastated (6-1, 6-1, 6-4) Henri Leconte in the farewell match of the Frenchman, on Centre Court in Paris '96, I was surprised that the young, modest and a little bit scared Swede, won the match so easily. If someone told me then, he would be a Grand Slam champion, probably I couldn't believe it... I used to like him, actually the same thing with all Swedish players, always appreciating his 1st serve and groundstrokes down the line, I like the fact he won the Aussie Open nineteen years ago as one of the most surprising GS champions in history. *"I was only 24 years old, so for me it was a huge title,"* Johansson said about his first big title (Canadian Open '99). *"All of the best players in the world were here. That was like an approval that if I played my best tennis, I could compete with the best players in the world. So that was a sign that I was on the right track. I felt that I belonged, but I also felt that beating Kafelnikov and also beating Jim Courier, to beat those two big champions was just amazing."* Trivia: in Adelaide '04 Johansson for the second time advanced to an

ATP quarterfinal being unranked, it happened because of left knee surgery (didn't play the entiore 2003 season).

Career record:	357–296 [288 events]
Career titles:	9
Highest ranking:	No. 7 (May 2002)
Best GS results:	Australian Open (champion 2002) Wimbledon (semifinal 2005) US Open (quarterfinal 1998 and 2000)

Davis Cup champion 1998 (didn't play in the final)

Albert Costa (Spain)

Born: June 25, 1975 in Lleida
Height: 1.80 m
Plays: Right-handed

The Spanish tennis enjoyed the appearance of four very good young players in the mid 90s (Alex Corretja, Felix Mantilla, Albert(o) Costa & Carlos Moya). I have to admit I expected the best things from Costa at the time, but changed my mind watching Moya at the Aussie Open '97 - two years later he became the no. 1 in the world and in retrospect, I have no doubts he had the best career. Costa seemed to me as a multiple French Open champion. I based that opinion on his three 5-setters against Thomas Muster, almost unbeatable on clay in the years 1995-1996. Costa almost stunned Muster in Paris '95 in four sets (having defeated two-time champion Jim Courier in round 4), then defeated him in the Kitzbuhel final the same year, and

lost a 5-setter in the Monte Carlo '96 final, leading 2-1 like in all their three five-setters. So Costa was my main favorite to raise the trophy in Paris each edition in the late 90s, yet he didn't even play one quarterfinal in those years! His early defeats in the years 1996-97 (to Francisco Clavet & Mark Woodforde) were shocking; another two years he was ousted by Marcelo Rios, so he could say about the unfortunate draw. In the early 00s Costa lost his clay-court charm, he wasn't among favorites in the first three editions of the new millenium, in 2000 he should have reached the semifinal anyway (lost in the quarters to a clay-court journeyman Franco Squillari having defeated him in their three previous meetings), in 2001 he suffered a dramatic 5-set loss already in the first round to **Julien Boutter** (b. 1974), a dangerous Frenchman, being able to play inspired tennis at times. Finally in the year 2002, Costa fulfilled his Parisian destiny. His route to the title is more impressive looking back, the first two scalps (Richard Gasquet & Nikolay Davydenko) were

obtained against inexperienced young players (Gasquet was a kid actually, debuting in Paris). In the quarterfinal Costa had a reverse luck comparing to his quarterfinal vs Muster seven years before - then he was two games away from a 4-set win, in 2002 he was two games away from a 4-set defeat to Guillermo Canas; five points to be more precise, the Spaniard trailed *2:4 (15/40) in that set, but survived 7-5, 3-6, 6-7, 6-4, 6-0 after an almost 4-hour clash. In the final against Juan Carlo Ferrero, a different type of luck was on Costa's side again - the rain fell in 3rd game of the match, the break lasted only 25 minutes, perhaps the younger Spaniard expected longer break and he completely lost his feeling of the court losing eleven straight games after the resumption - he needed those games to be warmed up well again, too late. Another two sets delivered what could be expected from the beginning, JCF won a set, another one Costa, and in the conclusion it meant 6-1, 6-0 4-6, 6-3 for the veteran (Costa's 202nd main-level event). I'm not sure how to explain Costa's inability to play good tennis indoors - he'd lost 17 consecutive matches under the roof in the years 1996-99 before defeating Hicham Arazi in Stuttgart. Very surprising stats because Costa had good volley technique & good reflex, he didn't need extensive swings to hit the ball off both wings. Already as a young player he reached a final on fast hard-court in Dubai '96, the same year in the Wimbledon's first round he eliminated Michael Chang, obviously not a grass-court player, but at the time Chang was in great shape and two years before had even played his lone Wimbledon quarterfinal. In 1997 Costa played on hardcourts two very good big events (quarters at Aussie Open & semis at Cincy) losing to Pete Sampras on both occasions. Nevertheless, Costa just like Mantilla, will be remembered as a clay-courter; they didn't make a progress like Corrteja in 1998 when he became equally dangerous on hard as on clay. Among Costa's 21 main-level finals, there's only one on a different surface than clay - the earlier mentioned event in the United Arab Emirates.

Career record:	385–273 [275 events]
Career titles:	12
Highest ranking:	No. 6 (July 2002)
Best GS results:	Australian Open (quarterfinal 1997) Roland Garros (champion 2002; semifinal 2003; quarterfinal 1995 & 2000)

Olympic Bronze medalist in doubles 2000 (p/Alex Corretja)

Franco Squillari (Argentina)

Born: August 22, 1975 in Buenos Aires
Height: 1.83 m
Plays: Left-handed

Squillari's game-style on clay looked like a copy of Thomas Muster - the serve just as an invitation to hit the ball over the net with heavy top-spins from both wings; patience required until the moment when the opponent plays shorter ball to allow attacking it with a forehand (also from the backhand side). So the question is: why Muster was incomparably more successful? I think the easiest explanation is: he was a much better volleyer (born one decade earlier, so he was growing up when the serve-and-volley style was a norm) and his fighting spirit was extraordinary. Squillari had an exceptionally low ratio of involvement in dramatic matches, so he was that type of guy, who losing - let's say "3-6, 1:3" or "2-6, 6-3, 1:3" - thinks more about the post-match shower than about finding a solution to finish it as a winner. Typical clay-courter, no chance for him to make an upset on grass or indoors, somehow he felt himself the best in Germany where he collected all his titles within 15 months (two in Munich, the last one in Stuttgart) - it was definitely the best period in his career at the age of ~25, in the meantime he had a match point to reach his lone Masters 1K semifinal (vs Alex Corretja in Rome '99) and advanced to the French Open '00 semifinal winning three out of five matches not being a favorite, including a sensational 6-4, 6-4, 2-6, 6-4 decision over Albert Costa. Despite heavy-handed tennis, Squillari finished his career with 2-0 H2H records over very gifted players like a few years younger Tommy Haas & Roger Federer. The Argentine had easily defeated them four times before they played their best tennis.

Career record: 155-165 [163 events]
Career titles: 3
Highest ranking: No. 11 (September 2000)
Best GS result: Roland Garros (semifinalist 2000)

Roberto Carretero (Spain)

Born: August 30, 1975 in Madrid
Height: 1.76 m
Plays: Right-handed

If we take into account the number of main-level wins, he is the weakest player introduced to this book, author of one of the most amazing stories in the entire tennis history. Bulky guy with a ponytail & baseball cap - Roberto Carretero Díaz - a former junior French Open Champion, shocked the tennis world by winning the title in Hamburg as a virtually unknown player ranked no. 143. During a wet and cold week (the temperature between 7 and 15 degrees Celsius), hitting 1st & 2nd serve with the same modest speed, en route to the title as the first qualifier in the previous 58 "Mercedes Super 9" tournaments, he saved three match points in the first round (Jordi Arrese, so already advancement to the second round in an event of this calibre was something big for the young Spaniard), then he destroyed two Top 20 players (MaliVai Washington & Arnaud Boetsch), before entering the centre court to stun Gilbert Schaller, Yevgeny Kafelnikov (for the second time in his career) and his countryman Alex Corretja 2-6, 6-4, 6-4, 6-4 in the 2-hour 44-minute final. After capturing the title, Carretero lost in the first round of Rome and Roland Garros to Mark Philippoussis & Karol Kucera respectively, two very good players, therefore it was tough to expect his amazing downhill - the Spaniard lost in total all his 18 full matches at the main-level (got a retirement win at US Open '96) before as a defending champion he won again a match in Hamburg 1997! After one year romance with the main level, in the aftermath of Hamburg '97 he lost so many points in the ATP ranking that dropped from Top 100 to Top 400 and never regained his previous position, winning in the meantime only two Challenger titles (Sopot '97 & Weiden '99) already with a full shaven head. He retired from professional tennis after the 2001 season at the age of 26, having undergone two shoulder surgeries and one foot surgery. It's really difficult to explain this extraordinary slump in case of a young, well built man. He was never caught using doping so we can only speculate what could happen behind the curtain during that sensational chilly week in northern Germany... Carretero remains a mystery.

Career record: 23–45 [46 events]
Career titles: 1
Highest ranking: No. 58 (May 1996)
Best GS result: Roland Garros (2R in 1997)

Marcelo Ríos (Chile)

Born: December 26, 1975 in Santiago
Height: 1.75 m
Plays: Left-handed (two-handed backhand)

Full name: Marcelo Andrés Ríos Mayorga, nickname "El Chino". I can honestly admit that there were not many players as gifted as the Chilean. Left-handers are in minority, so it's easier to underline their particular skills - in John McEnroe's case it was his volley-game, Goran Ivanisevic's serve was incomparable to anyone else, Rios delighted in the second half of the 90s with his baseline game: the two things made him so special - anticipation and creating exceptionally tight angles. When he improved his serve, he was able to make fools off his rivals - they had to run from corner to corner while he was standing in the middle of the court. Andre Agassi could do the same, but the American needed more power to enforce his style; Rios could do this breathlessly. At the best time of his brilliance, which happened in March '98, Rios triumphed in two big events (Indian Wells, Key Biscayne) becoming the first South American man to reach No. 1 in the world! It was already at the time tennis was very athletic, so his ascendance to the throne seemed impossible when he'd been claiming smaller titles in the preceding years. But the year 1998 was special; Pete Sampras finally felt tired after several years of his dominance while Agassi was coming back after his sabbatical 1997 year... *"Winning this, and beating Agassi in the final, the former No. 1, I can't ask for more,"* said Rios, who didn't start playing tennis until he was 11 but became the No. 1 junior in the world six years later. *"Being the best player in the world for Chile is something like not normal; I feel really proud."* Soon afterwards Rios began to struggle a couple of years with injuries (hamstring strain, stress fracture in his back, thigh, hip, tendinitis in his right knee and groin), and he never regained his '98 form remaining the only player who was No. 1 in the world not having won a major. In 2015, Rios demanded the title for his lone Grand Slam final (Australian Open '98) because the champion Petr Korda was suspended due to doping later that year. Despite a rather unfriendly attitude on and off the court, Rios inspired younger generations of Latin America players, and paved the way for his compatriots Fe4rnando Gonzalez and Nicolas Massu, who became distinctive players in the first decade of a new Century. *"I don't have a relationship with Chino,"* Gonzalez explained a few years ago. *"I've never had it. Never. There was no good vibe, not bad either."*

Career record: 391–192 [198 events]
Career titles: 18
Highest ranking: No. 1 (March 1998)
Best GS results: Australian Open (runner-up 1998; quarterfinal 1997 & 2002)
Roland Garros (quarterfinal 1998-99)
US Open (qiuarterfinal 1997)

Grand Slam Cup champion 1998

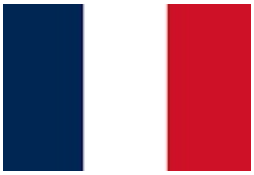
Hyung-Taik Lee (South Korea)

Born: January 3, 1976 in Hoengseong
Height: 1.80 m
Plays: Right-handed

The first man from the Korean peninsula who advanced to the Top 100, won a Grand Slam match and finally won an ATP title, overcoming all best results of his coach, and former best Korean player - **Yoon Yong-Il** (b. 1973). Hyung-Taik made his ATP debut in 1995 thanks to 'wild card' in Seoul, but waited another five years for his breakthrough. It happened at the US Open '00, he went through qualifying rounds, destroying 6-2, 6-0 a former Wimbledon semi finalist David Wheaton i.a., and was very happy after defeating Jeff Tarango in the first round, because he moved one step further than Yoon Yong-Il who had participated in a Slam before (US Open '98). In the next two rounds Hyung-Taik defeated even better players than Tarango, and with no. 182 in the ranking, he played a competitive opening set against Pete Sampras at the biggest arena in tennis! That achievement built his self-confidence and allowed him advancement to the Top 100. Lee's maiden title was impressive, again he was a qualifier, in Sydney '00, struggling a lot to overcome three obstacles. In the main-draw he played the tennis of his life defeating four quality opponents (Marat Safin gave him a walkover in the quarterfinal). In a very dramatic final, Lee stunned Juan Carlos Ferrero, winning 4-6, 7-6, 7-6, withstanding a match point. *"I still can't believe it,"* Lee said, speaking through a translator. *"Winning in Sydney gives me a lot of pride and confidence and I've learned a lot of things this week."* One month later, Lee won his lone title in doubles, partnering Vladimir Voltchkov (they triumphed in Delray Beach).

Career record: 156–156 [157 events]
Career titles: 1
Highest ranking: No. 36 (August 2007)
Best GS result: US Open (fourth round in 2000 & 2007)

Nicolas Escudé (France)



Born: April 3, 1976 in Chartres
Height: 1.85 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

Nicknamed "Picasso". A man for special occasions, big talent, not fulfilled. From the beginning of his career he was struggling with injuries. The big tennis world watched him for the first time when he was just 17-year-old. He received 'wild card' at French Open '93 and an honor to face Boris Becker on Centre Court. Escude got a brutal lesson (grabbed just three games) and almost no-one heard of him at the main-level for another four years when he advanced to the third round in Paris twice: first at Roland Garros, then in Bercy - those results allowed him to finish the year inside the Top 100. Australian Open '98 was his just 11th event at main-level. The Frenchman advanced to the semifinal, winning three matches trailing 0-2 in sets (Magnus Larsson, Richey Reneberg, Nicolas Kiefer), no one before him had achieved such a feat in the Open Era. The more stunning is the fact he was within a few points from losing each of those five-setters. Instead of attacking the Top 20 within twelve months, Escude got stuck around Top 100 struggling with injuries, and then another shocker: US Open '99, he needed to play qualifying rounds, in the first round saved a match point to avoid a 0-3 defeat to Magnus Gustafsson, and advanced to the quarterfinal where was beaten by the eventual champion Andre Agassi. Wimbledon '01 meant Escude's another quarterfinal defeat to Agassi. It was a pivotal event in Escuyde's career. Prior to Wimbledon '01 he was known as an offensive baseliner. He could easily attack the net using either forehand or backhand as an approach shot, but serve-and-volley in his case it was just an element of surprise. The beginning of the 21s Century meant the end of serve-and-volley dominance at Wimbledon, but in 2001 it was still a dominant strategy. In his four previous seasons, Escude didn't get any impressive results on grass (albeit he was a runner-up in the Netherlands '00, with beneficial draw), yet at Wimbledon '01 everything clicked. His victory over a young Lleyton Hewitt was especially respectable. The Australian already established himself as a specialist of defeating the ageing serve-and-volleyers, but when he had a different rhythm on his own service games, passing-shots weren't so precise. Escude not only defeated Hewitt at Wimbledon, he did it in the Davis Cup final the same year too, after very similar scorelines (4-6, 6-4, 6-3, 4-6, 6-4 and 4-6, 6-3, 3-6, 6-3, 6-4).

Career record: 172-129 [129 events]
Career titles: 4
Highest ranking: No. 17 (June 2000)

Best GS results: Australian Open (semifinalist 1998)
Wimbledon (quarterfinalist 2001)
US Open (quarterfinalist 1999)

Davis Cup champion 2001 (won clincher)

Rainer Schüttler (Germany)

Born: April 25, 1976 in Korbach
Height: 1.80 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

Australian Open 2003 – it's a tournament which defines Rainer Schuettler's [845] status in tennis history. The German unexpectedly reached the final; Marat Safin helped him a bit withdrawing from their third round encounter, but it would be unfair to say Schuettler was a runner-up by a fluke because he had beaten David Nalbandian and And Roddick in back-to-back matches. *"During the two weeks, I didn't think too much,"* Schuettler recalled. *"I was playing match-by-match, I was trying to go on court and play as well as I can. One memory that stands out is when I won a match point in the semi-finals against Roddick. I felt how cleanly I hit the backhand down the line to win the match. It was unbelievable during the night session, the stadium was full. The spectators were on their feet for a standing ovation."* The backhand was his best shot, he based his game on great physical fitness being a typical grinder with a never-say-die attitude. He announced his retirement in October '12, but the last match had played ten months before: *"I played my last match in January and due to a groin injury and fitness problems I have decided to retire. I would have liked to have played in the London Olympics at Wimbledon this summer, but I will now concentrate on future projects."* Besides the Australian Open final, he enjoyed two other highlights in his 17-year career: doubles final at the Olympic games in 2004 where he squandered a quadruple match point alongside Nicolas Kiefer and Wimbledon semifinal '08; that year he seemed finished (ranked no. 94 entering the tournament; having suffered the longest losing streak at the main level in 2008) but his risky game paid off – he won five matches (like at the Australian Open '03) including a quarterfinal marathon over Arnaud Clement in which he saved a match point. Trivia: Schuettler was bagelled twice in his career, first in Tokyo '98 by Jan-Michael Gambill, then at World Team Cup '09 by Robin Soderling. A few days after the Soderling humiliation, Schuettler lost at French Open

0-6, 0-6, 4-6 to Marc Gicquel (b. 1977)... unbelievable clay-court slump, but moved to grass and almost reached the final in the Netherlands, ulitmately losing to **Benjamin Becker** (b. 1981), the man who sent Andre Agassi into retirement (US Open 2006).

Career record:	327–337 [329 events]
Career titles:	4
Highest ranking:	No. 5 (April 2004)
Best GS results:	Australian Open (runner-up 2003) Wimbledon (semifinalist 2008)

Magnus Norman (Sweden)

Born: May 30, 1976 in Filipstad
Height: 1.88 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

Norman, born in a family of professional athletes, could be perceived as a successor of the greatest Swedish players as a teenager because already as 16-year-old boy, so at the time he began participating in junior events, got a "wild card" being unranked in Stockholm qualies, and defeated three opponents, including eleven years older former no. 25 - Peter Lundgren! In the first round Norman was trashed by Derrick Rostagno, but the ATP debut was very promising. Another two years were quite tough tough, Norman was playing in Satellites, then Challengers, his first two ATP events were separated by almost three years. Even though he didn't establish himself as another bjorn Bjorn Borg, Mats Wilander, Stefan Edberg or even Thomas Enqvist,

he got recognition in the late 90s as a dangerous floater. He got attention especially during Roland Garros '97 when ousted Pete Sampras in the third round - the future showed that Sampras had already been beyond his best years on clay, but at the time he was among the favorites to the title. In the French Open-Wimbledon '97 combo, Norman showed mental toughness, defeating in dramatic five-setters the two fastest servers on the tour (9-7 in the 5th Greg Rusedski in Paris & 14-12 in the 5th set vs Goran Ivanisevic in London, saving four mini-match points at 11-all). In the latter match, Norman suffered problems with his heart, and underwent five-hour surgery on December 1st, 1997 to correct irregular heart rate. The surgery slowed down his progress, and he significantly dropped in the year 1998, but enjoyed arguably the biggest success of his life, triumph in the Davis Cup. Norman had big input to the success because he won a deciding rubber vs Slovakia in five sets (Karol Kucera), and opened the Davis Cup final against Italy with an amazing match against Andrea Gaudenzi, which he won in very lucky circumstances. That Davis Cup triumph

initiated two great years in Norman's career and results adequate to those hypothetically expected from him in 1992 when he entered the ATP ranking: Norman won five titles in 1999, but modest results in the biggest events prevented him from the Top 10 advancement, then in 2000 Norman not only cracked into the Top 10, he also attacked the position of the best player in the world (it was at the time when Andre Agassi & Pete Sampras were finally tired after their exhausting rivalry of the 90s). Actually in Spring '00, Norman could feel that reaching the peak would be possible - in three big events in a row (Rome, Hamburg, Roland Garros) Gustavo Kuerten was the end station; first he defeated the Brazilian in the Italian final, then lost to him a quarterfinal in Germany, and lost also a 4-set thriller in the Parisian final, arguably the most exiting 4-set major final in history thanks to memorable 4th set when Norman playing at the highest level of concentration and physical dedication, saved ten match points before ultimately losing it. The tension was so high, that during the post match ceremony, Norman's was blinking, like he couldn't control the nerves. Perhaps that match decided that in the end of the year, it was Bralizian who enjoyed being number one in the world. Norman instead, experienced a gradual downhill. In the years 2001-02 he was still fearsome, but never came back to his aura of the two previous seasons, and the year 2003 meant a sudden collapse. The 27-year-old Norman, suffered ten defeats in a row (not counting qualies, yet including a Challenger), and some of those defeats were disastrous, like for instance 1-6, 3-6 to a Greek journeyman **Konstantinos Economidis** (b. 1977). It was a season when Norman was trying to get in shape after surgeries of his hip and knee in the years 2001-02. A first round loss to Jean-Rene Lisnard (b. 1979) at the US Open '03 meant the cup of bitterness was filled to the brim. Norman, who was usually dealing very well with tight situations at the end of matches, escaped from a straight set defeat, and had a match point serving at 5:3, but ultimately lost 6-7 to the inferior opponent. Afterwards he played just two more events and announced the premature retirement, not believing that knee & hip would stop bothering him. After the retirement, Norman established himself as one of the most respectable coaches, significantly improving results of his compatriot Robin Soderling, then helping Stan Wawrinka to switch from a Top 20 player without any bigger titles, to a multiple Grand Slam champion.

Career record:	244–177 [174 events]
Career titles:	12
Highest ranking:	No. 2 (June 2000)
Best GS results:	Australian Open (semifinalist 2000) Roland Garros (runner-up 2000; quarterfinalist 1997)

Davis Cup 1998 champion

Nicolás Lapentti (Ecuador)

Born: August 13, 1976 in Guayaquil
Height: 1.88 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

There is one particular thing about Lapentti - his ability to win matches when he created a match point chance. I don't know any other player with similar experience at the main level who has had such a great ratio of matches won from match point down to matches lost squandering a match point. It's a 16-2 record over the course of fifteen years of his career. Key Biscayne '98 marked his painful defeat to Slava Dosedel 6-3, 6-7, 4-6 despite holding six match points (two months later he lost to Dosedel again in Prague 6-3, 3-6, 2-6 leading 3:1 in the 2nd set), a few months later he was beaten by Scott Draper in Cincinnati (4-6, 6-4, 5-7) that time blowing one match point, and it's really remarkable that to the end of his career twelve years later, he was always winning once a match point for him was created (excluding Challenger '06 in Montevideo where Guillermmo Canas defeated him saving a match point). It's some sort of magic because in the meantime there occurred really complicated situations when it seemed obvious he had to lose this type of match. The best examples come from 2003: first in St. Pölten when in the second round he squandered a match point at 5:4 in the 3rd set against Irakli Labadze (b. 1981), and found himself at 2:6 in the tie-break to survive 5-7, 7-6, 7-6; a few weeks later at Wimbledon he squandered a double match point in the 3rd set against Jamie Delgado (b. 1977, the future coach fo Andy Murray), then saved one MP at 3:5 in the 5th set, and three more MPs as a receiver in the following game to survive the decider 7-5! Lapentti had won dramatic five-setters of all sorts, being close to losing them 0-3, 1-3 or 2-3. Generally when the scoreline indicated 5-all in the 5th set, you could assume that Lapentti would finish as a victor. It's also something that wasn't taken for granted because at the beginning of his career, Lapentti lost 6-8 in the 5th sets to Daniel Nestor & Marcelo Rios during Davis Cup rubbers. At the Australian Open '99 he rewrote the script having beaten 8-6 in the 5th set Karol Kucera (after intentionally dropping the 4th set since from a 0:3 deficit) - perhaps the most important win in his career because gave him an advancement to the semifinal of a major - it never happened again. So after the Kucera encounter, Lapentti won 7 out of 10 matches when the score indicated 5-all in the deciding set. The Ecuadorian

belongs to a narrow group of players who won 30 five-setters at least, but it'd be misconception to think that he was almost always winning tight matches given his awesome records in five-setters and MP-matches. He lost plenty of tight matches of all sorts, simply his magic somehow worked once he witnessed a match point for himself. Lapentii was a smart player, he hadn't a finishing stroke from both sides, hadn't big serve or amazing volley skills, but all types of shot he adjusted to his tennis repertoire on a pretty high level and was using them adequately to a situation. He had this unique intelligence in his eyes to analyze the whole match in its progress to choose the right shots at the right time, and maybe apart from the required luck, it was a significant skill which helped him to win so many dramatic matches... The nephew of Andres Gomez, who won French Open '90. Although clay was Lapentti's best surface, he never reached the quarterfinal in Paris, only once played a fourth round there, and lost to his friend and doubles partner of the junior times - Gustavo Kuerten. In 1994 when Lapentti won Orange Bowl, he defeated Kuerten in the final while together they reached the doubles final. When Lapentti's younger brother **Giovanni** (b. 1983) appeared on the tour, Nicolas announced him as a more gifted player, but it was never confirmed by Giovanni's results, he didn't even win a major match sinking at the Challenger level. Trivia: the Ecuadorian is one of four Open Era players to win his maiden ATP level title in the debut (Bogota '95).

Career record:	317–287 [287 events]
Career titles:	5
Highest ranking:	No. 6 (November 1999)
Best GS results:	Australian Open (semifinal 1999) Wimbledon (quarterfinal 2002)

Carlos Moyá (Spain)

Born: August 27, 1976 in Palma (Majorca)
Height: 1.88 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

Full name: Carlos Moyá Llompart. Moya left the tennis circuit unfortunately in the shadows, and it's a pity because he has considerably contributed to modern tennis... I wish he hadn't announced his retirement at the end of 2008 or hadn't done as other notable players like Stefan Edberg, Marat Safin or Patrick Rafter - a farewell season. In the last two years of his career, during the struggle with a foot injury, Moya was actually non-existent at the main level, only ten tournaments, four wins... Remembering that he had already one major title and one final at the age of twenty-one, I'd say he finished his career as an underachiever, but on the other hand, who could expect in 1996 that this 20 year-old long-haired clay-courter would become No. 1 player in the world one day in March? First of all, he was an example of a player who maximally adjusted his game-style to abilities, sometimes it was ridiculous how he was trying to play forehands from the backhand side, but somehow it worked very efficiently thanks to brilliant footwork! Obviously with forehand alone he couldn't achieve so much, he used to be a big server at times and a very clever volleyer. And he used his net skills on faster surfaces wisely, in some sense beginning a new era in the Spanish tennis - before Moya actually every Spanish player was a synonym of a clay-court specialist... Moya achieved a lot on hardcourts and indoors, but never adjusted his game to grass, and I think it's more a matter of his return games cause he simply hadn't time to prepare himself properly to powerful forehand shots from his left side. The alleged clay-courter Moya built his name defeating Boris Becker twice within a few months on two different surfaces. First he did it in Paris-Bercy '96 (2R, carpet!), then in the Australian Open '97 first round. The second victory over the defending champion on Australia's main tennis arena, had a big impact on the rest of Moya's career. *"Playing against him gives me extra motivation"* admitted Moya. *"Becker is one of the greatest players in tennis history."* Suddenly he became a fan favorite, especially for teenagers, with his oversized Nike clothes, headband and Babolat racquet - he definitely helped to popularize the brand which had been primarily known for strings before. Expectations were high since the second round, and he rose to the challenge advancing to the final where go a lesson from Pete Sampras. There was a big gap between them, Moya admitted it, but already ten months later

defeated the American in Hannover-Masters, and when Moya advanced to No. 1 in March 1999 he surpassed Sampras on the top... he held the top spot for two weeks (only Patrick Rafter was shorter on the top among the 26 ATP ranking leaders of the Open Era): *"I always believed that winning a Grand Slam was the best thing that could happen to you. But this [being No. 1] surpassed that. There were a lot of players that wanted to dethrone Sampras. There was pressure. And for me, it was the only chance."* Trivia: Moya is a record-holder in the most winning consecutive matches when a deciding third set tie-breaks was required, he won 17 matches of this kind in a row in the years 2002-08 before losing 7-6, 6-7, 6-7 to his fellow Mallorcan, Rafael Nadal in something what at the time was a record-tying three-setter in terms of the duration. For the past few years, Moya has been Nadal's coach. Nadal on Moya: *"Moya was a pioneer in this sport. He deserves everybody's recognition. He has done very significant things in the world of tennis. He was No. 1 in the world, a difficult thing to achieve, won the biggest tournaments… He has contributed greatly to Spanish sport."*

Career record:	575–319 [326 events]
Career titles:	20
Highest ranking:	No. 1 (March 1999)
Best GS results:	Australian Open (runner-up 1997; quarterfinal 2001) Roland Garros (champion 1998; quarterfinal 2003-04 & 07) US Open (semifinal 1998; quarterfinal 2007)

Davis Cup champion 2004
Masters runner-up 1998

Sjeng Schalken (Netherlands)

Born: September 8, 1976 in Weert
Height: 1.93 m
Plays: Right-handed

He began his tennis journey hitting against the wall, I'm not sure if it's a good explanation of his stiffness. The wall is very good as a tool for developing patience, but the problem with the wall is that often it doesn't force the young adept to run. Schalken was very patient, clay had been his favorite surface in the first years on the tour before he improved a bit his serve to become more successful on hard-courts.

For someone who was able to threaten the best players of the 90s, for a long time Schalken couldn't achieve something proportional to his potential at majors. During 28 consecutive Slams he never went beyond the third round, but when he finally achieved that feat, he advanced already to the quarterfinals, and for three years playing the second week of majors it was his natural environment; in the years 2002-2004 he advanced six times to the last 16 and on five occasions he won the fourth round matches. Once he even managed to win a quarterfinal when the opportunity was great because he faced a novice at that level, hard-hitting Fernando Gonzalez, and the Dutchman outsmarted the Chilean in a very dramatic contest. The luck was finally on Schalken's side; in the 90s he lost so many dramatic matches that it was actually against the probability, because he didn't seem very tense, simply a combination of a few factors caused that for example at Wimbledon, year after year he was losing: 6-8 (Jan-Michael Gambill), 11-13 (Jim Courier) and 18-20 (Mark Philippoussis) in the fifth sets. All this painful experience was rewarded in the latter stages of his career, and the Dutchman improved at the end of his career in five-setters from an abysmal 6:14 to a pretty good 12-14, including a 5-set win over a specialist in deciders - Nicolas Lapentti at Wimbledon '03. From the perspective of the Dutch tennis, Schalken was a player who connected two generations: the older/better (Krajicek, Siemerink, Haarhuis, Eltingh... Van Scheppingen) and the younger/worse (Sluiter, Verkerk, Wessels, Van Lottum). In 2001 Schalken contributed to the only Davis Cup semifinal for the Netherlands, in the first round he won in straight sets against Carlos Moya (4-1 over Spain), in the quarterfinal (in the first round too) along with Paul Haarhuis, he won doubles against Germany (4-1) and in the semifinal he lost one of his several bitter five-setters, after almost five hours to Nicolas Escude, being within points to win all three sets he lost. Schalken, similarly to Wayne Ferreira, for almost the entire career

hadn't problems with injuries, but when finally something bad caught him, it simply meant the end. Schalken had to pull out of Roland Garros '04, ending a sequence of 35 straight majors played - he was diagnosed with mononucleosis. Despite that, he reached the Wimbledon quarterfinal, but on more demanding surfaces he had no power anymore, retired in four matches within one season with just five retirements in the previous ten years of his professional career, and suddenly at the age of 29 he decided to quit. His last result is worth mentioning, it's a Davis Cup win over Switzerland in the first round of 2005. Schalken won a clincher against a young Stanislas Wawrinka in exceptional circumstances; the Swiss led 4:1 in the decider with two breaks, then serving at 5:4 he blew four or five match points on serve, depending on how to count it because one of the match points was replayed when during a long rally the ball hit by Wawrinka was called 'out' only to be overruled by the umpire Enric Molina. *"All I see is that yellow thing,"* said Schalken after the match. *"When I get some rest in my game, I see the tennis ball getting bigger. If that peace is not there, it looks like a golf ball that comes at you very quickly and so that you are always on the defensive."*

Career record:	292–267 [263 events]
Career titles:	9
Highest ranking:	No. 11 (April 2003)
Best GS results:	Wimbledon (quarterfinalist 2002-2004) US Open (semifinalist 2002)

Gustavo Kuerten (Brazil)

Born: September 10, 1976 in Florianópolis
Height: 1.91 m
Plays: Right-handed

Kuerten is a German descendent, his paternal great-grandfather name was "Kürten" while maternal great-grandfather "Thümmel". I don't know if it's accidental, but Kuerten as a young pro made his first trip to Germany to play qualifying rounds in Hamburg (ATP) and Dresden (Challenger), he failed on both occasions, it was 1995. The following year he made a transition from a Challenger to a main-level player, but without spectacular results. Actually when the "fairytale" French Open '97 kicked off, Kuerten was among many, secondary young South American players (without a Davis Cup tie in which Brazil lost to the United States, he would be virtually unknown outside his continent), who hadn't drawn particular attention. Everything changed after his third round match against an arguably best clay-courter of the 90s Thomas Muster. The Austrian was far away from his invincibility of the years 1995-96, but he was still a Top 5 player, and one of the main favourites to the title. Kuerten [66], who had never won three main-level matches in a row before, finally did it, stunning the former champion in a short 5-setter. When the Brazilian won another round against Andrei Medvedev after a very similar 5-set encounter, out of nowhere, he became a favorite to the title because the draw was wide open. Admittedly in the quarterfinal he faced a defending champion Yevgeny Kafelnikov, but the Russian, generally better adjusted to hardcourts, was poorly playing before the event on clay, and his advancement to the quarterfinals wasn't expected at all. Another five-setter (third in a row), and Kuerten prevailed again by a two-game margin in the decider. The last two matches he won easier, dispatching in the final the two-time French Open champion - Sergi Bruguera, who similarly to Kafelnikov, wasn't expected to be seen in the second week. *"I did every shot perfectly,"* Kuerten said after the final. *"Today was my best match of the tournament. I didn't think, `Wow, it's a final and I have to win.' I just play like I practice. I was pretty relaxed."* Kuerten conquered the hearts of the French public and tennis fans all over the world with his "samba" tennis. As opposed to previous French Open champions of the 90s, very efficient clay-courters (Jim Courier, Muster, Bruguera), he didn't win his matches wearing opponents down with amazingly consistent heavy top-spins off the forehand side; he displayed an all-court game with much better serving, more

variable backhand and points obtained at the net. Before Kuerten, there were three triumphs of inexperienced players in Paris (Bjorn Borg '74, Mats Wilander '82 & Michael Chang '89), but in each case the shocking champion was a tennis prodigy, and great things to come had been foreseen for them. Kuerten was very refreshing, soon afterwards he confirmed that his game-style suited to the hardcourts as well when he reached the Canadian Open final & Cincinnati quarterfinal trashing Michael Chang & Andre Agassi after the same one-sided scoreline (6-3, 6-1). The end of the 90s rather disappointed, but the years 2000-01 brought something even better than could be anticipated when "Guga" shocked the tennis world in Paris, namely he became the best player in the world and spent 43 weeks on the top, 31 more weeks than such a great champion like Boris Becker! Kuerten secured the no. 1 in the end of 2000 in the nick of time (surpassing Marat Safin), and lost this position in similar circumstances one year later to Lleyton Hewitt. *"As a tennis player, nothing could be higher than becoming No. 1 at the [Tennis Masters Cup], beating Pete and then Andre back-to-back. This is the highlight of my career by far."* the Brazilian stated. When he enjoyed the best period of his career in 2001 (between Roland Garros and US Open when he won three titles) it seemed almost impossible that he wouldn't open the year 2002 as no. 1, but including the US Open quarterfinal he suffered 11 defeats within 12 matches! He was struggling with a hip injury and decided to undergo a surgery on Feb 26, 2002 in Nashville (Tennessee). After the comeback Kuerten continued his career for another six years, but his fantastic footwork, allowing to freely hit the ball off both wings, was damaged. In the years 2002-04 there were sporadic good results, some great matches, but Kuerten couldn't deal with keeping the high level over a few day-by-day matches. The last three years were miserable, Kuerten was a shadow of his previous self despite the relatively young age. In 2006 for instance he played just two matches losing them both to players, who combined won in their careers one match fewer than Kuerten three times within one event. Kuerten played his career last match on Philippe Chatrier in Paris (had skipped nine consecutive majors), the court where he felt the best outside his native country; he lost in straight sets to Paul-Henri Mathieu, then drew a heart inside the court, something he had done for the first time seven years before miraculously surviving a match against an inspired U.S. journeyman **Michael Russell** (b. 1978). *"In terms of emotions, it's the finest moment of my career. Nothing compares to that moment,"* said Kuerten. *"It's the match – the one that I would take with me if I could choose only one. My connection with the fans was so strong… This heart was my way of thanking them for their support and for the emotions that we were going through together at that moment."*

Career record:	358–195 [198 events]
Career titles:	20
Highest ranking:	No. 1 (December 2000)
Best GS results:	Roland Garros (champion 1997, 2000-01; quarterfinal 1999 & 2004) Wimbledon (quarterfinal 1999) US Open (quarterfinal 1999 & 2001)

Masters champion 2000

Agustín Calleri (Argentina)

Born: September 14, 1976 in Rio Cuarto
Height: 1.82 m
Plays: Right-handed

If you ask me "Who was the mentally weakest Top 20 player in the Open Era", I won't hesitate - "Calleri", nickname "El Gordo". When we look at percentages of matches that indicate good mentality (five-setters, deciding tie-breaks, MP-matches), Calleri has a negative ratio in each department, even when he could (and should?) win one of the most amazing five-setters of the period we deal in this e-book with, he lost it. I mean his South American duel with **Flavio Saretta** (b. 1980). Calleri won two tie-break sets being close to losing them (saved three set points in the first tie-break and came back from a 3:5 deficit to win the second one), then he squandered two match points on return leading 8:7 in the decider. Ultimately the Brazilian survived 6-4, 6-7(13), 6-3, 6-7(5), 10-8! Calleri's first ATP final took place in Buenos Aires 2002: the Argentine led 6-2, 5:1, then had a double match point on serve at 5:2 and the crowd behind himself, somehow lost that match... to Nicolas Massu. That final consisted of these two players is a good exemplification of tennis complexity from mental point of view: there are guys like Massu, who don't hurt you with any specific weapon, but in a combination of everything they possess and extraordinary fighting spirit, they may win something really big (Olympic gold medal in this case); other guys like Calleri, have solid basis of the most required technical ingredients with sporadic flashes of brilliance - sometimes watching Calleri hitting from the baseline you could evoke a multiple Grand Slam champion, Stan Wawrinka (similar height, amazing power off both wings) - yet the difference in their careers in terms of successes is huge. Of course, we can say Wawrinka was a better server & better volleyer, anyway Calleri with his ability to cleanly hit the ball wherever he wanted on clay and hardcourts, should have achieved much more. The fact he never even reached the fourth round of a major could be almost incomprehensible without awareness of his weak mentality. During the US Open '07 he simply blew off the court the former champion Llyton Hewitt, a few years earlier he did the same to Andre Agassi in Miami, even though the great American had won the event four times.

Career record: 208–184 [186 events]
Career titles: 2
Highest ranking: No. 16 (July 2003)
Best GS results: third round in Paris & New York

Mark Philippoussis (Australia)

Born: November 7, 1976 in Melbourne
Height: 1.94 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

Μαρκ Φιλιππούσης - the son of a Greek father and an Italian mother. The year 1999 was the best in his career, he managed to achieve something only Michael Stich (1993) had almost done before, namely he highly contributed to claiming three titles for Australia (Hopman Cup, World Team Cup and Davis Cup) winning 3, 3 & 3 matches in singles of respective competitions; besides he collected the biggest of his eleven titles as he triumphed at Indian Wells. Huge disappointment came at Australian Open that year, Philippoussis lost in the fourth round, and never reached the quarterfinal in his home tournament. That year he was perceived, perhaps the only time in his career, as one of the favorites because in his previous major (US Open '98) he had reached the final. Philippoussis' second major final came in a rather unexpected period, when he was struggling with injuries and dropped in the ATP ranking to no. 48. Similarly to his previous best Slam, he survived an amazing quarter final: at US Open '98 against Thomas Johansson, at Wimbledon '03 against **Alexander Popp** (b. 1976)... The tall Australian made some noise for the first time in 1995 as a 19-year-old lad. In his just fifth ATP event, Philippoussis [272] reached the final in Scottsdale as a qualifier having defeated four much higher ranked opponents, then he played a good match in the final against the former no. 1 Jim Courier. Philippoussis received "wild card" at Key Biscayne and reached the third round - those two results (and a final in Bologna) catapulted him within a few months from Top 300 to Top 100. His serve was tremendous, never before a teenager was serving with such intensity, in Autumn (Kuala Lumpur) the Australian established a record in number of aces - 44 against Byron Black, in three sets! He took the serve to the next level, not known even for Goran Ivanisevic, who had been serving below 40 aces in five-setters in the mid 90s. Brad Gilbert, the coach of Agassi, said the future would belong to Philippoussis. His serve was phenomenal, but his technique at volleys very good, the strokes of both sides inconsistent, yet powerful, giving him plenty of points. It seemed like a full package. The 20-year-old Philippoussis played perhaps a match of his life at night session during the Australian Open '96, it backed up Gilbert's claims: in the match of Greek descendants, Philippoussis eliminated the main favorite to the title Pete Sampras in

impressive three sets. The following match of the Australian it was a disaster, he lost 2-6, 2-6, 2-6 to Mark Woodforde! Without two Davis Cup clinchers, Philippoussis could be perceived as an underachiever, certainly he had tools to win one major at least. He was a novelty at the late 90s with his uncompromising tennis, and the will to risk like no-one else before; in some matches he used to serve constantly around 200 kph regardless of the score and the class of his opponents, always believing that his destiny depended only on him. *"When I was on the court, I played. When I trained, I trained hard. But as soon as that thing was over, I switched off and enjoyed my life,"* Philippoussis said many years after retirement. He used to spend plenty of money on fashionable cars and didn't restrain himself from a nightlife. *"The greats have almost no life, and that's the reality of it. They're obsessed, you need to be obsessed with everything about what you're doing."*

Career record:	313–204 [204 events]
Career titles:	11
Highest ranking:	No. 8 (April 1999)
Best GS results:	Wimbledon (runner-up 2003; quarterfinalist 1998-2000) US Open (runner-up 1998)

Davis Cup champion 1999 & 2003 (won clinchers on both occasions)

Stefan Koubek (Austria)

Born: January 2, 1977 in Klagenfurt
Height: 1.75 m
Plays: Left-handed (two-handed backhand)

For the Austrian tennis he was some sort of consolation after Thomas Muster's retirement, although Koubek couldn't approach the status of his older compatriot. Generally another tercet of the best Austrians (Koubek, Jurgen Melzer, **Markus Hipfl**) was significantly weaker than the previous one (Muster, Horst Skoff, **Alex Antonitsch**). Koubek can be considered as an underachiever. At the turn of centuries, he created some attention around himself especially at home (called "Alpian Rodman" there, due to dying his hair), but worldwide the perception of him was also positive when he was young. His style reminded of Marcelo Rios' attitude - the same posture and easiness of hitting ground-strokes. Unpredictable, he started the 2003 year with eight consecutive defeats when he arrived in Doha where he got his last title, not dropping a set. One year earlier, also in January, with three successive defeats he began his Australian Open campaign trailing 0-6, 1-6, 1:4 (15/40) to Cyril Saulnier; he managed to erase the deficit & win three straight sets (7-6, 6-4, 8-6) producing one of the most amazing comebacks in the entire tennis history. Koubek survived despite winning 30 points fewer, to this day it's a record for the biggest negative discrepancy in total points between the winner and the loser (matches counted since 1991). In 2007 Koubek did something very similar, that time in a "best of three" format. In the Sopot first round, he was trailing to Agustin Calleri 0-6, *1:5, saved two match points returning at 4:5, and found himself at *2:5 (deuce) in the 3rd set saving another two match points in game no. 10 to prevail 0-6, 7-6, 7-5. Counting his previous match in Kitzbuhel vs **Daniel Kollerer** (4-6, 0-6) he'd lost 21 games in a row! By the way, in 2010 during a Bundesliga match, Koubek grabbed the countryman Koellerer (b. 1983) into his throat because the younger Austrian called him "Wanker". Koubek was disqualified, at the main-level he had experienced the same fate due to throwing his racquet and accidentally hitting a ball boy.

Career record: 208–236 [237 events]
Career titles: 3
Highest ranking: No. 20 (March 2000)
Best GS result: Australian Open (quarterfinal 2002)

Fernando Vicente (Spain)

Born: March 8, 1977 in Benicarlo
Height: 1.80 m
Plays: Right-handed

Light blonde player which is quite untypical for men from the Iberian peninsula. The long-haired Vicente, operating almost entirely with slices from his backhand wing, was playing in the times when the Spanish tennis was the strongest, so even though he'd won three titles (all on his favorite clay) & he'd been occasionally defeating top players (on all surfaces), he had never an opportunity to play for Spain in the Davis Cup. Trivia:
- within a few months of 2000 he lost three dramatic matches to Yevgeny Kafelnikov (each of them on a different surface); the most painful was the first of them - five sets (3 hours 34 minutes) at Roland Garros. Vicente was three points away to win in four sets and two points away to win in five - in the decider he led 5:2, later on 5:3 (30/0) on serve
- he played two matches against **Federico Luzzi** of Italy (lived: 1980-2008, died of cancer; one year later, in unexplained circumstances, abruptly died five years younger Frenchman, **Mathieu Montcourt**, who tenniswise was at Luzzi's level), five sets in total and all of them concluded in tie-breaks; first the Italian won 7-6, 6-7, 7-6... Vicente avenged it 7-6, 7-6 in their other encounter four years later. Strange tightness with two clay-courters involved. Since 2017 Vicente has been coaching one of the most promising players, Andrei Rublev. *"It's time to show that you deserve to be eight in the world and get away from the' elevator effect 'in the top-ten."* Vicente warns that he sees his ward *"In the direction of opting for a big one."* Full name: Fernando Vicente Fibla. His twin brother, Jose Maria reached a career-high ranking of No. 321 on July 27, 1998. Vicente coaches Andrei Rublev, with whom already achieved more within a couple of years than in his entire career as a professional player.

Career record: 157–213 [216 events]
Career titles: 3
Highest ranking: No. 29 (June 2000)
Best GS result: Roland Garros (fourth round 2000)

Max Mirnyi (Belarus)

Born: July 6, 1977 in Minsk (Soviet Union)
Height: 1.96 m
Plays: Right-handed

Максім Мірны

A son of a former Soviet Union volleyball player. Mirnyi sr. was the most important figure in the development of Max, accompanying him throughout his long career. Mirnyi had a very brief junior career, he grew up quickly and began an early adventure at the Satellite circuit at the age of 16. First noticeable results came in 1999 (before he had been known as a doubles specialist); on the American clay he ousted the former no. 1 Jim Courier in two tournaments. The broad-shouldered Mirnyi co-created the most dramatic matches in the years 2000-01 at the US Open. Two years in a row he lost epic five-setters to the best guys in the world at the time (Magnus Norman & Gustavo Kuerten) leading 2-0 in sets & being within points to close the match out in two different sets. Much more luck he had at the end of '01 - in Stuttgart he played an event of his life; as a qualifier advanced to the final eliminating four excellent players (counting the first round of qualies, Mirnyi fought off match points in three different contests). The Belarusian had no chance in the final against Tommy Haas, an old acquaintance from the Nick Bolletieri academy in Florida. It's quite interesting that Mirnyi - known as a big server - lost so many one-sided matches to Haas. A good example of psychological edge, Haas easily defeated Mirnyi already in 1993 (Satellite) and 1995 (Orange Bowl - juniors), so you cannot find those results on the ATP website in their official H2H. In 2003 he became the first Belarousian to win an ATP title - greater success in retrospect because in the semifinal he had defeated Roger Federer (the Swiss a few months before his first major title). He'd stopped playing singles in 2008, but for another ten years he was contiuing his doubles career becoming one of the most accomplished players of the Open Era, took part in 98 finals (won 52 titles, including six majors). He never won a title partnering his countryman Vladimir Voltchkov, but they created a good pair in the Davis Cup competition, helping their country to advance to the semifinal in 2004.

Career record: 244–242 [226 events]
Career titles: 1
Highest ranking: No. 18 (August 2003)
Best GS result: US Open (quarterfinal 2002)

Jan-Michael Gambill (USA)

Born: June 3, 1977 in Spokane, Washington
Height: 1.90 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed both sides)

Transitional player between two generations of American players: a great one (Sampras, Agassi, Courier, Chang, Martin) and a decent one - comparing the previous - (Roddick, Blake, Fish, Ginepri, Dent). Gambill never faced Ginepri, compiling a 15-28 record against the rest of the Yankees. Gambill has achieved the best result among ambidextrous players of the 21st Century as he reached the Miami final in 2001. It was quite special time for the 24-year-old Gambill - within a few weeks he won as many as four matches being one point away from defeat (two en route to the Delray Beach title and another two entering the Miami final), defeating in straight sets the best player in the world (Gustavo Kuerten at Indian Wells) and two best players of the future (Andy Roddick & Lleyton Hewitt). It seemed that he'd enjoy one of those seasons when a dangerous floater suddenly plays tennis of his life which is awarded with a participation in the season-ending championship. It didn't happen though in Gambill's case, following his Miami final he lost his great form and never recovered. Gambill got attention & recognition for the first time three years earlier when as a Challenger player within a few weeks on the American soil gathered valuable results, advancing from no. 227 to 81. He played three times against Andre Agassi then, defeating his famous opponent on the third try at Indian Wells. *"I feel like right now I can stay on the court with anybody,"* Gambill said following his shocker over Agassi. *"I want to go on the court thinking I'm going to win, of course, but I wouldn't say that I can beat anybody. I've revamped the way I've been thinking about my game. If you stay mentally tough, you get an opportunity. I think I've integrated that in my game a lot better."* He got the nickname "Mr. Hollywood", people began to compare him to another blond American player of the 70s/80s - **Vincent van Patten** (b. 1957, one title) who was simultaneously playing tennis and acting. The good-looking Gambill didn't go that way and finished his tennis career as someone more successful than Van Patten (one title, highest ranking No. 26 in 1981). Quite peculiar was Gambill's forehand; technically he was operating with two backhands on a regular basis because on his right side, he was holding the racquet with his left hand at the bottom (see the picture); volleys he was was playing

one-handed, more prone to hit forehand with one hand than playing one-handed backhand slice. Impressive abdominal muscles thanks to doing a 1000 crunches a day! Trivia: Gambill played four matches against Wayne Arthurs, always defeating the Australian after dramatic three-setters being 2-1-3-1 points from losing them respectively.

Career record: 201–196 [194 events]
Career titles: 3
Highest ranking: No. 14 (June 2001)
Best GS result: Wimbledon (quarterfinal 2000)

Nicolas Kiefer (Germany)

Born: July 5, 1977 in Holzminden
Height: 1.82 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

When he appeared on the big scene in the late 90's along with Tommy Haas as potential successors of Boris Becker and Michael Stich, I knew they had relatively slim chances to win at least one major, on the other hand, taking into account Kiefer's stunning 1999 season (twenty-two year-old then), I'd say he finished his career as an underachiever - mainly given only six titles, and the fact he hasn't won a Masters Series tournament. In the already mentioned '1999' season, he was working with Bob Brett and they implemented an interesting tactic - Kiefer was playing almost all his service games from the back of the court, but every time at a break point down, he was adopting serve-and-volley tactics, often at game points too. In spite of the predictable pattern it was perfectly working, and suddenly in 2000 when he seemed to be a Top 5 player for the years to come, his career in some sense collapsed, he never regained his composure after that. Interesting player overall, around 2004 he changed his on-court strategy to become almost a regular serve and volley player (at least behind the 1st serve) on faster surfaces. It clicked well two times allowing him to get the two best results intertwined with several unexpected defeats: first at the Australian Open '06 when he reached the semifinal after a controversial marathon win over Sebastien Grosjean, then two years later in the Canadian Open when again a victory over a Frenchman (Gilles Simon) preceded the end station (the final loss to Rafael Nadal). As a son of a French mother, he was always extra motivated facing the guys of the other side of Germany's western border. Definitely a very talented guy with a stroke of genius, good to watch on every surface. During the Olympic games in Athens he experienced the most bitter moment of his career; just like his partner Rainer Schuettler, Kiefer didn't lose often squandering match point(s), but in

the arguably most important match of their careers, they'd wasted a quadruple MP before losing to the Chilean duo.

Career record:	366–274 [260 events]
Career titles:	6
Highest ranking:	No. 4 (January 2000)
Best GS results:	Australian Open (semifinal 2006) Wimbledon (quarterfinal 1997) US Open (quarterfinal 2000)

Olympic Silver medalist in doubles 2004 (p/Rainer Schuettler)

Guillermo Cañas (Argentina)

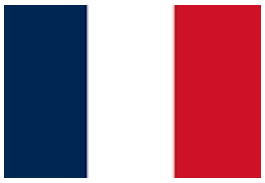
Born: November 25, 1977 in Buenos Aires
Height: 1.85 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

He picked up a tennis racquet as a 7-year-old boy, inspired by the greatest Argentinian player, his namesake - Guillermo Vilas. Very similar name didn't help to achieve at least half of Vilas' successes, but Canas may be remembered as one of the best Argentinians born in the 70s, if not the best. Although a bulky, amazingly quick player, always displaying "never say die" attitude, endowed with tremendous ability to win points in hopeless situations, perhaps he was the best at it before Rafael Nadal's appearance. Versatile player, as the first Argentinian of the generation mainly connected to the 21st Century, he played finals in all basic configurations: outdoors (clay, grass, hard) & indoors (hard). His best moment came in Toronto 2002, his route to the title is even more impressive in retrospect: he defeated in sequence - Roger Federer (1), Paradorn Srichaphan (9), Yevgeny Kafelnikov (1), Marat Safin (1), Tommy Haas (2) and Andy Roddick (1). In the parenthesis I put the highest ranking achieved by those players, so the route was absolutely stunning. *"Day by day, I felt more confidence in my game,"* the 24-year-old Canas [19] said. *"It's nice to feel you can beat anybody on the tour. Maybe I surprised myself. I knew before that I could do it, but I never did it. It feels great to beat five of the top 10 players in the world in one tournament."* Fun facts:
Canas was a nightmarish opponent for Tim Henman. When they met for the first time (1998), the unknown at the time Canas lost despite a 6-3, 5:2* advantage. The Argentine won their all following six matches, three in a row after dramatic contests including two five-setters, edging 7-5 & 9-7 in the fifth sets
2007: Canas shocked the tennis world defeating Federer 7-5, 6-2 at Indian Wells, snapping a 41-match winning streak of the Swiss. Two weeks later, Canas defeated

Federer again, that time in Miami. *"I don't know what is the key to beat him, I fight for every point and I think for that I beat him,"* Canas said. *"I think I played great tennis, for me it's like a dream."*
he's the only player I know, who lost a match leading two-sets-to-love and 5:0, it happened in 1999, in his first Davis Cup vital rubber, as he lost to **Maurice Ruah** of Venezuela 6-3, 6-3, 6-7, 3-6, 3-6, not holding a match point (Argentina won the tie 4-1)

Career record:	252–195 [196 events]
Career titles:	7
Highest ranking:	No. 8 (June 6, 2005)
Best GS results:	Roland Garros (quarterfinalist 2002, 05 & 07)

Arnaud Clément (France)



Born: December 17, 1977 in Aix-en-Provence
Height: 1.72 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

He is a good example of how a bit of luck and a few good events without spectacular successes can shift a player from one level to another. Autumn '97: the almost 20-year-old Clement, one of many young French Challenger players, lost a qualifying round in Toulouse, but entered the main-draw as a lucky loser and beat Magnus Larsson [25] in the second round. It helped him to build self-confidence, in another two main-level appearances (Vienna & Lyon), Clement made shocking upsets, eliminating in the first rounds Top 10 players (Sergi Bruguera & Patrick Rafter). From a guy on the verge of Top 200, he suddenly became a Top 100 player and the officials of Paris-Bercy put him on Centre Court - he took his chance being displayed world-wide for the first time defeating another much higher ranked player, Marc Rosset. A memorable match for me due to circumstances not worth mentioning here... It was pretty clear that the short Frenchman (possessing a very good serve at his height) would do some damage in the future. Clement did it indeed, three years later in Melbourne - especially in retrospect his route to the final is admirable because apart from defeating Greg Rusedski, Yevgeny Kafelnikov and his friend Sebastien Grosjean in the semifinal (withstanding match points in the 3rd set) - automatic appreciation, he had defeated in straight sets two teenagers who later would turn into top players - Tommy Robredo and... Roger Federer. After that match Clement led 3:1 in H2H vs Federer, it

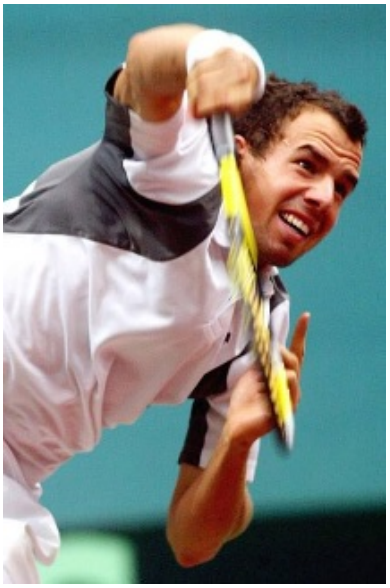
ended up 3-8. Trivia despite his modest height, Clement knew how to hold his serve for a longer period of time, and it made an impact of his involvement in two epic five-setters, the first of them he won (15-13 in the 5th vs Rosset; Davis Cup), the second lost (14-16 in the 5th set to Fabrice Santoro). The latter, completed at French Open '04, had lasted 6 hours 35 minutes, and it was the longest Open Era match before the Isner-Mahut marathon six years later. *"What do I get? A medal? I'm not interested,"* said the understandably distraught Clement, *"Anyway it lasted over two days so it doesn't count."*

Career record:	316–327 [319 events]
Career titles:	4
Highest ranking:	No. 10 (April 2001)
Best GS results:	Australian Open (runner-up 2001) Wimbledon (quarterfinal 2008) US Open (quarterfinal 2000)

Davis Cup champion 2001 (didn't play in the final)

Dominik Hrbatý (Slovakia)

Born: January 4, 1978 in Bratislava (Czechoslovakia)
Height: 1.82 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)



The youngest Top 100 player of 1996 as a "King of Chalengers". The 18-year-old Slovak began that year ranked No. 315 in Egyptian & Croatian Satellites, then he won two Challengers, losing finals in four others. When he entered the Rod Laver Arena at Australian Open '97 to play a fourth round match against Pete Sampras, he was virtuallly unknown; he shocked the world though - not only outaced one of the best servers in history (!), he also almost beat him in five sets squandering three mini-match points in two different games! All of a sudden he was a man to watch. Two months later when he rached a fourth round of another big event (Key Biscayne), he said he'd be a better server than Sampras! That cocky sentence was in contrast to Hrbaty's mundane on-and-off court attitude... once he said that he was enjoying his off court time the most... simply fishing. I passed him once in Sopot '03 at the city's main avenue - he was walking in casual clothes with an obscure carrier bag hanging on his shoulder, no-one outside the tennis world could guess that guy earned seven million dollars on the court... I'd say that considering his style I'd put him to the same group with Thomas Enqvist as far as guys born in the 70s are concerned: two good servers from chilly area of Europe, quite prone to double faulting, eager to

play majority of the points from the baseline operating very close to it, endowed with very hard & flat strokes off both sides, perhaps too heavy to conquer the biggest clay-court events. Hrbaty was a slightly weaker version of Enqvist overall, but achieved more on clay-courts, including arguably two career-best results: Roland Garros semifinal in 1999 (quite unfortunate 4-set defeat to Andre Agassi), and a final in Monte Carlo '00 in which he succumbed to Cedric Pioline. Analyzing Hrbaty's scorelines I may argue that he was a different animal playing in 'the best of five' formula. His great physical preparation helped him a lot in winning many complicated four- and five-setters, of course it contributed to the fact he almost won the Davis Cup for Slovakia in 2005 (six-one record in singles with two wins in the final vs Croatia). But in the 'best of three' matches he was that guy you generally couldn't count on him when it came to - let's say - 5-all in the 3rd set; nevertheless he won as many as three matches in the deciding tie-break against Marat Safin (Hopman Cup final '09 is one of them), but Safin was completely unpredictable when the drama and additional tension were involved. Hrbaty loved to play Down-Under in January because he felt stronger than his opponents after solid preparation in December the precedent year; following several years with the vibe of underachievement, 2004 seemed like a breakthrough year as he collected back-to-back titles (Auckland-Adelaide); lost 11-match winning streak being easily outplayed by Sebastien Grosjean in Melbourne, and the charm quickly evaporated.

Career record:	359-318 [304 events]
Career titles:	6
Highest ranking:	No. 12 (October 2005)
Best GS results:	Australian Open (quarterfinalist 2001, 2005) Roland Garros (semifinalist 1999) US Open (quarterfinalist 2004)

Mariano Zabaleta (Argentina)

Born: February 28, 1978 in Tandil
Height: 1.83 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

The broad-shouldered Zabaleta, the son of a rugby player, was a member of a great generation of Argentinian players born between 1976 and 1982 (Calleri, Canas, Zabaleta, Puerta, Gaudio, Chela, Nalbandian, Coria, Acasuso). His darker skin would suggest more Inca blood in his vein than that of the Spanish ancestry (?) Among the players of this group he was perhaps the biggest underachiever given his exquisite junior career: 84-7 record, won Roland Garros & "Orange Bowl" of 1995. Already as a junior he won his first ATP tour match defeating the best Polish player of the 90s (**Wojtek Kowalski**, b. 1967, highest ranking: 109). The third event brought a semifinal (Bermuda '96), afterwards the transition to professional tennis wasn't easy though. Zabaleta waited to partially fulfill the expectations until Hamburg '99, that big event often charged with many surprises due to tricky weather. Zabaleta ousted five higher ranked players and almost won the final against Marcelo Rios - the Argentinian had a match point at 6:5 in the 4th set, but netted his forehand; instead of dramatic 4-set win he suffered a 5-set loss, his first on the main-level from a match point up, and who knows, maybe it also made an impact on the rest of his career because until that moment he had been usually winning dramatic encounters, since then it wasn't a case, and especially Zabaleta's five-set record was very doubtful (finished career with a poor 3-10 record)... Zabaleta's serve was quite peculiar, before tossing the ball his right hand was already behind the back. Serving like this is sometimes seen in the motion of children who have problems to coordinate the entire body, before Zabaleta, the American Jay Berger was serving like that too (even in more bizarre fashion), this untypical motion presented also Zabaleta's fellow Argentine & good friend - Juan Ignacio Chela.

Career record: 202-213 [211 events]
Career titles: 3
Highest ranking: 21 (April 2000)
Best GS result: US Open (quarterfinal 2001)

Tommy Haas (Germany)

Born: April 3, 1978 in Hamburg
Height: 1.88 m
Plays: Right-handed

Began playing at age 4 with his Austrian father, Peter, who is a former European champion in judo and ex-schoolmate of actor Arnold Schwarzenegger... Haas' career is one of the longest (21 years at the main-level) & strangest, as many as four times interrupted by long breaks, even five times if we count his junior career. Haas's potential was noted by tennis guru Nick Bollettieri. The US coach was so impressed

by the young German's talent that he offered Haas the chance to stay and train at his Bollettieri Academy in Bradenton, Florida for free, and Haas began attending at age 11. At 13, speaking little English, Haas moved full-time to Florida to train at the academy along with his older sister Sabine. Two years later he appeared on the ATP ranking thanks to some points obtained in American Satellites. In January '95 Haas broke his leg and didn't play four months at all. When he came back he had to modify his plans and instead of attacking bigger events (Challengers & ATP), he continued his junior career achieving the best result at the end of the year when lost the Orange Bowl final to Marianio Zabaleta. First attempts to play in ATP events weren't successful and Haas decided to play his farewell junior event (Roland Garros, quarterfinal). Afterwards as a player unranked he debuted - thanks to w "wild card" - in a Challenger in Weiden, and advanced to the final defeating players with ATP experiences. It boosted his confidence and when he got a "wild card" to his first main-level event in Indianapolis, he reached the quarterfinal, being stopped by the best in the world - Pete Sampras. A few months later they met again, and Haas easily took a set in Basel (4-6, 6-2, 3-6), then it was quite obvious that he'd be a Top 10 player soon. Bollettieri said that Haas was the most gifted player he had ever trained, indeed the young German sometimes was playing like "unbeatable Federer " many years later: very good serve, great movement, equal easiness to hit the ball off both wings, attacks to the net? - no problem after the serve and during rallies. The big problem it was consistency, something what was bothering the young Andre Agassi (albeit the teenage Agassi achieved much more than the young Haas) - if Haas had a good day in the years 1997-98, he would easily; if the things didn't go his way, he complained mixing English & German, was throwing his racquets & losing quickly, he was almost deprived of really dramatic matches in the first two years of his career. Another two years finally delivered complex matches, Haas reached Australian Open '99 semifinal & obtained Olympic silver medal in

Sydney '00, on both occasions being beaten by Yevgeny Kafelnikov. It seems the end of 2001 brought the best version of Haas and he would be able to fulfill expectations. Between Long Island ’01 and Australian Open ’02 he was actually the hottest player on the tour winning 29 out of 34 matches (three titles) – it meant more wins than collecting the best player at the time – Lleyton Hewitt. That fantastic streak was soon reflected in the ranking, Haas became No. 2 in the world in May 2002, and there are two curiosities connected to that year proving Haas' weird career: despite being No. 2 he didn't play "Masters", neither that year, nor in the future - no other player ranked so high, never participated in the season-ending championships; the second curiosity - he underwent right rotator cuff surgery in New York on Dec. 20, 2002 which caused the first of his three long breaks. In 2003 he didn't play at all (another surgery on the same shoulder on July 18, 2004), another time sidelined for a year between the seasons 2010-11 as he underwent right hip surgery on Feb. 21, 2010 and one month later underwent right elbow surgery; the third long break it's a period between Summer 2014 and 2015 (arthroscopic surgery on right shoulder again), finally the fourth long break occurred in the entire 2016 as on April 13 that year, he underwent ninth surgery of his career to repair a torn ligament in his right foot! As a 39-year-old father of two daughters he came back one more time in 2017 to play his farewell season, losing more often than winning, but in Stuttgart as No. 302 he stunned 36 y.o. Federer [5], saving a match point, in the oldest ATP match since 1981 Brisbane 1R (46 y.o. **Mal Anderson** defeated 28 y.o. **Jim Delaney**), thus 75 years combined beat 74... Haas was an all-court player, capable of playing well on each surface. There's one interesting thing about his five-setters: no other player in the Open Era has won so many 5-set matches being 1 or 2 points away from defeat. The German won six five-setters saving match points (out of twelve matches of this type), including one of the most amazing matches in history at Roland Garros 2013 when he ousted John Isner 7-5, 7-6(4), 4-6, 6-7(10), 10-8, having wasted twelve match points in the 4th set (nine at 6:5!)... then he saved 1 MP at *4:5 in the 5th set, earlier trailing 0:3 (30-all). If he had lost that match it would have been the record of match points wasted before loss. Besides six "best of 5" MP-down wins, he also won thrice in five-setters being two points away from defeats.

Career record:	569–338 [348 events]
Career titles:	15
Highest ranking:	No. 2 (May 2002)
Best GS results:	Australian Open (semifinals 1999, 02, 07) Roland Garros (quuarterfinal 2013) Wimbledon (semifinal 2009) US Open (quarterfinals 2004, 06, 07)

Silver medal at Olympics in Sydney 2000

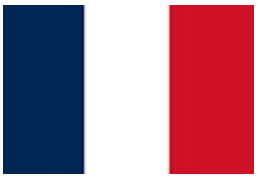
Vladimir Voltchkov (Belarus)

Born: April 7, 1978 in Minsk (Soviet Union)
Height: 1.80 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

Уладзімір Валчкоў [237] – arguably the most sensational Wimbledon semifinalist of the Open Era (Voltchkov was almost eliminated in the second qualifying round when he beat the highest seeded, Antony Dupuis 6-1, 6-7, 8-6), the first qualifier in the Wimbledon semifinals since 1977 (John McEnroe) and the second lowest ranked major semifinalist behind **Bob Gilitnan** (Australian Open-2 in 1977 with no. 365). The Belarusian was neither a powerful server nor a natural serve-and-volleyer, but he possessed a nice all-court style, creative game-plan and simply everything clicked for him during the fortnight – in another six years of his career he never played such good tennis again. In his main-level event No. 11, en route to his lone Grand Slam match on a Centre Court, he unexpectedly ousted – inter alia – two distinctive players of the 90s: Cedric Pioline [6] & Wayne Ferreira [37], and displayed very good tennis in the opener of his semifinal against Pete Sampras. Nonetheless trailing *4:5 in the tie-break he made a backhand volley error from a position he could have probably won the point in 9 out of 10 attempts. He didn't recover emotionally afterwards, lost his serve twice beginning the 2nd set, and after the 1-hour 39-minute encounter Sampras advanced to his seventh and last final at the All England Lawn tennis & Croquet Club. The American didn't need to play at 'deuce' even once in 15 service games; between sets two and three he gained 17 straight points on serve. Aparat from that Wimbledon, it's rather tough to say something positive about Voltchkov. He played only one ATP final, in Tashkent '02 losing to Yevgeny Kafelnikov, and was regularly playing in the Davis Cup, thanks to that he significantly improved his negative record. In 2004 he helped Belarus to reach the Davis Cup semifinal winning vital rubbers against Russia & Argentina. In one of many ties he represented Belarus in the most prestigious tennis team competition, he played a tight five-setter against a young Roger Federer. Two men from Minsk, **Egor Gerasimov** (b. 1992) and **Ilya Ivashka** (b. 1994) follow footsteps of Voltchkov and Mirnyi, they have assured for themselves ranking allowing them to enter the main draw at Slams, but I don't see them making some noise like compatriots born in the 70s.

Career record: 67–87 [70 events]
Career titles: 0
Highest ranking: No. 25 (April 2001)
Best GS result: Wimbledon (semifinal 2000)

Sébastien Grosjean (France)



Born: May 29, 1978 in Marseille
Height: 1.75 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

The best junior in singles & doubles in 1996; the first such a feat since 1987 (Jason Stoltenberg). Looking at Grosjean's posture it was quite obvious that he wouldn't emulate his junior successes as a professional. Very characteristic player - always the visor of his baseball caps worn backwards, and quite often a collar of his polo shirt upwards. Tennis-wise, Grosjean's trademark was his forehand - absolutely amazing acceleration. Despite the modest height, the serve didn't belong to Grosjean's weak strokes, actually he was the first man below 180 cm, who was able to regularly deliver +200 kph. He came to prominence at Key Biscayne '99, en route to the final he defeated i.a. Gustavo Kuerten and Carlos Moya (fresh no. 1 in the world) withstanding three match points in the deciding tie-break. In regard to his four major semifinals (at three different venues) his only four titles are staggering. He managed to get one big title though, and it happened in very specific circumstances. Every year Paris-Bercy is a tournament in which there's a group of players fighting for the last place(s) in Masters (ATP World Tour Finals). Majority of them had only theoretical chances; in 2001 it was Grosjean's case – he needed to win the event to qualify, which was highly unlikely when the event kicked off because he had won just one ATP event. The Frenchman [8] took advantage of a very beneficial draw to advance to the semifinals where he faced Tommy Haas, who'd seemed to be certain of his participation in the season-ending championship because all he needed was to avoid a situation where Grosjean was a champion. So basically Haas had his destiny in own hands… he lost, but Grosjean still needed one more victory. In the final Grosjean defeated in four sets Yevgeny Kafelnikov, preventing the Russian from at least one Masters 1K title. The end of the year was awesome, Grosjean reached the Masters final, then was a member of the French team which won Davis Cup (losing both final rubbers though).

Career record: 341–247 [240 events]
Career titles: 4
Highest ranking: No. 4 (October 2002)
Best GS results: Australian Open (semifinal 2001)
Roland Garros (semifinal 2001)
Wimbledon (semifinal 2003-04)
Masters runner-up 2001 & Davis Cup champion 2001

Alberto Martín (Spain)

Born: August 20, 1978 in Barcelona
Height: 1.75 m
Plays: Right-handed

Full name: Alberto Martín Magret. One of the youngest players who ever appeared on the ranking - he was only 15 year-old when obtained his first points for Spain #6 Satellite where he got to the quarterfinal in the 4th week... I've got a problem with deciphering "Matt Dillon" - despite his long years on the tour he stays some kind of mystery to me, I haven't seen too many matches in which he participated, I didn't even see his most spectacular victories over Pete Sampras and Lleyton Hewitt, only some fragments. Analyzing his scorelines, I'd say he was someone with great mental fortitude, there are players who didn't win a final set tie-break '11-9' or longer even once in their careers, he did it three times as early as in years 1997-98 on a Challenger level! This pattern he had established at the beginning of his career, helped him a few times afterwards. A Roland Garros underachiever (only once advanced beyond the second round in ten attempts; French Open junior champion of 1996) taking into account his five Masters 1K quarterfinals (two as a 'lucky loser') and three ATP titles (all on clay).

Trivia:

played four times against Wayne Ferreira (all 'best of three') and always their matches went to tight deciders. In 1997 Martin first won 4-6, 6-2, 7-5 then lost 6-3, 5-7, 5-7 and something similar with a reverse order was repeated in 2004 as Ferreira first won 4-6, 6-4, 7-6 to lose their fourth and last match 6-4, 4-6, 6-7 :)

Bucharest '99 (first round): Martin saveed 10 match points vs Adrian Voinea and later won his second ATP tournament after an easy final over Karim Alami

almost experienced a triple bagel at the Australian Open '07 facing the young Andy Murray. Martin won his only game trailing 0-6, 0-6, 0:5 (the entire match lasted just 70 minutes).

Career record: 218-269 [269 events]
Career titles: 3
Highest ranking: No. 34 (June 2001)
Best GS result: Roland Garros (fourth roound 2006)

Mariano Puerta (Argentina)

Born: September 19, 1978 in Cordoba
Height: 1.78 m
Plays: Left-handed

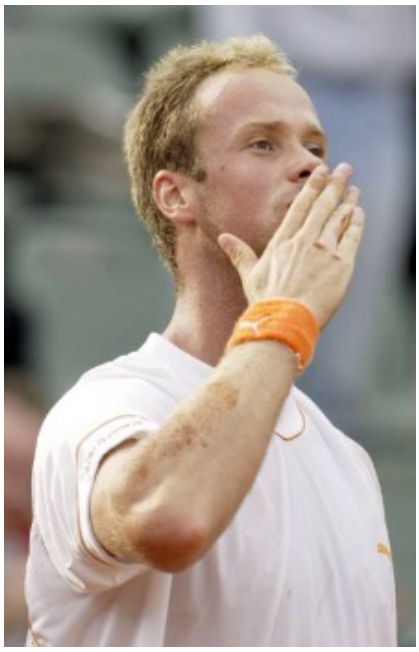
The infamous Argentinian was a part of a very interesting generation of South American players that appeared on the circuit in the late 90s. Not as gifted as Chilean Marcelo Rios, Brazilian Gustavo Kuerten or Ecuadorian Nicolas Lapentti, Puerta obtained a status of a regular ATP player after Wimbledon '98, and could be perceived as the future best Argentinian player among the group consisted of Mariano Zabaleta, Franco Squillari and Guillero Canas. The season 2000 caused that casual tennis fans knew his surname. He enjoyed a very successful South American swing (after finals in Mexico City & Santiago, he claimed a title in Bogota, having defeated Kuerten from a match point down in the semifinal). The year 2001 stopped his progress; first he underwent left wrist (ligaments) surgery in January and missed five months of the season, then served a nine-month suspension for testing positive for clenbuterol at Vina del Mar in February 2003. It seemed that his days were counted, he gained a lot of weight, dropped to no. 440 and decided to play a Futures event in Chile (October '04) which he easily won. It was an amazing story that an overweight player, once aspiring to Top 10, more than a half year after had been picking the balls up somewhere in Chile on an irrelevant court, played fantastic tennis on Centre Court in Paris. Puerta was delivering really beautiful clay-court tennis defeating Canas and Nikolay Davydenko in similar five-setters; not only the enormous forehand winners caught the attention, also his dives generally unseen on clay. In the final he also played very good tennis against Rafael Nadal; the Spanish matador claimed his first French Open title, but needed to give his all to avoid the decider. Unfortunately shortly after he was accused of using illegal substance (cardiac stimulant etilefrine); in December 2005 he was suspended for a doping offense, this time for eight years (the longest in tennis history at that time), effectively ending his professional career. This suspension was later reduced on appeal and the Argentine could return in 2007. Puerta was forced to forfeit all of his rankings points and prize money from the 2005 French Open onwards, and had all his 2005 results from after the French Open annulled. Puerta's finish as a finalist at the 2005 French Open was allowed to remain on the record books. In June 2007, 1.5 years after playing the previous professional match (six match losing streak), Puerta began his unsuccessful comeback. He advanced to the Top 300, but the

officials of ATP events weren't interested in giving him 'wild cards'. After playing two years at the Challenger level, Puerta decided to retire at the age of 31.

Career record: 128–118 [117 events]
Career titles: 3
Highest ranking: No. 9 (August 2005)
Best GS result: Roland Garros (runner-up 2005)

Martin Verkerk (Netherlands)

Born: October 31, 1978 in Leiderdorp
Height: 1.95 m
Plays: Right-handed



The Grand Slam finalist with the fewest number of main-level wins. Verkerk's career on the ATP Tour actually lasted only two years (2003-04). There was an amazing acceleration in his career after six years when he was unknown for the wider audience. Quite interesting that he played his first two Grand Slam events on Centre Courts (first at the US Open '02 against Andy Roddick, then at Aussie Open '03 against Mark Philippoussis), I suppose that those two matches were very important because he felt the atmosphere of full crowded big arenas and he wasn't blown off the courts which could allow him to believe in himself more. Roland Garros '03 was his third major. In the meantime he claimed his maiden title (Milan) and reached the Rome quarterfinal (avenging Roddick), so his appearance in the fourth round couldn't shock (in the second round he saved a triple match point against Luis Horna who had eliminated Roger Federer a round before) - he was supposed to lose to Rainer Schuettler (contemporary Aussie Open runner-up), but he beat the German easily on Centre Court, then on Suzanne Lenglen he produced another shocker surviving a thriller against Carlos Moya being two points away from defeat and in the tight fifth set playing on full risk his second serves and ground-strokes. Before the tournament everyone could expect his straight sets defeat to Guillermo Coria, but given his performances in the previous two matches, a 7-6, 6-4, 7-6 win in the semifinal was only a bit surprising. Verkerk had no chance in the final against Juan Carlos Ferrero, who was among the favorites to triumph in Paris already in the years 2001-02. Verkerk wasn't able to replicate big tournament for another year, but shortly after Wimbledon '04 he obtained his second title (Amersfoort) in the last two matches defeating the Chilean heroes (Nicolas Massu & Fernando Gonzalez) after tight three-setters (all his matches he won in deciders which is very rare case as long as the titles are concerned) a few weeks before they ruled at the Olympics in Athens.

He put so much effort into the home title that he injured his right shoulder, and never came back to that form he presented then, at the age of 26. He underwent arthroscopic surgery in Berlin on Oct. 12, skipped the entire 2005 season and notched only bad results in bigger events of the years 2006-08 before deciding to retire. On the assumption that the injury was inevitable, I'd say "better that he didn't come back" finishing careers like Pete Sampras or Robin Soderling - in style, with a title.

Career record: 59–66 [66 events]
Career titles: 2
Highest ranking: No. 14 (September 2003)
Best GS result: Roland Garros (runner-up 2003)

Radek Štěpánek (Czechia)

Born: November 27, 1978 in Karviná (Czechoslovakia)
Height: 1.85 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

"How do you feel after winning the title at the end of your career?" **Fred Stolle** (b. 1938, two-time Grand Slam champion of the pre-Open Era; his son **Sandon** played one ATP final, Nottingham '96) asked 30-year-old Stepanek courtside when the Czech triumphed in Brisbane. *"It's not the end, it's the beginning"* replied the fresh champion. It was amusing, not true, but also not so far away from that what Stolle could sarcastically think, responding *"Maybe the beginning of the end."* In January 2009 Stepanek was more or less in the middle of his career, and the best thing lay ahead of him. The same year he helped Czech Republic in advancing to the final of Davis Cup in Barcelona, where he lost his most important match at the time, and a brutal one, to David Ferrer despite sensationally destroying the Spaniard in the opening two sets (6-1, 6-2) - something like that was almost unimaginable. Stepanek was two points away from winning the second rubber as he led 5:4 (30-all). Spain won the tie 5-0 and Stepanek could realistically think that a match of such a magnitude would be impossible to repeat in his career. His destiny for him was bright in Davis Cup though, much brighter than anyone could expect and Stepanek became one a few players of the Open Era to win two Davis Cup clinchers. He did it in two consecutive seasons: first in Prague '12 when survived a complex 4-setter against Nicolas Almagro, then the following year in Belgrade when

he faced a novice Dusan Lajovic, and defeated him with ease - actually it's been the most one-sided Davis Cup clincher of the first two decades of the 21st Century. I remember seeing Stepanek for the first time, it was the US Open '02 semifinal in doubles, partnering Jiri Novak, Stepanek advanced to the final and was kissing his partner in celebration. It seemed pretty clear that Stepanek was someone with an inclination to atypical behaviour, but he was already 24, rather unknown in singles, so he could be perceived as another doubles specialist. That year Stepanek was playing singles a lot, he took part in eleven qualifying events advancing ten times to the main draw, on clay he reached two semifinals. Australian Open '03 was a turning point for him - in the second round he defeated in five sets a declining, yet still one of the best players in the world Gustavo Kuerten in front of many spectators. Even though Stepanek was destroyed on the Centre Court in his another match (Lleyton Hewitt), he felt that he belonged to a broader elite not only in doubles. Stepanek regularly played at majors for another 14 years - in 55 appearances he reached just one quarterfinal. As someone with two Masters 1K finals, Stepanek could count on at least one major semifinal, it didn't happen, but during the Wimbledon quarterfinal, he held a match point to beat Jonas Bjorkman 3-1 in sets. Stepanek was an all-court player with slightly better backhand, his forehand was somewhat old-fashioned, but very flat and very precise, he was very flexible, able to make a sudden transition from defense to offense, a player with great touch, he could produce very nice tennis to watch on all surfaces, also on clay despite of the lack of top-spin ground-strokes. One of his two Masters 1K finals, Stepanek reached on clay (Hamburg); in quite specific circumstances of the year 2006 when Rafael Nadal & Roger Federer withdrew after their titanic final in Rome the previous week. Trivia: Stepanek's match against Ivo Karlovic (Davis Cup 2009, semifinal) could have been the first all-tie-break five-setter if a two game advantage in the decider hadn't been required then. The Czech won 6-7, 7-6, 7-6, 6-7, 16-14 after six hours saving match points at 4:5 and 11:12.

Career record:	384–302 [289 events]
Career titles:	5
Highest ranking:	No. 8 (July 2006)
Best GS result:	Wimbledon (quarterfinalist 2006)

Davis Cup champion 2011-12

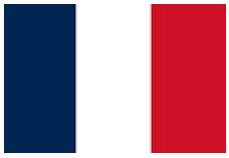
Gastón Gaudio (Argentina)

Born: December 9, 1978 in Temperley
Height: 1.75 m
Plays: Right-handed

Gaudio's unexpected triumph at Roland Garros '04 gave me thrills, perhaps the most amazing emotions I've ever felt watching tennis in the 5th set of his epic drama vs Guillermo Coria. Even though Gaudio began the event as No. 44, not having even played a major quarterfinal (he didn't play afterwards too), I put his name among a few main contenders to the title. For me personally it was an astonishing prediction when he won a match point vs Coria; I believed in him based on his matches against the best clay-courters of the early 00s in Paris: in 2002 (4R) he lost to Juan Carlos Ferrero 7-6, 1-6, 7-6, 2-6, 4-6; one year later (3R) to Gustavo Kuerten 6-7, 5-7, 7-5, 3-6. Those matches were tight, could have gone the other way if Gaudio had been mentally more stable... the highest level of clay-court tennis in them, so my assumption was "if he deals better with pressure in the most important moments, he may win the whole thing". The context of the French Open 2004 was quite special - both Ferrero and Kuerten were far away from the form they presented raising the Parisian trophy, a teenage Rafael Nadal withdrew (tough to say how far he could go in 2004, but worth mentioning that Gaudi comfortably led Nadal 3-0 until Monte Carlo '05). The draw was wide open, Coria was the main favorite and he confirmed his phenomenal disposal. In that memorable final he led 6-0, 6-1, 4:3* when a miracle occurred - the crowd started to cheer for Gaudio with “Mexican wave” changing the tone of the final. Coria started to cramp and suddenly - Gaudio - who was trying to avoid humiliation, looked a bit paralyzed having a wide open door in front of himself. According to my stats in his 119 main-level events prior FO '04 he had just won one match facing a match point, against Coria he fought off two match points (on return!) and survived the 3-hour 31-minute struggle with his trademark shot - cross-court backhand. Gaudio had an abysmal 1-9 record in five-setters prior to those fantastic two weeks in Paris, during the event he won three five-setters; the first two already in the first two rounds against quality opponents! Gaudio can be labelled as a one Slam wonder, nevertheless in the aftermath of that triumph he established himself as a Top 10 player for two years, notched two 'Masters' events. Finally he was able to do what could have been expected from him for a couple of years before Paris '04 - he found a way to win tight matches with better ratio which allowed him to play clay-court ATP finals quite regularly. Gaudio participated in 12 ATP finals in his career (all on clay), record 8-8 (2:4 before Paris '04 and 6:4 after it).

Career record: 270–196 [194 events]
Career titles: 8
Highest ranking: No. 5 (April 2005)
Best GS result: Roland Garros (champion 2004)

Arnaud di Pasquale (France)



Born: February 11, 1979 in Casablanca (Morocco)
Height: 1.85 m
Plays: Right-handed

Could he be in the 00s someone like Lucas Pouille in the 10s? I compare them with two common denominators: both French, both blonde guys with longer hair playing in baseball caps regardless of the weather. Di Pasquale, who grew up in North Africa, belonged to the best juniors (US Open '97 title), he was 19 when in his just sixth main-level event reached the final and lost after a tight match to Francisco Clavet (Bucharest '98). The French fans waited for a new generation, and at the time (late 90s) he seemed to be at the same level with a bit older boys (Sebastien Grosjean & Arnaud Clement), who would achieve much more ultimately. Di Pasquale established himself as a clay-courter, but the biggest result in his career comes from hardcourts: Olympics in Sydney. He shocked the spectators with two wins, over Magnus Norman and Juan Carlos Ferrero, it placed him in the medal zone. Albeit he lost the semifinal to Yevgeny Kafelnikov, but in the 3rd place match he surprised once again, defeating 7-6, 6-7, 6-3 Roger Federer, after squandering a match point in the second set tie-break. The following season (2001) brought weaker results as a consequence of two injuries - back & knee. He underwent arthroscopic left knee surgery in Paris on Sept. 19, 2001 following his dramatic US Open defeat to Ferrero [5], serving to win the contest in four sets. The Frenchman returned to action after nearly eight months out. The knee was never the same though, and in 2004, at the age of 25 he played his last main-level event in Palermo, the city in which he claimed his lone title in 1999, not dropping a set in the process, defeating i.a. two clay-court specialists - Alex Corretja and Alberto Berasategui. Trivia: between October '99 and March '00 he played three times against Jim Courier and all those encounters featured tight deciding sets, the first two in France won the North-American, their last meeting in North America was won by the Frenchman. Despite winning the medal, he never got a chance to represent France in Davis Cup.

Career record: 69–98 [99 events] Olympic bronze medalist (Sydney 2000)
Career titles: 1
Highest ranking: No. 39 (April 2000)
Best GS result: Roland Garros (fourth round in 1999 & 2002)

Ivo Karlović (Croatia)

Born: February 28, 1979 in Zagreb (Yugoslavia)
Height: 2.11 m
Plays: Right-handed

First of all - the tallest player who professionally appeared in the 20th Century. At the end of the 90s he was just a freak known at the Futures level. There was actually nothing in his game style except the serve, so he needed to work hard also on his biggest weapon to make himself "an all tie-break player". He needed keeping a high percentage (above 60%) of the first serve in & developing a serve-and-volley style to make a transition from Futures to Challenger level. When he achieved that, another step was an improvement of the body movement which allowed him to run around the backhand to play the "everything or nothing" forehand - it helped to get some important points as a receiver in inevitable tie-breaks. Finally when he established himself as an ATP Tour player, he could work on other ingredients - volleys & backhand slice. So the best version of Karlovic meant: 60-70% of the 1st serve when he was almost unbreakable for two hours, decent volleys, decent backhand slice, and dangerous aggressive forehand in a 1/4 ratio. The Croat, in that disposal, could be dangerous for the best players; twice he beat Novak Djokovic, once Roger Federer, and he was within points of defeating Andy Murray & Rafael Nadal. Karlovic waited until he was aged 24 for a breakthrough which happened in a dreamlike scenario - on Centre Court at Wimbledon '03 against the defending champion, Lleyton Hewitt [1]. Karlovic ranked no. 203, debuted in a major as a qualifier (had failed to get the Grand Slam main draw in his eight previous attempts), and began his first appearance in front of a big audience being very tense. Instead of a probable tie-break, the crowd witnessed three breaks against Karlovic in the opener. Hewitt had plenty of opportunities to win the 2nd set (including six break points in three different games); Karlovic saved a set point with a service winner on 2nd serve; Hewitt also led 5:4* in the tie-break, but lost three straight points and the match 6-1, 6-7, 3-6, 4-6. Perhaps entering the big stage at relatively old age for a tennis player, and very economical style (almost no running in games as a receiver), highly contributed to a very long career marked by enormous number of aces & tie-breaks. It's possible to write a separate chapter about dramatic matches of Karlovic and his American counterpart - John Isner, so in this bio I'll mention just one curiosity about the Croat: still no-one has been involved in an all tie-break five-setter, but only Karlovic could be (and twice), losing twice matches that were

the closest to a fifth tie-break - to Radek Stepanek 7-6, 6-7, 6-7, 7-6, 14-16 in Davis Cup '09 and Aljaz Bedene 7-6, 6-7, 7-6, 6-7, 6-8 eight years later at Wimbledon.

Career record: 370-343 [340 events]
Career titles: 8
Highest ranking: No. 14 (August 2008)
Best GS result: Wimbledon (quarterfinal 2009)

Ivan Ljubičić (Croatia)

Born: March 19, 1979 in Banja Luka (Yugoslavia)
Height: 1.93 m
Plays: Right-handed

Because of the Balkan war in the early 90s, he emigrated with his parents to Italy where he began his serious tennis journey. Perhaps the traumatic war experiences contributed to the hair loss & actually the entire career he was bald. His teenage life was coincidental with Goran Ivanisevic being one of the best players in the world, because of that Ljubicic stylized his serve on the one of Ivanisevic - the foot of his frontal leg didn't touch the surface in the first phase of preparation. The big serve allowed him to become a regular ATP player at the turn of millenia, but other shots required a lot of practice. A rather one-dimensional Ljubicic was quite often a victim of dramatic defeats. Enough said - in the year 2002 (extending to the Aussie swing of 2003) he lost as many as seven encounters holding match points (twenty MPs in total!). There were also dramatic 2-set or 4-set defeats (most famous at the US Open '01 in four tie-breaks to the defending champion Marat Safin). Ljubicic was inconvenient for all the best players, but he seemed to be someone capable of losing everything tight what was possible & his return game wasn't the only problem - the most severe case comes from the Aussie Open '02 when he lost to Wayne Ferreira despite 6-4, 6-4, *5:1 and 5:3(40/15) - with his serve? Unbelievable! The hard work finally paid off in the years 2005-06. Ljubicic showed off his improved version, with stable backhand and good volley skills, so important for players who serve very well. In the first quarter of 2005 Ljubicic reached three hardcourt finals and quite funny he lost them all to his future pupil Roger Federer, but twice making the things complicated for the almost unbeatable at the time man from Switzerland. It was a huge boost of confidence for the 26-year-old Croat who shortly after the third of those finals, stunned the United States in the first round of Davis Cup. Ljubicic not only defeated higher ranked Andre Agassi and Andy Roddick, he also - partnering Mario Ancic - overcame the Bryan brothers who had won 16 straight Davis Cup sets

at the time. It was the beginning of the sensational conquering of the Davis Cup (in the final against even more unexpected Slovakia). Before it happened, Ljubicic had been the hottest player of Autumn '05 winning 16 matches in a row and almost another one which could have meant his third straight indoor title (he led 2-0 in sets vs Rafael Nadal in Madrid). Also to Nadal, "Ljubo" lost his lone Grand Slam final, in Paris, so at the venue least expected. Admittedly he was not a serve-and-volley specialist, but he could be easier expected in the Wimbledon semifinal on the assumption the tie-break ratio would be good for him.

Career record:	429–296	[292 events]	Davis Cup champion 2005
Career titles:	10		
Highest ranking:	No. 3 (May 2006)		
Best GS results:	Australian Open (quarterfinal 2006) and Roland Garros (semifinal 2006)		

Paradorn Srichaphan (Thailand)

Born: June 14, 1979 in Khon Kaen
Height: 1.85 m
Plays: Right-handed

...almost enjoyed one of the most astonishing debuts at the main-level. As an 18-year-old boy [768], who had just played some matches in Satellites of the Malay Archipelago, faced in the first round of Singapore the former no. 1 in the world Jim Courier [22] and was relatively close to oust the American in two easy sets! Courier survived 2-6, 6-4, 6-3 and Srichaphan disappeared from the tennis focus for another two years when - along with Tamarine Tanasugarn - advanced to the Hopman Cup final. He was a man to watch in the years 2002-04, during those years he won all his titles and played fourth rounds at three different majors. He was labeled as a shot-maker, becoming one of the most exciting players to watch. As opposed to two other entertaining "forehand players" who got attention in the early 00s (James Blake and Fernando Gonzalez), Srichaphan didn't need to run around his backhand side - from that wing he was also able to produce winners of all sorts under pressure. What made Srichaphan special at the time, was his extraordinary flexibility, he could keep the ball in play with the help of splits! I'd say that in terms of the on-court movement, animalistic agility, only the young Rafael Nadal could be comparable to the Thai. Srichaphan seemed as a potential Grand Slam semifinalist (never even played a quarterfinal) and a Masters

1K champion (never even played a final). It's not easy to explain why he didn't go further in the biggest events when he enjoyed his best times on the tour. Perhaps the quality of opponents partly explain he hasn't achieved anything spectacular; all the most important matches of his career (major fourth rounds or Masters 1K semifinals, he faced opponents who sooner or later were the best in the world). Nevertheless, Srichaphan became the first Asian to reach the Top 10. It was an impressive feat given the fact he was just an average guy for a few months during every clay-court season; he finished his career with a shameful 10-35 record on clay... the lack of patience was his biggest drawback. In the years 2005-06 he was inconsistent, but still gave an impression of someone who could explode with fantastic tennis at any given tournament except clay. Outside tennis, Srichaphan had two major passions: kick-boxing & motorcycles. The former certainly contributed to his athleticism and endurance, but the latter made an impact on a sudden collapse. The beginning of the end occurred in early 2007 when he injured his right wrist during a practice session; underwent right wrist surgery on Oct. 11 in Los Angeles. In the meantime he indulged in motorcycles because the injured wrist was strong enough to hold the motorcycle handlebars; he suffered an accident in May 2008 which postponed his potential comeback. After a two-year break Srichaphan returned to the tour in Bangkok '09 to play just one doubles match. Another motorcycle accident, much more serious (broke both hands and a wrist) in April '10 caused his decision to officially retire from tennis in June 2010, so more than three years after his last singles match. Trivia: Chennai was Srichaphan's best event, in the years 2002-05 he played finals in four consecutive editions, and back-to-back finals he lost to Carlo Moya after almost identical scorelines (4-6, 6-3, 6-7 and 6-3, 4-6, 6-7 respectively). More luck he had against **Paul Goldstein** (b. 1976), defeating him within a year on American hardcourts (6-4, 3-6, 7-5 and 5-7, 6-3, 7-6) saving three match points on both occasions.

Career record:	239–193 [189 events]
Career titles:	5
Highest ranking:	No. 9 (May 2003)
Best GS results:	Australian Open (fourth round 2004) Wimbledon (fourth round 2003) US Open (fourth round 2003)

Juan Ignacio Chela (Argentina)

Born: August 30, 1979 in Ciudad Evita
Height: 1.90 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

"El Flaco". A player without any fireworks. He based his game on solid serve and good baseline strokes. Clay-courts suited him the most, but a few times he proved to be a dangerous player on hardcourts too. He became one of a few players who won their first titles out of nowhere - in 1999 he had played his first three ATP events, lost all opening matches, then triumphed in Mexico City '00 as a qualifier [129], defeating Gustavo Kuerten in the second round saving two match points in the 2nd set (in 2019, Chela's namesake & fellow Argentine - **Juan Ignacio Londero** (b. 1993) repeated that feat, triumphing in Cordoba with a 0-3 record at the main level, however, Londero played with "wild card"). What's distinctive about Chela it is his inability to win a quarterfinal of a big tournament - the Argentine played three Grand Slam and eight Masters 1K quarterfinals losing them all; the best chance he had in Hamburg 2005 - after eliminating three better players than himself, lost to Christopeh Rochus (6-3 0-6 3-6) for whom it meant the career-best result. Chela had his chance to win something big as he was appointed to the first rubber of the Davis Cup '06 final, but lost in four sets to Nikolay Davydenko, and the team captain Alberto Mancini replaced him in the decisive rubber with Jose Acasuso. Currently, Chela coaches Diego Schwartzman, with whom has overcome his best results. Schwartzman about Chela: *"He told me, I break 78 percent of the time when I go up against the server love-30. I almost always break when the opponent starts love 30."* Chela: *"I'm very calm when he's returning because he knows he's one of the best in the world."*

Career record: 326–272 [276 events]
Career titles: 6
Highest ranking: No. 15 (August 2004)
Best GS results: Roland Garros (quarterfinalist 2004, 2011)
US Open (quarterfinalist 2011)

Nicolás Massú (Chile)

Born: October 10, 1979 in Viña del Mar
Height: 1.79 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

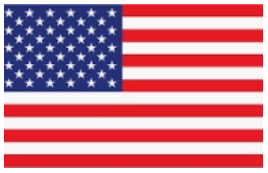
The first steps on the tennis court, Massu did under the guidance of his maternal Jewish-Hungarian grand-father. Massu (the Lebanese/Palestinian origin of the father's side) enjoyed a successful career as a junior; when Marcelo Rios became the best tennis player in the world of 1998, journalists were already talking about his successors - Massu & Fernando Gonzalez. In terms of the ranking, Rios' younger compatriots achieved less, but Massu among these three guys is the only one who won one of the biggest titles in tennis - the Gold medal at the Olympics in Athens which opens the discussion "who is the best player in the Chilean history?" (Gonzalez won the most matches, and reached the most major finals). The story was absolutely incredible because Massu not only triumphed in singles, he also (partnering Gonzalez) won the gold medal in doubles, surviving both finals in dramatic five-setters. Within 24 hours Massu went beyond the tennis spectrum, his story will be remembered and mentioned in wider context in the upcoming decades - in the history of sport. In the last two matches of that singles event, Massu defeated the American players for whom reaching the final stages of the Olympics meant career-best result as well, but nothing can be depreciated in Massu's triumph because earlier in the event he had defeated two former Nos. 1 in the world (Gustavo Kuerten & Carlos Moya). Massu arrived in the Greek capital having lost eight consecutive matches on hardcourts! How he managed to win two gold medals is unbelievable because it's his lone hardcourt title in singles and the only one in doubles overall! The week of unforgettable miracles... Pertinacious player, always fighting to the end, he won many matches from a deep hole (especially in 'the best of three' format), a type of guy who wanted to spend as much time on the court as possible - the longer the match, the better for him. This attitude didn't fully pay off at majors, it's quite remarkable that despite his mental toughness he had a negative record at majors, even in Paris. In the 00s no other player was involved in so many long matches, he loved to stretch breaks between his serves to maximum (25 seconds in ATP & 20 seconds in major events then). After many years of being associated with clay-courts, he advanced to the final in Madrid (indoors). That result certainly helped him to build confidence on hardcourts, and the manifestation of it, the tennis fans witnessed during his glory days in Athens. Trivia: Massu played two longest four-setters, both in Davis Cup rubbers; first in 2007 when he lost to Dudi Sela 3-6, 4-6, 7-6, 4-6 after 5 hours 7 minutes, then two years later when he overcame Stefan

Koubek 6-4, 4-6, 6-4, 7-6 after 5 hours 14 minutes. He's been coaching Dominic Thiem for two years, and helped the Austrian to become a better player on hardcourts. *"I try to show Dominic all the time that I'm playing the match with him,"* Massu said, *"I'm not running with him, but I'm playing the match with him outright. I'm totally focused on every point. I'm very passionate."*

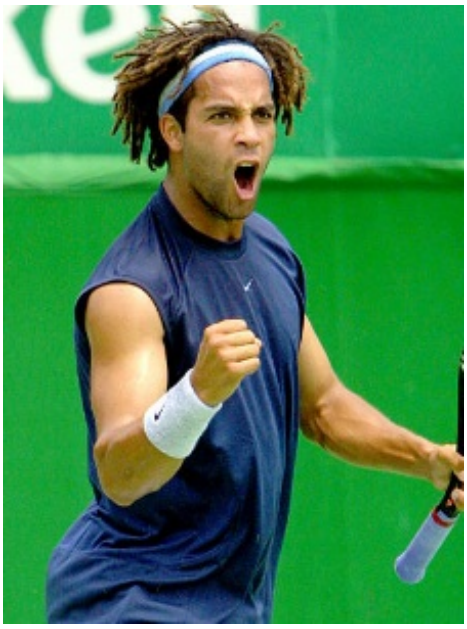
Career record: 257–233 [225 events]
Career titles: 6
Highest ranking: No. 9 (September 2004)
Best GS result: US Open (fourth round 2005)

Oympic double (!) Gold medalist (Athens 2004)

James Blake (USA)



Born: December 28, 1979 in Yonkers, New York
Height: 1.85 m
Plays: Right-handed



The son of an English mother... Blake with his fancy gamestyle & dreadlocks, brought some freshness to the tour at the beginning of the new Century, expectations were high... From the beginning obviously not the same level, anyway he and Andy Roddick were supposed to replace Andre Agassi & Pete Sampras as two main forces of the US tennis - indeed it happened, however, much below that what could be foreseen, in both cases. The years 2002-2003 were crucial in Blake's career, defined him as someone extremely talented (perhaps one of the fastest forehands in history, taking into account not only the speed of the ball he hit, but also the reaction to the shot of the opponent), but mentally unstable, simply too weak at tight moments to win the biggest events. At different points in his career, Blake had a 0-7 record in deciding 3rd set tie-breaks and 0-9 in five-setters before erasing his demons in those situations. I was wondering many times "how it's possible to have such negative records when you have so many tools in your repertoire?" Here are my conclusions:
- Blake, similarly to the early version of Agassi, was a front-runner, he was playing in very fast pace & couldn't keep concentration for a longer period of time (two hours maximum?); if a system "no-ad and champions tie-break" had been applied during his times he would have been one of the best player in history (?)
- his backhand; it was pretty good shot overall, nonetheless his weakest... at situations like 5-all or 6-all in deciding sets he was missing much more backhands,

he knew that & quite often was trying to run around his backhand too much with additional risk of hitting the forehand
- too proud to show emotions when still long way to go... I mean in those forming ATP years he won a couple of sets saving match points, but those were second sets; certainly he didn't know how to be involved in a psychological battle, how to shift the momentum, what to do to lead 2:0 for instance at the beginning of the decider being one point from a straight set defeat... enough said, he won his first main-leven match from an MP down in his 138th tournament!
- too conservative with his second serve, I mean if want to win the most important points with your serve, you have to either hit your second serve with similar speed to your first one or if you generally play from the back of the court, sometimes you need to try kick-serve and run to the net.
A wasted talent? Not exactly, thanks to the Davis Cup win over Mikhail Youzhny in the 2007 final. It was an opening rubber, but crucial for the rest of the weekend (USA defeated Russian already on Saturday). The following year he was one point away from a Silver medal at least, but wasted a triple match point against Fernando Gonzalez, who was hs exceptionally difficult opponent (Blake lost to Gonzalez also a Davis Cup five-setter two years before. The Beijing loss must have been extremely painful, especially taking into consideration the fact, Blake had overcome in the quarterfinal Roger Federer, avenging eight previous defeats.

Career record:	366–256 [245 events]
Career titles:	10
Highest ranking:	No. 4 (November 2006)
Best GS results:	Australian Open (quarterfinalist 2008) US Open (quarterfinalist 2005-06)

Davis Cup champion 2007

...Born in the 80s...

Marat Safin (Russia)

Born: January 27, 1980 in Moscow (Soviet Union)
Height: 1.93 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

A prototype of a new player, quite characteristic for the 21st Century - a tall man who comfortably moves on the court. I was really impressed watching his first big win (over Andre Agassi, French Open '98). A few months before I had seen him destroying Jim Courier for fifty minutes (Safin led 6-0, *4:1 before losing in five) in the Davis Cup first round. It was played on a hardcourt, shorter rallies, I didn't notice his extraordinary skills in defence then. Prior to Safin's appearance, the players of height +190 cm were automatically associated with limited, rather awkward movement. I cannot say anything bad about Safin's volley skills, but from scratch it was clear he would construct the majority of his points from the back of the court everywhere. At the time it wasn't obvious that the serve-and-volley tennis was in retreat because Pete Sampras was still the best in the world while more natural serve-and-volleyer Patrick Rafter, won the US Open twice. Back to Paris '98; the qualifier Safin stunned Agassi, in the second round he won another five-setter (against Gustavo Kuerten) and a new star was born. Many months that followed, brought disappointment though. Safin was often losing in the first or second round, and he became known as a player who was destroying more racquets than Goran Ivanisevic (the Croat was struggling a lot at the time with his form), a new bad boy. Something unbelievable happened to Safin in the European clay-court swing of Spring 2000. He had begun the season with five tournament defeats, when arrived in Barcelona he was ranked no. 35 with a poor 4-11 record for the season. And all of a sudden he claimed back-to-back titles (the second one in Mallorca) initiating the best seven months of his tennis life. In that period the 20-year-old Safin collected seven titles and almost finished the year as the best player in the world - only the final of 'Masters' won by Kuerten gave the Brazilian the edge of the Russian. Remarkable that for another nine years (actually five) of his career, Safin won the same number of events (7) as during 3/4 of the 2000 season! It's not easy to explain - not knowing all factors off the courts - why Safin didn't keep his status of the best player born in the 80s at least in the first half of the 00s. Perhaps the enormous success (mainly manifested by triumphing at the US Open '00 after trashing Sampras in the final) was so unexpected juxtaposing with the

disappointing 1999 season, that partially decreased his motivation to train hard. Judging by his skills, he could have certainly been for the early 00s someone like Jim Courier a decade before; meanwhile that what achieved Courier in the early 90s was ten years later distributed between Safin, Lleyton Hewitt & Andy Roddick, before Roger Federer - like Sampras more or less ten years earlier - overwhelmed them all. Safin's first serious setback came in the city where he transformed his career from serfdom to kingdom - Barcelona. It was the year 2003. Safin retired in the final. His left wrist bothered him. Counting that final, he lost all his seven matches to the end of the season and dropped from no. 8 to 86 when stunned the tennis world in Melbourne advancing to the final after three four-setters and three five-setters. Safin tied Harold Solomon's record (Roland Garros '76) for the most sets played in the Grand Slam fortnight – 30 – and his tiredness was visible during the final. He lost it quickly to Federer, who had begun his rule over the tennis world on that day and it lasted more than four years before he was overthrown by Nadal at Wimbledon '08. Safin of the years 2004-05 it was someone who would lose to anyone as well as someone who enjoying a good day would beat the best players in the world, and it happened in successive rounds of the Australian Open '05. Safin kicked off the event destroying an unknown Serbian boy... Novak Djokovic; in the semifinal survived a match point (vs Federer) and in the final in the front of the Partisan Australian crowd Safin defeated in four sets the local favorite Hewitt. It was Safin's swan song in some sense. He was just 25-year-old, playing more mature tennis than at the US Open '00 (his serve and his volleys were significantly better), but didn't win another title for another five years. The years 2006-08 were upsetting, nevertheless at Wimbledon '08 he advanced to the semifinal, again defeating Djokovic in straights and their H2H has been finished at 2-0 for Safin since then. Inability to win a title for several years forced his decision to quit after the farewell '09 season. For the ~30-year-old Safin that season was less profitable than the 1991 farewell season for the 30-year-old Stefan Edberg. Throughout his career Safin was a player whose matches we can compare to the Russian roulette, plenty of luck was involved in his dramatic matches - he could win tight matches over the elite players as often as lose them to inferior players, but in the year 2009 he was almost losing everything tighter, at Roland Garros he even lost to such a casual player like Josselin Ouanna (his main-level record just 9-17) after one of those matches you can theoretically lose once (6-7, 6-7, 6-4, 6-3, 8-10) - for Safin it was the second loss of this kind following his defeat top Max Mirnyi more than five years before (6-7, 6-7, 6-1, 6-4, 9-11). Safin was losing that year everything tighter until his last tournament held at Paris-Bercy. In the first round he saved three match points with three aces to beat the French bony journeyman **Thierry Ascione** (b. 1981, the future coach of Jo-Wilfried Tsonga). In the last match of his career, Safin lost to Juan Martin del Potro, and perhaps it was Safin's best match of the season because the Argentinian was fresh after triumphing at the US Open, and he was mirroring Safin in terms of the posture and abilities, he was perceived then as a potential leader of the men's tennis in the years to come which never happened, but it's a different story...

Career record: 422–267 [260 events]
Career titles: 15
Highest ranking: No. 1 (November 2000)
Best GS results: Australian Open (champion 2005; runner-up 2002 & 04)
Roland Garros (semifinalist 2002; quarterfinalist 2000)
Wimbledon (semifinalist 2008; quarterfinalist 2001)
US Open (champion 2000; semifinalist 2001)

Davis Cup champion 2002 (singles) & 2006 (singles & doubles)

Juan Carlos Ferrero (Spain)

Born: February 12, 1980 in Ontinyent
Height: 1.83 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

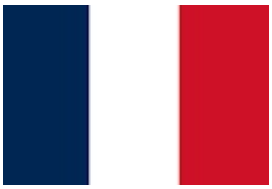
Full name Juan Carlos Ferrero Donat... When he appeared on the ATP tour at the end of the previous Century, I was quite surprised receiving a message that he's in a group of those talented youngsters born at the beginning of the 80s who would become the best in the world in the upcoming years. I don't know who said that, not sure if I heard it or read it, I registered something like this in my memory nonetheless. Already in his ATP debut he reached the semifinal as a qualifier with 24 straight pro wins (five in Casablanca including qualies, preceded by 19 Satellite wins), he followed it with his first Challenger title (in his third appearance at this level) and a dramatic third round match in Barcelona against Carlos Moya, who was virtually the best in the world then. The years 2000-2003 belonged to Ferrero on clay-courts; even though he lost two successive French Open semifinals to Gustavo Kuerten, he won the most clay-court matches in the first four years of the new decade. In 2002 he reached the final in Paris when lost a bizarre match to Albert Costa, finally a year later he fulfilled his dream defeating a sensational runner-up Martin Verkerk, converting a match point with his trade-marke shot - aggressive forehand from the middle of the court. The skinny Spaniard got a nickname "Mosquito" from his friends due to his vicious forehands in all directions. His backhand was also good, his volley technique beyond reproach, his serve improved as he obtained some muscles in the process of becoming one of the best players in the world, which happened after the Parisian triumph (he was in the mix with Andy Roddick & Roger

Federer). There are plenty of clay-court specialists who quickly run and can patiently hit the ball off both wings with astonishing accuracy - what separated Ferrero from a bit older guys like Alex Corretja, A.Costa & Felix Mantilla, it was his ability to win dramatic matches with high frequency. Before losing the Rotterdam '04 final, he had won three straight matches in deciding tie-breaks, at the time he survived as many as ten matches being one point away from defeat in more than 100 main-level events (fantastic ratio). Following the Rotterdam event, Ferrero unexpectedly lost in Marseille to the local journeyman (**Gregory Carraz**, b. 1975) and actually he was never the same afterwards. *"I found out yesterday I had the chickenpox,"* said the 24-year-old Ferrero withdrawing from Indian Wells '04. *"Sometimes things happen and you can't do anything about it. I'm disappointed because I was looking forward to playing here."* His body was weakened in the consequence, admittedly he was sidelined just several weeks, but once he came back on the tour to his beloved clay, he couldn't regain his self-confidence. At the end of 2003 he was no. 3 with an episode of being on the top after the US Open final where he proved he wasn't just a clay-court specialist; the year 2004 he finished as no. 31. and here is this what I mentioned at the beginning of this bio - I perceived the young Ferrero as someone who would achieve as much as he ultimately achieved in the years 2004-2012.

Career record:	479–262 [268 events]
Career titles:	16
Highest ranking:	No. 1 (September 2003)
Best GS result:	Australian Open (semifinal 2004; quarterfinal 2003) Roland Garros (champion 2003; runner-up 2002; semifinal 200-01) Wimbledon (quarterfinal 2007, 09) US Open (runner-up 2003)

Davis Cup champion 2000 and Masters runner-up 2002

Michaël Llodra (France)



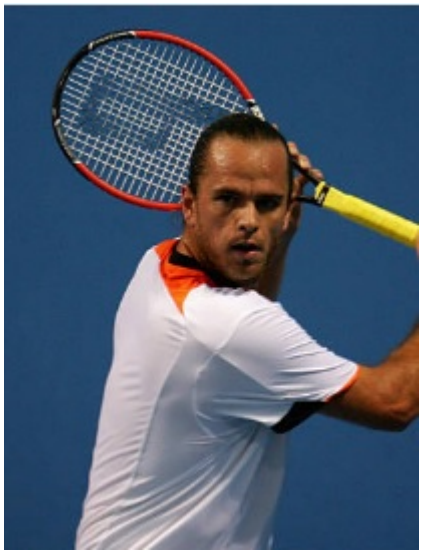
Born: May 18, 1980 in Paris
Height: 1.90 m
Plays: Left-handed

One of those players who mismatched decades. I suppose that with his serve-and-volley style, very good sliced serve and great acceleration off both wings, Llodra could achieve much more being born ten years earlier. When he was entering the main-level it was a time when serve-and-volley players were in retreat. Really, I don't see a big difference between Llodra's abilities and his countryman, fifteen years older left-handed Guy Forget. Llodra's mentality was rather suspicious; according to my stats he never won an MP-down match at the main-level (in Miami '03 he survived a match of this type in the qualifying round against Flavio Saretta), had a negative tie-break record, nevertheless I think he should have reached at least one major quarterfinal and a Masters 1K final. Actually he was one point away from doing that in his career (Frenchy Open '04 and Paris '10)... In 2001, having played just seven main-level events, Llodra got two back-to-back Challenger titles in Germany (Heilbronn & Hamburg), smooth transition to one level higher didn't occur in the aftermath though. The year 2010 brought an enormous opportunity to make history. Llodra was appointed to play a decisive match in the Davis Cup 2010 final replacing an injured Gilles Simon. His opponent, Viktor Troicki seemed to be within Llodra's grasp, as a less natural player indoors, moreover also not dealing well with tight situations. That day, nothing tight occurred, Troicki managed to deconstruct Llodra's serve and beat the Frenchman easier than anyone could expect. llodra needed a partner to deal better with the pressure, in doubles he claimed three major titles as well as a 'Masters' title, at the Olympics in London (2012) he won in the semifinal along with Jo-Wilfried Tsonga one of the most dramatic 'best of three' matches of the Open Era, the French duo defeated Spaniards. Trivia: Llodra could have been a record holder in losing the longest tie-break if qualifying rounds had been officially recognized: he defeated Richard Fromberg 6-4, 6-7(19), 8-6 at Wimbledon '01.

Career record: 187–221 [220 events]
Career titles: 5
Highest ranking: No. 21 (May 2011)
Best GS result: fourth round at three different venues

Xavier Malisse (Belgium)

Born: July 19, 1980 in Kortrijk
Height: 1.85 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)



At the age of 13 he decided to quit football to be fully focused on tennis and four years later he was one of the best juniors in the world training in the Nick Bollettieri Academy. In 1998 he could play one more year as a junior but decided to become a professional and within the year he jumped 686 places in the ATP ranking which automatically put him in the mix with a peer Juan Carlos Ferrero as well as one year younger Roger Federer & Lleyton Hewitt as "the future of tennis". All those guys reached no. 1 in the world, Malisse barely entered Top 20, but considering him as a potential Grand Slam champion had its basis already in his debut. In Philadelphia '98 as a qualifier he played his first main-level match against the best player in the world for the previous five years - Pete Sampras - and almost defeated him (two points away from victory at 5:4 in the decider)! *"I got off to a bad start and let him into the match,"* Sampras said. *"He had some unbelievable shots that really surprised me. He's going to be around; you'll see a lot of him."* In the first two years on the tour Malisse confirmed his potential; he had defeated Thomas Muster on clay (he was declining then) and Goran Ivanisevic on hardcourts. After nine main-level events he had already played two finals; then something happened and his amazing progress was halted. Anyway in 1999 he helped Belgium in unexpected advancement to the Davis Cup semifinals, i.a. defeating Federer to whom he would lose their ten other meetings. There was a moment when it seemed that Malisse after disappointing the first two years of the new century, would fulfill expectations as he reached the Wimbledon semi final eliminating top players in back-to-back matches. He lost a two-day encounter to David Nalbandian and who knows, maybe the Argentinian stole Malisse's spirit in that match to enjoy results the Belgian could have achieved. A player enigma, at times he could play astonishing tennis with plenty of improvisation, god-like mode made him dangerous for all the best guys, yet lack of consistency buried his talent. To some degree perhaps also an injury he suffered in 2007 beginning the season with two titles in the first three events of the season. Trivia: Malisse is the only player (apart from "Masters") who won an ATP event losing a match, it happened in Delray Beach '07; there was an experiment with "round robin" format. Malisse lost to Rainer Schuettler his second match in the event, but won another three.

Career record: 294–274 [268 events]
Career titles: 3
Highest ranking: No. 19 (August 2002)
Best GS result: Wimbledon (semifinalist 2002)

Fernando González (Chile)

Born: July 29, 1980 in Santiago
Height: 1.83 m
Plays: Right-handed

One of the most entertaining players to watch in the 00s. He became the French Open junior champion in 1998 defeating Juan Carlos Ferrero in the final (Ferrero will take revenge in the Parisian quarterfinal five years later). On the professional tour the Spaniard made much quicker progress, in the years 2000-01 he appeared in the French Open semifinals while Gonzalez barely played the qualifying rounds there. Admittedly he needed a few years to fulfill (at least partially) high expectations in the aftermath of Marcelo Rios becoming no. 1 in the world, but in 2000 he triumphed [352] in Orlando, in his just third main-level event having saved four match points in the qualifying second round (vs Giorgio Galimberti). After Orlando he needed to work hard drifting between Challengers & ATP to reach a higher ground. Defeating Pete Sampras in Miami, he sent a signal he wasn't just another clay-courter from South America. To the end of his career he was similarly dangerous everywhere except grass where his broad forehand preparation and a bit unnatural slice couldn't help. The forehand was his trademark, no doubt about it - pondering about the biggest forehands in tennis history Gonzalez is certainly a Top 5 contender. His faith in that shot was similar to Mark Philippoussis' faith in his serve. I think these two guys loved to risk the most, they didn't want to give their opponents any hope in longer rallies when the things got tight; set point down, match point down, it didn't matter - Philippoussis wanted to serve as hard as he could, Gonzaled did the same with his forehand. Statistically speaking that attitude paid off, they both finished their careers with positive ratios as far as dramatic conclusions are concerned. Gonzalez lost the two biggest finals of his career (Australian Open '07, the Olympics in Beijing '08), but the task to win at least one of them was exceptionally difficult - he faced Roger Federer & Rafael Nadal at their best, respectively. Along with Nicolas Massu, Gonzalez won the gold medal in doubles of the Olympics in Athens '04, he also obtained the bronze medal in singles after an amazing (6-4, 2-6, 16-14) victory over Taylor Dent in the third place match, withstanding two match points at 13:14 (service & forehand winners). The forehand

was massive, usually you could assume he'd hit more forehand winners than his opponent regardless of the result, almost impossible to witness a match won by "Gonzo" with fewer forehand winners.

Career record:	370–202 [204 events]
Career titles:	1
Highest ranking:	No. 5 (January 2007)
Best GS results:	Australian Open (runner-up 2007) Roland Garros (semifinal 2009; quarterfinal 2003 & 08) Wimbledon (quarterfinal 2005) US Open (quarterfinal 2002 & 09)

3 Olympic medals (two in singles: Bronze in Athens, Silver in Beijing) and Gold in doubles (Athens)

Luis Horna (Peru)

Born: September 14, 1980 in Lima
Height: 1.80 m
Plays: Right-handed

The second best Peruvian player in the Open Era (behind Jaime Yzaga), but someone who could achieve much more. Enough said, this initially blond player (so untypical for the men from western coast of South America) who was bald at young age, with a nickname "Lucho", won 10 out of 24 meetings against Top 10 players not being even once in Top 30 in his career. In 2003 Horna had defeated the two out of three best players in the world at the time, both in straights - Roger Federer at Roland Garros and Juan Carlos Ferrero in Sopot. How was it possible that someone who could play at that level, had never even reached an ATP final? He finally did it not on clay, which could be logical, but on hardcourts in Long Island 2004. Horna's tennis was based on heavy forehand top-spins, this shot allowed him to conquer two South American cities (Acapulco and Vina del Mar) - en route to those two titles he didn't drop a set. He had been a successful junior before turning pro, especially in doubles as he won Roland Garros & Wimbledon 1997 with two different partners (Jose de Armas and Nicolas Massu). He reminded himself about this at the twilight of his career when partnering Pablo Cuevas, he triumphed in the Parisian Slam. Absolutely amazing achievement especially in retrospect, because they had overcome six pairs consisting of at least one Grand Slam doubles champion; in the quarterfinals after a dramatic match they survived against the Bryan brothers - undoubtedly the best pair of the first two decades of the 21st Century.

Career record: 140-146 [142 events]
Career titles: 2
Highest ranking: No. 33 (August 2004)
Best GS result: third round twice at different venues

Albert Montañés (Spain)

Born: November 26, 1980 in Sant Carles de la Rapita
Height: 1.75 m
Plays: Right-handed

Albert Montañés Roca - his full name... I'd like to compare Montanes with another Catalan player, namely Alberto Martin: clay-courters of the same height and very similar game-styles. The both AMs belonged to something I'd call "second brood" of the Golden Spanish tennis age.

First brood: players born in the years 1974-76 (Alex Corretja, Felix Mantilla, Albert Costa, Carlos Moya)

Second brood: players born in the years 1978-82 (Martin, Montanes, Juan Carlos Ferrero, Feliciano Lopez, Tommy Robredo)

Third brood: players born in the years 1982-86 (David Ferrer, Fernando Verdasco, Nicolas Almagro, Rafael Nadal)

All these guys were active when Nadal triumphed in Paris for the first time. Martin & Montanes achieved the least among these 13 players, but more than Joao Sousa, the best Open Era player of the neighbouring Portugal, to put things into perspective. Just like Ferrer (the same height) they were anti-chokers, each of them lost only three matches squandering match points in main-level events, by the way each in career-defining moments - Martin in Rome '05 (vs Ferrer) having a chance to reach his lone Masters 1K semifinal, Montanes at French Open '11 (vs Fabio Fognini) being one step from his lone Grand Slam quarterfinal. They didn't hesitate to beat tennis legends when the chance appeared; Martin stunned Pete Sampras 6-4, 6-4 in Cincinnati '01 while Montanes ousted Roger Federer 6-2, 7-6 in Estoril '10. So one may wonder: why Ferrer was incomparably more successful? I think two issues are important: bodybuilding (Ferrer is more muscular, especially comparing him to Montanes) and the backhand (Ferrer was operating double-handed BH which is more helpful for defensive players). Simply Ferrer was physically better adjusted to tennis of the 21st Century. Who knows, perhaps Martin & Montanes could achieve much more if - with the skills they possess - they were playing in the 80s, maybe

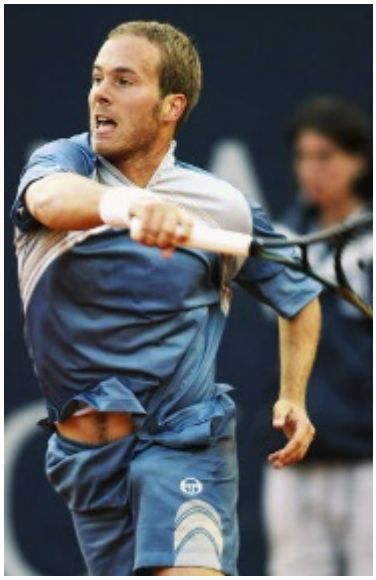
even in the 90s. Martin & Montanes faced each other six times (counting one Challenger final), each player winning three times. Trivia:
Montanes is one of the very few players to win a title after saving match points in two different matches. He did it during his title run in Estoril 2009 in his quarter-final (Gilles Simon) and final (James Blake)
Nadal won his first back-to-back tournaments defeating in the finals A.Martin in Costa Do Sauípe (6-0, 6-7, 6-1 leading 4:0 in the 2nd set) and Montanes in Acapulco (6-1, 6-0)
He holds the record for most first-round exits at Grand Slam events; 35 reached at 2016 Wimbledon

Comparison:
Albert Montanes: 6 titles... best ranking 22... 292 events... record 255–287 (47%)... best Slam (FR & US Open, 4R)... best Masters 1K (twice QF)... $5,866,340
Alberto Martin: 3 titles... best ranking 34... 267 events... record 218-269 (44%)... best Slam (FR Open, 4R)... best Masters 1K (five times QF)... $3,840,885

Career record:	255–287 [293 events]
Career titles:	6
Highest ranking:	No. 22 (August 2010)
Best GS result:	Roland Garros (fourth round 2011)

Olivier Rochus (Belgium)

Born: January 18, 1981 in Namur
Height: 1.65 m
Plays: Right-handed



The shortest Top 100 player of the 21st Century. It's a pity he has never played against eleven years younger Diego Schwartzman, because I'd like to see at least a photo of them together, comparing their height. Rochus faced the tallest player of the 21st Century - Ivo Karlovic, and defeated him twice in dramatic matches (both in 2005) despite being aced 56 times. By some, the Belgian was called "baby Federer" - they were born in the same year, they were playing as a doubles team in juniors events (won Wimbledon '98), and ~20 cm shorter Rochus seemed to possess very similar skills, but the height made a huge difference in their careers. On the tour they played eight matches against each other (+four more counting the junior years), Federer won them all; their official meeting no. 5 was quite special. It was in Halle '06, Federer was enjoying the best period of his tennis life then, yet on one of his favorite courts, he had to save four match points in the 2nd set, and a mini-match point at 2:4 in the decider to survive 6-7, 7-6, 7-6 after 2 hours 45 minutes. Despite the loss I think it's a highlight of Rochus' career; in that match he showed that being deprived of any pressure, he could play like a genius. A few months earlier that year, in Melbourne, Rochus lost 6-4, 6-7, 6-7, 6-7 to Marat Safin, who became an eventual champion of the event; at Wimbledon '10 Rochus led 2:1 in sets against Novak Djokovic in the first match ever played indoors in the most prestigious event (a few months earlier he had defeated the Serb in Miami 2-1). So the Belgian was able to play on equal terms against the best players in the world, and he could only wish he had been much taller in order to achieve much better results. He was no. 1 in the world under 14 and belonged to the best players under 16 and 18 (Wimbledon semi-finalist of 1997, lost to Daniel Elsner, who didn't actually win anything interesting in men's tennis). When he turned pro, he felt that the importance of the serve was incomparable to the teenage years and he needed to compensate for the size disparity with quick feet, clean, compact strokes and astute court sense. About his problems with obtaining cheap points he once said: *"I've been dealing with this since I'm 12 years old. Now it's over my mind. I know I can play with all the weapons. And the big one, I have to run a lot. It's always I think a little tougher for me physically, but I'm trying my best like this."* Rochus' older and slightly taller brother **Christophe** (b. 1978), had worse career, but won more than 1000 main-level matches and played two ATP finals (he had no chance in them) as well as Masters 1K semifinal (Hamburg '05).

Trivia: Rafael Nadal lost his first ATP match to Rochus, 2-6, 2-6 in the Mallorca '02 second round. In Marseille '06, Rochus had a match point against Nadal, but the Spaniard saved it with an ace to prevail 4-6, 6-2, 7-5.

Career record: 237–274 [261 events]
Career titles: 2
Highest ranking: No. 24 (October 2005)
Best GS result: fourth round (three times)

Andreas Vinciguerra (Sweden)

Born: February 19, 1981 in Malmö
Height: 1.78 m
Plays: Left-handed (double-handed backhand)

Vinciguerra (the Italian surname) belonged to the group of the most exciting youngsters who appeared at the turn of centuries along with Marat Safin, Juan Carlos Ferrero, Xavier Malisse (b. 1980); Roger Federer, Lleyton Hewitt (b. 1981); Andy Roddick, Guillermo Coria, David Nalbandian (b. 1982). Among them only Malisse didn't do anything special, he had much more successful career than Vinciguerra anyway. The Swede was actually finished at the very beginning. He enjoyed a sucessful junior career, so his first title at the age of 19 (first ATP final when he was 18), didn't surprise anyone (he did it earlier than his peer Federer, who was defeated by the Swede in their only main-level meeting - Stockholm '00). One year later he failed to add another title, but reached two big semifinals (Rome, Paris) that allowed him to finish the year at career-high no. 33. He was just twenty-one and for the rest of his career he didn't win as many matches as in the years 1999-2001 because of serious back problems (in the years 2007-08 he didn't play at all). Trivia: Vinciguerra experienced one of the most painful Davis Cup weekends in a Sweden vs Israel tie of 2009, losing in his hometown the fifth sets 9-11 to **Dudi Sela** (b. 1985) and 6-8 to **Harel Levy** (b. 1978; unexpected Canadian Open '00 runner-up) in strange indoor matches without spectators (worries about the safety of the Israeli team members in Malmo – a city with a large Muslim community).

Career record: 87-103 [90 events]
Career titles: 1
Highest ranking: No. 33 (November 2001)
Best GS result: Australian Open (fourth round 2001)

Lleyton Hewitt (Australia)

Born: February 24, 1981 in Adelaide
Height: 1.79 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

I remember that when I saw in a newspaper that Hewitt defeated Andre Agassi 7-6, 7-6 in the Adelaide semifinal, I thought he would become the best player in the world (I was right, but I expected that he'd dominate the entire decade which didn't happen ultimately). He was almost 18-year-old, ranked 550, played in the event thanks to 'wild card'. Admittedly Agassi was coming back to the tour after very poor 1997 year when he significantly dropped in the ranking, anyway his name could have been fearsome, paralazying for a kid; therefore I assumed: if that inexperienced Aussie teenager defeated in two tie-breaks a player, who had been already established as the second best in the 90s, he'd make big things in the future. The following day Hewitt survived a tight contest against his future coach (Jason Stoltenberg) becoming the lowest ranked champion in the ATP history (the third youngest behind Aaron Krickstein & Michael Chang). Hewitt's career was divided into two parts - when he was a Top player, actually the best one of the first half of the 00s, and the second part when he grinded to a halt. Pondering why the Australian, rather deprived of one leading shot at least, was so successful, especially in the early 00s, I think that two factors were crucial:

- at the time the serve-and-volleyers were still a force in men's tennis, yet in retreat and Hewitt found a formula to frequently beat them
- Hewitt matured earlier than the most gifted players born in the early 80s (Roger Federer, Andy Roddick, Juan Carlos Ferrero, Marat Safin... no one of them made big results as a teenager)

If I have to draw a parallel between Hewitt and other great champion, I may indicate Jimmy Connors. Just like the American legend, Hewitt was playing flat strokes, he wasn't a natural serve-and-volleyer, but following the Australian tradition, he had been playing doubles regularly, so he was not afraid of attacking the net during rallies. Another similarity between Hewitt and Connors it's their unbelievable competitiveness; they're the types of guys who are ready to leave on the court everything they possess, they will be fighting to the end regardless of inconveniences, they will use all the trickery within the rules to intimidate the

opponents, to beat them in a mental battle first, then in a battle of pure tennis skills. Hewitt's records in the early 00s against ten years older (more or less) serve-and-volleyers were terrific: 9-1 Tim Henman, 5-4 Pete Sampras, 4-3 Greg Rusedski, 3-1 Patrick Rafter, Mark Philippoussis & Todd Martin, 3-0 Goran Ivanisevic, 1-0 Richard Krajciek. Those records clearly indicate his great reflex, ability to keep the return at relatively good percentage against guys who obtain plenty of points directly behind the serve; he could force them to play volleys, then passing them or lobing - if I have to say what was Hewitt's distinctive shot, it's the lob - the stroke very important facing attackers, but quite useless in confrontations against grinders. One of them, Tommy Robredo defeated Hewitt in five sets at French Open '03 and looking backwards, might be said it was the beginning of the end of his reign in men's tennis which lasted two years more or less being initiated with his US Open '01 triumph when he utterly deconstructed Sampras' mighty serve, like no one else before on hardcourts. *"He returned and passed about as well as anyone I've ever played,"* said the 14-time Slam champion. *"He's got the best return and the best wheels in the game."* During his best years, Hewitt's serve was also formidable, he used to risk a lot with his second serve, perhaps more than any other player of his size.

Career record: 616–262 [271 events]
Career titles: 30
Highest ranking: 1 (November 2001)
Best GS results:
Australian Open (runner-up 2005)
Roland Garros (quarterfinalist 3001 & 2004)
Wimbledon (champion 2002; semifinalist 2005; quarterfinalist 2004, 06 & 09)
US Open (champion 2001; runner-up 04; semifinal 2000, 02; quarterfinal 03 & 06)

Davis Cup champion 1999 & 2003 (in both editions highly contributed as a singles player)
Masters 2001-02 champion

Taylor Dent (USA)

Born: April 24, 1981 in Newport Beach, California
Height: 1.88 m
Plays: Right-handed

An American of Australian father with French surname (in the French language 'dent' means "tooth" which is quite funny because Dent was displaying his teeth quite a lot at all strokes). There are two father-son combos introduced to the book: Dents and Ruuds. Taylor's mother was a professional player too (US Open "mixed"-doubles final in 1977). A freak player, actually the fastest server in the 00s behind Andy Roddick, but didn't even once served at least thirty aces in match. He had a huge problem with variety and consistency with his 1st serve, I think it's an explanation of his low number of aces. Another weird issue is his doubles activity, it's rather a common thing that serve-and-volley players notch notable results in doubles, not Dent - he did not win an ATP tournament in doubles (!) - his only Challenger triumph came after a walkover in the final... never played beyond the second round in a major... Totally arrhythmic player, given the speed of his 1st serve and the S/V attitude, you'd expect from him many tight three-set matches, decided by one or two breaks but often he was playing a tie-break being already broken twice in that set before! He hadn't any weapons from the baseline but his mixing game of amateurish errors exchanged with serving bombs and fantastic volley as well as rare incredible "all or nothing" shots from the baseline, didn't allow his opponents to find the proper rhythm. I think he was the only player in the 00's who used to attack to the net after nothing - chip & charge combination from a forehand side directly after the return, maybe also Max Mirnyi implemented this tactic in his best period at the beginning of that decade. Dent enjoyed his best event at the Olympics in Athens. He advanced to the semifinal, then two Chileans deprived him of a medal (first Nicolas Massu, then Fernando Gonzalez in the very dramatic third place match).

Career record: 151–140 [143 events]
Career titles: 4
Highest ranking: No. 21 (August 2005)
Best GS result: fourth round twice

Jürgen Melzer (Austria)

Born: May 22, 1981 in Vienna
Height: 1.83 m
Plays: Left-handed (two-handed backhand)

I write about Melzer in past tenses even though he is still active in doubles. As a singles player he won his last main-level match in 2018 and before the pandemia he was classified outside the Top 1000, so I suppose if he pops up at age of 40 in 2021, it will be a farewell match in Kitzbuhel or Vienna thanks to 'wild card'. Melzer was the best Austrian player between the eras of Thomas Muster and Dominic Thiem, nowhere near to their levels, but similarly to them, in Paris he notched his best result. It was Roland Garros 2010: Melzer hadn't passed beyond the third round in any of 31 major attempts before, so he could be very happy just playing the quarterfinal against Novak Djokovic, it was already two rounds better than his previous best. The end station seemed inevitable as the Serb led 6-3, 6-2, 2:0, but Melzer made one of the most impressive comebacks at Roland Garros of the decade, winning the thriller on Suzanne Lenglen after 4 hours 15 minutes being five points away from defeat in sets 4 & 5. That victory is even more impressive in retrospect with the knowledge of Djokovic's amazing record in five-setters. It was a turning point in the career of the 29-year-old Austrian. The same season he advanced for the first time to the fourth round at Wimbledon & US Open, also defended his title in Vienna having defeated Rafael Nadal in his previous event (Shanghai). The route to the Top 10 was continued in the following season - first time he reached the round 16 in Melbourne, it was followed by the only Masters 1K semifinal - Monte Carlo after defeating Roger Federer. That win over Federer (6-4, 6-4) actually marked the end of Melzer's great form extended over a non-calendar year. In the footsteps of several gifted players before, he experienced a period of +/-10 months of consistency at the highest level, but in his case it was stretched over two seasons, therefore he didn't play 'Masters'. Melzer belonged to the most offensive players, who used double-handed backhand (Wimbledon & US Open doubles champion along with Philipp Petzschner, in his two best years). He used to play double-handed dropshots, rather rarity, Nikolay Davydenko was doing the same with the other leading hand. As opposed to Davydenko's double-handed BH volley, Melzer's BH volley was a very classical stroke, his cross-court forehand I'd consider as his best shot though. Trivia: Melzer faced his peer Federer for the first

time after eleven years on the tour together (Wimbledon 2010). Their rivalry is potentially finished at 4-1 for the Swiss.

Career record: 350-334 [312 events]
Career titles: 5
Highest ranking: No. 8 (18 April 2011)
Best GS result: Roland Garros (semifinalist 2010)

Nikolay Davydenko (Russia)

Born: June 2, 1981 in Severodonetsk (Soviet Union)
Height: 1.78 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

Никола́й Давыде́нко ...stumbling upon his own legs, signs of frustration when nothing serious happened, lack of confidence to take a "challenge" when TV spectators know it was worth of that, regular average speed that cannot hurt anyone, finally double-handed volleys - at times hit from a comfortable position to play a normal overhead (!)... you would see those frames of Davydenko's career to ponder: "How it's possible that this guy was a solid Top 5 player for several years, multiple Grand Slam semifinalist?" The short answer can be contained in Juan Martin del Potro's comment after his loss to Davydenko in the 'Masters' 2009 final - *"He plays like PlayStation."* If you extract those frames, you don't see the whole picture - a man-machine. Davydenko once said he was a fan of the great Polish ski-jumper Adam Małysz, who used to explain his great successes on the ski jumping hill in a simple way: *"I'm focused on myself, to make a good jump."* In tennis you interact with your opponent, so it's obviously tough to be focused on yourself all the time, but I suppose it was something Davydenko tried to do throughout his career. The game-plan was basic: run fast being close to the baseline and hit the ball off both wings as soon as it bounced from the floor. This tactic was very efficient, even against a guy like Rafael Nadal, who had less time for reaction facing Davydenko. It didn't work against Roger Federer though. The Swiss maestro with his slice & dice plan B, could outmaneuver the Russian machine, and he did it on regular base. Davydenko reached four quarterfinals and four semifinals at majors as many as five times being eliminated by Federer. It was never easy, but a very clever tactician like Federer knew how to play the most important points in those matches. The 5-all scenario was repeated several times, always with the same conclusion.

Thus I guees Davydenko may legitimately say: "If I hadn't met Federer so many times, I would have been a Grand Slam champion." The sweet revenge finally came in London '09. Davydenko was on fire and self-confident, having a fantastic 18-5 record in tie-breaks as he faced Federer in the semifinal. Perhaps it helped him not panic too much at *4:5 (0/30) in the 3rd set, and he beat his worst foe 6-2, 4-6, 7-5 despite twelve consecutive defeats (it ended at 2-19 from Davydenko's perspective). *"I had to hit fast and aggressive strokes and keep points on my racquet. I stepped on the court, felt the ball and did everything in my power to seal the deal in straight sets. I was nervous during the match point, and emotions started to blow out after I won,"* said Davydenko. He had finished the year in style and began another one keeping the great track. In Doha '10, just like in London, Davydenko defeated two best guys of the previous decade, the self-confidence was skyrocketing when he entered the Australian Open. Many pundits could perceive him as a main favorite, in the quarterfinal he faced Federer for the third time in his third successive event, for set a half he was destroying the Swiss, but the potential sensation, turned into Federer's pretty convincing win,at least on paper (2-6, 6-3, 6-0, 7-5). It was the last time when Davydenko found himself in the second week of a major event. The last four years of his career were similar to the first four, he was usually a first/second round victim.

Career record:	482-329 [346 events]
Career titles:	23
Highest ranking:	No. 3 (November 2006)
Best GS results:	Australian Open (quarterfinalist 2005-07 & 10) Roland Garros (semifinalist 2005 & 07; quarterfinalist 2006 & 09) US Open (semifinalist 2006-07)

Davis Cup champion 2006 and Masters champion 2009

Victor Hănescu (Romania)

Born: July 21, 1981 in Bucharest
Height: 1.98 m
Plays: Right-handed

Perhaps the tallest player among those who didn't base their games on the serve. It's strange that such a tall player served 20 aces or more only four times in his career - the most, 29 aces in a three-set match, against Goran Ivanisevic (6-7, 6-4, 6-4) at Queens Club '04; perhaps it's the first match when I saw him. It was a big win for the young Romanian, nonetheless the Croat was playing his penultimate event and probably wasn't very focused on return games. Normally, a two-meter player should be associated with faster surfaces, meanwhile the patient and technically good Romanian, claimed his only title on clay (Gstaad '08 - he saved three match points in the second round against Ivo Karlovic) and on the same surface played his best major, reaching the quarterfinal at Roland Garros three years earlier - well deserved because in the fourth round Hanescu ousted David Nalbandian [11] in five sets. The worst year in Hanescu's career occured when he was 25. He suffered torn ligaments in his stomach while serving against James Blake (Davis Cup), then had problems with his back, and played just six main-level events, not winning a match. Between a loss (from three match points up vs Igor Andreev) in the Bucharest '05 semifinal and the first round of Houston '07, he had lost eleven straight matches. In the meantime he dropped from no. 42 to 759. One of those guys who certainly could have achieved more if their mentality had been much better. Hanescu had a negative record in all tighter situations, and it reflected in his numerous defeats when he squandered match points. Paradoxically, in 2009 he won two amazing Grand Slam matches; first at Australian Open when he overcame **Jan Hernych** 3-6, 3-6, 7-6, 7-6, 8-6 (the Czech was serving to win the match in 3rd and 5th set, wasting match points in sets 3 & 4 which makes it one of the rare cases in tennis history when a player won a match being close to lose all three sets he won)... then at Wimbledon, Hanescu eliminated **Ivan Navarro** 6-3, 6-7, 6-4, 6-7, 12-10 saving four match points in the decider!

Career record: 201–244 [229 events]
Career titles: 1
Highest ranking: No. 26 (July 2009)
Best GS result: Roland Garros (quarterfinal 2005)

Jarkko Nieminen (Finland)

Born: July 23, 1981 in Masku
Height: 1.85 m
Plays: Left-handed (two-handed backhand)

A representative player for the 00s. He was playing at a good level the entire decade being dangerous everywhere. Based on his game-style (very patient baseliner without powerful serve) it was reasonable to assume he would achieve the best results on clay, but he never advanced to the French Open quarterfinal playing at this stage in all other three majors. He had something I would call "Lapentti's factor"; I mean the ability to win tight matches much more often than losing them without the help of one single stroke which facilitates the job, also he possessed the ability to win matches from seemingly hopeless situations. He was an on-court thinker, being down he could change his tactics attacking more often to the net, especially at critical situations - facing a match point he used to apply serve-and-volley actually not doing that at all before in the match. Already in his second main-level event (Stockholm '01) he reached the final as a qualifier, but lost to Sjeng Schalken in five sets leading 3:0 on serve in the decider. Dealing with the finals it's something he could have been criticized for; just two titles out of 13 finals, and among those 11 failures he was a heavy under-dog just twice (Roger Federer). Generally he had no tools to threaten the best players in the world: 0-15 record vs Federer, 0-8 vs Rafael Nadal, 1-6 vs Novak Djokovic and 0-5 vs Andy Murray. Arguably the best Grand Slam win in Nieminen's career comes from the French Open '05 when he ousted on Centre Court Andre Agassi in five sets (three hours), but after the match Agassi revealed, he had sciatica, and the late-February '05 cortisone shot he took for the inflamed nerve in his back simply worn off. *"You know, it's bad. It's something that needs to be addressed because I can't be out there like that,"* said Agassi who was hardly moving in the last two sets of that match losing them '1-6, 0-6' *"I mean, I literally hurt."* **Emil Ruusuvuori** (b. 1999) follows Nieminen's footsteps. The young Finn recently makes his transition from Challengers to the ATP circuit. He has defeated i.a. Dominic Thiem & Gael Monfils, it gives the hope that he would be a regular ATP player this decade.

Career record: 408–348 [341 events]
Career titles: 2
Highest ranking: No. 13 (July 2006)
Best GS results: Australian Open (quarterfinal 2008)
Wimbledon (quarterfinal 2006)
US Open (quarterfinal 2005)

Roger Federer (Switzerland)

Born: August 8, 1981 in Basel
Height: 1.85 m
Plays: Right-handed

He will make his long-awaited return to tennis following double knee surgery in Doha next month. This year he will turn 40, I thought that his last year's semifinal defeat to Novak Djokovic at Australian Open would be his last official appearance. Federer left nothing in the tank after the opener which he lost leading 4:1* (40/0). He had defeated **John Millman** (b. 1989) and Tennys Sandgren in amazing five-setters, being on the verge of defeat. Federer made the hearts of his fans beating again, but players of this kind, he was usually defeating 3-0 at Slams. A few weeks after Djokovic's loss, Federer played (and won) an exhibition match against Rafael Nadal in Cape Town (Federer's mother comes from South Africa), then came the pandemic and Federer wouldn't play for six months even if he wanted. Couldn't be a fitting end of his stellar career to play the last two matches against his two arch rivals? I wonder what he can count on, does he believe he may bewitch at Wimbledon one more time? They both, Federer and Nadal have won 20 majors. I assume that keeping the tied-record would be a driving force of the comeback, but let's face the reality. Nadal is five years younger, Djokovic (18 major titles) six years younger - their styles of play have been always more demanding, but they also have been denying paradigms of tennis longevity. If Federer can realistically think about defeating them, he is theoretically able to do this only at Wimbledon, but he cannot face them earlier than in the quarterfinals (this year) while in the past few years, a bunch of young and hungry wolves stormed the tennis scene. From perspective of tennis fans, Federer's comeback is a blessing, I think that he's the most beloved tennis player ever, but he risks frequent defeats and dropping in the ranking, how long he can enjoy participating in ATP events when he'll be losing in second rounds to players he could have defeated "6-2 6-4" in his best years? In modern tennis, there

was only one guy who was able to be competitive in the 40th year of living - Jimmy Connors, it's tough to compare his times. On the one hand Federer has been one of the finest servers who touched the racquet, it allows to imagine him holding easily; on the other hand how he may react when will be forced to be involved in baseline rallies as a receiver against big hitters who know how to change the direction of the ball. I wish him all the best, but don't believe that he's going to win the biggest events again; a few years he proved me wrong though, it was the year 2017, the almost 36 year-old Federer came back from a knee injury after a six-month break, and won Australian Open! That year he also triumphed at Wimbledon, it was a year when Djokovic and Andy Murray (the best players of 2016) suffered injuries, and Federer, like many years in the past, was competing with Nadal in the race for the position of the best player of the season. Federer began to play with lower frequency, wisely choosing his events. Wimbledon '12 meant Federer's presumably last title - then remarkable achievement five years later, within five majors he collected another three titles. It's a great example that everything is possible, but the times were different; as I already mentioned, Federer hadn't such a strong opposition of players a dozen years younger like he will be facing this season. No matter what would happen this year, Federer has guaranteed a place in history as one of three greatest players, in the minds of many the greatest, the goat, and I understand it given his style of play and friendly personality... Looking back, it was tough to predict how tremendously Federer's career would develop. It was the year 1998 when Federer played his first ATP tournaments, the number three was special because he faced Andre Agassi in the first round of Basel. Federer was shown on Eurosport for the first time, and journalists had an opportunity to write about the teenager as one of the biggest prospects in tennis (he had won Wimbledon and Orange Bowl that year). The first full year on the tour (1999) wasn't easy though. Federer was interviewing flashes of brilliance with annoying nonchalance, in the mid-season he suffered an 8-match losing streak. Federer's peer Lleyton Hewitt drew more attention, in the years 2000-01 one year older Marat Safin and Juan C. Ferrero were ranked higher; in 2001 Federer had defeated at Wimbledon the 7-time Wimbledon Pete Sampras in a memorable five-setter, it seemed like a handing over the baton, but the following year, when Federer was perceived for the first time as a potential Grand Slam champion, he lost the first round at Wimbledon to three years younger Mario Ancic, in straight sets, in the first match of the Croat on a big arena fully packed! In 2001 Federer claimed his maiden title, in a main-level event no. 48; no other great champion waited so long to raise a trophy. The 20-year-old Federer was happy the burden dropped off his shoulders, but in his age Bjorn Borg was a triple Grand Slam champion, Ivan Lendl had 8 Grand Prix titles and led Czechoslovakia to Davis Cup triumph, while Sampras didn't need to worry about money anymore claiming a Grand Slam Cup title (received a check for 2 million dollars, having won his maiden Slam by the way). Saying that Federer would be for the 00s someone like Borg, Lendl and Sampras in the previous decades, didn't make sense, but time showed that he has overcome them all, significantly. Federer won his

first two really big titles at age of 22 (Wimbledon, Masters), but in my opinion, the key to astonishing achievements was his performance at Australian Open '04 when he advanced to no. 1 for the first time (and didn't lose this position for more than four years when Nadal overthrown him after an epic Wimbledon final... 237 consecutive weeks on the top - it's a record). The event in Melbourne '04 was so important because Federer showed his new face... The end of the 90s it was a time when serve-and-volley was still a dominant game-style, Federer grew up (just like me) admiring Boris Becker and Stefan Edberg, he stylized his tennis on these two great players, but he didn't possess Edberg's finesse and Becker's power, Federer's serve was very good, but not lethal like in Sampras' case. The young Federer reminded me the most of Tim Henman (one of Federer's toughest rivals in the first few years on the tour), the permanent aspirant to the Wimbledon title. Admittedly Federer had his first Wimbledon crown at the age of ~22 which placed him in an all-time hierarchy over Henman, but at the time I wasn't convinced that he would win many more, given that a talent of Andy Roddick exploded that year and Ferrero looked like a "king of clay" for the entire decade; finally Federer's acquaintance from the junior times, David Nalbandian was playing better and better, defeating Federer in their first five professional meetings! Returning to Federer's new face in Melbourne - he reinvented himself during the fortnight. From an offensive player, who was supposed to play serve-and-volley regularly on grass and indoors, and applying attacking game on hardcourts, Federer turned into a baseliner. He wasn't particularly interested in frequent attacks to the net, and the effect was thundering: Federer defeated in back-to-back matches in four-setters his toughest opponents of the young generation: Hewitt (H2H 2:7) and Nalbandian (H2H 1:5). Federer rewrote the script because he realized that men's tennis was transforming itself into a baseline game in which those who hit the ball very well off both sides will have more arguments to defeat players who rely more on serve and volley. The Australian Open '04 catapulted Federer to a new level, the trophy raised in Melbourne it was the Holy Grail - Federer became convinced that thinking about himself as another Edberg/Becker was like running into a brick wall. Nonetheless, being inspired by them was priceless, the new Federer simply found the great balance between his defensive and offensive attitude, he could modify his game depending on the situation, attacking the net freely without an obvious pattern. I remember his matches from the mid 00s when he was almost invincible, he could play a few games in a row not being interested to hit a single volley, and then, all of a sudden he could apply a few serve-and-volley actions behind the second serve or propose cheap-and-charge with his specific backhand slice dropping on the service box (a dropshot in its longer version). Federer's new face was brutal for two players in particular: Hewitt and Roddick. It was rather sad watching how these two young men were helpless facing Federer, especially that he was giving them a taste of their own medicine: against Hewitt, Federer could be glued to the baseline, exchanging shots of different spins, simply showing the Australian that his baseline game was more versatile, his footwork better, and it was enough - adding much better serve -

to defeat him fifteen times in a row (!) while against Roddick, Federer was serving better than against anyone else because of the specific rhythm of their matches - when your opponent holds easily, you have more energy to serve faster and that's what Federer was consistently implementing. He knew how to read Roddick serve, and the rock solid backhand block, allowed him to put the ball onto Roddick's side more often than other players could do; with this methodical approach Federer knew that he should break A-Rod at least once each set, if not - not a problem at all, one mini-break in the tie-break should be enough to take the set anyway... Federer defeated the American eleven times in a row (6-0 in tie-breaks in those matches). Federer created a huge gap between himself and all the most talented players born in the years 1980-82, only Marat Safin seemed to be a challenging opponent, but once he won his second major title (Australian Open '05; epic semifinal over Federer) he couldn't find the motivation anymore. Already when Federer had won five-six majors, people started to foresee twenty for him which finally came true, but it's scary to think how many biggest titles Federer could have collected if two arch-rivals hadn't stood in his way: Nadal & Djokovic. The Spaniard manifested his big hunger for glory in the first meeting against Federer. It happened at Key Biscayne '04. The Swiss opened the year with a 23-1 record, had won three titles and then, Nadal stunned him 6-3, 6-3... Federer hadn't lost a match of this type for 1.5 years when he had been defeated by other left-hander Franco Squillari 2-6, 3-6 in Sydney. The first few matches didn't indicate that Djokovic would be a serious threat for Federer's records. The Swiss won their first four matches, dropping two sets in the process but his victory wasn't threatened in any of those matches. Montreal '07 changed everything in their rivalry; it's not only that Djokovic defeated Federer in the final, he did it in dramatic circumstances, 7-6, 2-6, 7-6 (saving a triple set point on return at 5:6 in the opener). That match set a tone for the rest of their rivalry. The Serb got the edge in tighter moments, actually it's ridiculous how many times he defeated Federer when the things were balanced for them both at the end of their matches: Djokovic has won all their three matches when a deciding third set tie-break was required, and all their four five-setters (three of them when Federer was holding match points, twice on serve which is absolutely mindblowing).

Career record: 1242–271 [362 events]
Career titles: 103
Highest ranking: 1 (February 2004)
Best GS results:
Australian Open (champ 2003; 06-07, 10, 17-18; runner-up '09; semifinal 05, 08, 11-14, 20)
Roland Garros (champ 2009; runner-up 2006-08 & 11; semifinal 05 & 19; quarterfinal 01, 10, 13, 15)
Wimbledon
(champ 2003-07, 09, 12, 17; runner-up 08, 14-15 & 19; semifinal 16; quarterfinal 01, 10-11, 18)
US Open (champ 2004-08; runner-up 09, 15; semifinal 10-11, 14; quarterfinal 12, 17 & 19)

Masters champion 2003-04, 06-07, 10-11
Davis Cup champion 2014
Olympic gold medalist in doubles (2008), silver in singles (2012)

Year-end ranking 1998-20: 301-64-29-13-6-2-1-1-1-1-2-1-2-3-2-6-2-3-16-2-3-3-5

Filippo Volandri (Italy)

Born: September 5, 1981 in Livorno
Height: 1.83 m
Plays: Right-handed

The best Italian player between Andrea Gaudenzi (eight years older than Volandri) and Fabio Fognini (six years younger than Volandri). Volandri got the recognition in 2001 as he [141] defeated in miraculous style the Wimbledon champion Goran Ivanisevic in the Davis Cup 6-2, 7-6, 3-6, 0-6, 6-4 trailing 1:5 in 2nd and 1:4 in 5th set. He needed to wait another two years though, to shift from the Challenger circuit to the ATP tour. And he did it with two spectacular results - as a player outside the Top 100 he reached two Masters 1K quarterfinals (as qualifier in Monte Carlo, as 'wild card' in Rome). To the end of his career he remained a clay-court player. Very good forehand and backhand, but his serve was the biggest weakness, it was as slow as he was ~15 cm shorter. Anyway he had his moments of elevation: at Rome '07 (third round) in front of the home crowd he experienced the match of his life stunning Roger Federer 6-2, 6-4. The scoreline is shocking because Federer was losing very rarely in the years 2005-07, but when he lost matches he had his chances at least in one set; the loss to Volandri was Federer's only one in three years of his dominance when he had no chance. *"What I've done here will only sink in tomorrow. This is the best court in the world. The crowd were fabulous,"* Volandri said.A few months earlier in a Davis Cup rubber he was leading 6-3, 5:4* (30/0) against Rafael Nadal when the Spaniard was building his 81-match winning streak on clay. Volandri lost in four, but in those both matches he was able to outplay for 1.5 hour the best players of the decade. Trivia: the Italian lost two very similar matches to the French Open champions (on clay of course!); in the Umag '03 final he succumbed to Carlos Moya 4-6, 6-3, 5-7 trailing 0:4 in the decider to serve for the championship at 5:4... one year later in the Vina del Mar quarterfinal he lost 1-6, 6-2, 6-7 to Gustavo Kuerten - in that match Kuerten had been leading 5:0 (40/15) in the 3rd set, but later saved match point at 5:6!

Career record: 178–222 [218 events]
Career titles: 2
Highest ranking: No. 25 (July 2007)
Best GS result: Roland Garros (fourth round 2007)

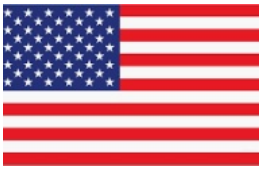
Feliciano López (Spain)

Born: September 20, 1981 in Toledo
Height: 1.88 m
Plays: Left-handed

Feliciano López Díaz-Guerra, one of the oldest, still active players... In the early 00s, checking all possible scorelines of the years 1998-99, I stumbled upon Lopez's loss to **Rodolphe Gilbert** 6-2, 6-7(10), 6-7(10) in Barcelona's qualifying event. The 18-year-old Lopez had played just one ATP event before; thanks to that scoreline I quickly recognized a potential in him to be involved in plenty of dramatic matches in the future. Without a big serve of one player involved at least, it's almost impossible to co-create a scoreline like this. I needed to wait 2-3 more years to follow Lopez's ATP scores that confirmed his lefty serve was a basic weapon. He made his breakthrough at the famous Wimbledon '02, advancing to the fourth round after two consecutive wins from match points down, and elimination of Rainer Schuettler, who was still considered as a top player at the time. Since that event, Lopez has become a regular ATP player for a very long time. The most important thing about him - the best server in the history of Spanish tennis and the only one among those respectable guys from the Iberian Peninsula, who couldn't hurt you with his backhand. Actually I'd call him "arrhythmic player", maybe not as arrhythmic like his peer Taylor Dent, nevertheless you never knew what to expect from Lopez. He could play one game on serve constantly approaching the net, then he could stay back, he could play with you from the baseline just using a backhand slice to suddenly run around to dictate the pace with heavy-topspin forehands. These untypical tactics in the 21st century, made him a dangerous floater everywhere. He was even more dangerous in his 30s, thanks to great physical preparation and experience which he gathered in those countless dramatic matches. An example: fourth round at Wimbledon '08, 4:5 (0/40) vs Marcos Baghdatis in the 5th set, Lopez saves the first two match points with service winners, misses his first serve on the third match point, Baghdatis moves a little bit more forward - Lopez delivers a 2nd serve bomb - an ace, and wins the match 8-6 in the decider. The Spaniard holds some records: most consecutive major appearances (75) and the most main-level losses (457).

Career record: 494-457 [453 events - record]
Career titles: 7
Highest ranking: No. 12 (March 2015)
Best GS results: Wimbledon (quarterfinal 2005, 08 & 11)
US Open (quarterfinal 2015)
Davis Cup champion 2008 (singles) 09 & 11 (doubles)

Mardy Fish (USA)



Born: December 9, 1981 in Edina
Height: 1.88 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

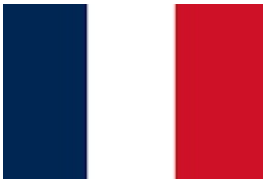
Third best player of a generation of Americans who began their professional careers at the time when Andre Agassi & Pete Sampras were finishing theirs. No doubt that Andy Roddick was a leader, behind him James Blake & Fish, both enjoyed very similar careers. Fish played five big finals, Blake three; Fish played three major quarterfinals, Blake the same. In the hierarchy of American tennis, I place Blake a bit higher though, because he made a big impact on the Davis Cup title for the US team in 2007. Besides, Blake won a few titles more, and 65 more matches, yet percentage-wise they share the same 58% win/loss record. During their years on the tour, the toughest task in terms of potential opponents, it was defeating Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal. Both Americans have quite similar H2H records against the legends of the game: Fish 1-8 vs Federer & Nadal, Blake 3-4 vs Nadal & 1-10 vs Federer.... Fish, similarly to his peer Federer, showed inclination to serve-and-volley tactics in his first years on the tour. It was a time of a transition to more defensive attitude, and over the years Fish's game became more based on groundstrokes which couldn't work very well in his case since his forehand was very inconsistent, especially under pressure (Blake had the same problem with his other wing). Early on, Fish was a serve-and-volleyer with a huge first serve, a worse version of Sampras, one of the best serves in the mid 00s. Enough said, when he reached the Cincinnati final (lost it having a match point) in 2003, numerous very good players weren't able to break him, with Roddick included in the final. Between the Cincy first round, and the second round of the US Open '03, Fish held 92 straight times! The year 2004 was the most important from a patriotic point of view. Fish reached the final of the Olympics in Athens, and he was a favorite to get the gold medal, a few weeks later he helped the USA in advancing to the Davis Cup final, winning a crucial rubber against Max Mirnyi. Fish lost his status as an elite player in 2005 as a consequence of left wrist injury (two surgeries). Even though it was the left wrist, so not responsible for serving & forehand, it made things complicated because of his stronger backhand side. Fish emerged after two bad years (2005-06) as a more complex player. He was using serve-and-volley only as an element of surprise, his

serve was more variable, but still it was a big weapon, for example in Lyon '07 he fired 43 aces in three sets against Oliver Rochus. The years 2010-11 were the best in Fish's career. Approaching 30, he lost 13 kilograms! He did it thanks to a new diet (rejected: cheese, sugar, pizza, cheeseburgers and French fries) and harder work on the physical preparation. *"A lot of it is maturity and getting older,"* he said. *"You know, sort of getting married and realizing you're not out there for yourself anymore. You can be pretty selfish as tennis players, being an individual sport."* In 2011 he finally became a Top 10 player, something that seemed like his destination already in 2003. Before he played 'Masters' in London, his decline began - with a semifinal in Tokyo he lost to Nadal. Since that tournament, he couldn't win two consecutive matches in nine tournaments in a row. In 2012 he was sidelined for part of the season with health issues and actually the US Open '12 meant his last good event (reached the fourth round and withdrew from a match vs Federer), which had occurred three years before he officially finished his career - it took place in the same venue (after participating in a few events of 2013, in 2014 he didn't play at all - anxiety disorder was the cause he skipped many tournaments; in June that year he had a cardiac catheter ablation operation to correct misfiring electric pulses in his heart).

Career record:	301–218 [216 events]
Career titles:	6
Highest ranking:	No. 7 (August 2011)
Best GS results:	Australian Open (quarterfinalist 2007) Wimbledon (quarterfinalist 2011) US Open (quarterfinalist 2008)

Silver medalist of the Olympics '04; Davis Cup runner-up the same year

Julien Benneteau (France)



Born: December 20, 1981 in Bourg en Bresse
Height: 1.85 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

An infamous leader in a category of players who lost the most finals, without winning a title. Benneteau as many as ten times (within six years) left the court as a runner-up. Bad luck? Growing pressure with following failures? It's difficult to explain why a player of his calibre, someone who was able to defeat Roger Federer (twice!), Novak Djokovic & Rafael Nadal (when they were teenagers), never won an ATP title, because all his final opponents were beatable. I cannot say that he was a heavy underdog even facing Juan Martin del Potro (Benneteau's final no. 8, in Rotterdam '13) because it was their first meeting and the Frenchman had played a terrific match two days before against Federer. Benneteau was close to win a title on his third attempt (Kitzbuhel '09) when he led with a set and a break against Guillermo Garcia-Lopez and actually should have won his pre-ultimate attempt. He had a match point in the 2nd set against very little experienced Joao Sousa (Kuala Lumpur '13), attacked the net and was passed. Benneteau reached his lone major quarterfinal in quite lucky circumstances (Roland Garros 2006) - his fourth round opponent, who had never played in the second week of a Slam - Alberto Martin - retired already in the opener. Benneteau reached Masters 1K semifinals twice (Cincinnati '14; faced a match point in the first round against an obscure Slovenian player - **Blaz Rola** and Paris '17 when ranked no. 83 defeated four much higher ranked opponents). It was a dreamlike scenario in Paris, because in the semifinal he was supposed to face Jack Sock (had defeated him in their only previous meeting), the same with a hypothetical final opponent - Filip Krajinovic (Benneteau outplayed him three years before). If Benneteau had won the event, he would have made an amazing story of a guy who suffered ten ATP titles, only to win a much bigger title at the time when no-one believed in him anymore. It didn't happen, Sock won 7-5, 6-2; in the following year the 37-year-old Frenchman made something like a farewell tour, being mainly focused on majors, and in each of them he won at least one match (in Australia even two, upsetting David Goffin in the 2nd round). Benneteau finished his career as a Top 60 player. He was more successful in doubles, won twelvewtitles including French Open '14 (partnering **Edouard Roger-Vasselin**, the son of **Christoph**, French Open '83 semifinalist).

Career record:	273–297 [292 events]	**Career titles:**	0
Highest ranking:	No. 25 (November 2014)		
Best GS result:	Roland Garros (quarterfinalist 2006)		

David Nalbandian (Argentina)

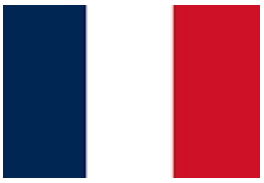
Born: January 1, 1982 in Unquillo
Height: 1.79 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

I don't think about him "the best/most successful player of the Open Era without a major title", but it's legitimate to call him that way comparing players born in the 80s. Distinctive & bold competitor anyway - no doubt about it. He could afford himself to play on every surface on his own terms. It's a domain of exceptionally gifted players, who possess all shots in their repertoires - he was one of them. Obviously he will be remembered as someone with terrific two-handed backhand, but I'd like to pay close attention to his one-handed skills; usually "double-handed guys" don't play sliced backhands and volleys with Nalbandian's finesse. I wish he won Davis Cup once, I think he deserved it leading the team to the 2006, 2008 & 2011 finals, defeating very good players in those finals (especially the 2008 final was very unfortunate for the Argentinians). On the other hand he was the only guy beside Alex Corretja & Nikolay Davydenko to win 'Masters' not having a major title under his belt - I consider his triumph in Shanghai as some kind of miracle in regard to the progress of that final and the man he had beaten there... I remember at the end of 2003, I expected he would be the best player of the 00s. Then came a quarterfinal meeting against Roger Federer at the Australian Open '04 - the Swiss won in four sets improving their H2H to 2:5 (eventually 11-8). You never know what would have happened if something in the past had been slightly changed. My casual thought is that it was the key match to the careers of both players... Three times in his career he had moments of tremendous glory. For the first time at Wimbledon '02 when as unseeded player he advanced to the final with actually non-existent experience on grass; then in Shanghai '05 when he triumphed in the year-end championships defeating Federer, who was on a 35-match winning streak and on the verge of magnificent comeback to notch his 36th match won in a row; for the third time in 2007 when in Autumn he claimed the two biggest indoor events of the regular season (Madrid & Paris), defeating in both events Federer & Rafael Nadal as well as many a young Novak Djokovic (Spain).

Career record: 383–192 [193 events]
Career titles: 11
Highest ranking: No. 3 (March 2006)
Best GS results: Australian Open (semifinalist 2006; quarterfinalist 2003-05)
Roland Garros (semifinalist 2004 & 2006)
Wimbledon (runner-up 2002); US Open (semifinal 2003; quarterfinal 2005)

Masters champion 2005

Paul-Henri Mathieu (France)



Born: January 12, 1982 in Strasbourg
Height: 1.85 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

Mathieu is an example of a player whose one match hypothetically destroyed career already at its beginning. It was a decisive fifth rubber of the Davis Cup '02 final, the French captain Guy Forget appointed Mathieu to play singles because he finished the regular season with indoor back-to-back titles (Moscow, Lyon). The Davis Cup final was also held indoors, but on clay. Mathieu that year led 2-0 in sets against Andre Agassi in the fourth round of Roland Garros so there was no basis to suppose he wouldn't be successful on clay in the future. For the first two hours it looked like a match of his life; Mathieu easily won the first two sets against his peer Mikahil Youzhny, he was two points away from a 4-set victory, but eventually lost it 6-3, 6-2, 3-6, 5-7, 4-6. That defeat caused mental breakdown. Mathieu needed a few months to recover, until July '03 he had an abysmal 3-12 record. Once he regained his confidence - another blow, an event in Palermo '03. The Frenchman was dealing very well with tight situations in all his matches, until he led *6:5 (40/0) in the 3rd set of the final against Nicolas Massu when lost twelve straight points. A perfect event from a mental point of view (Mathieu had won five tie-breaks and if he had converted one of those three match points against Massu, he could have won three matches being within a few points from defeat) ultimately turned into a disaster. Inability to clinch the matches remained with Mathieu to the end of his career, he finished it with negative ratio of all tighter stats (five-setters, deciding tie-breaks, MP-matches), but had his moment of mental glory on Court Philippe Chatrier at Roland Garros when he survived one of the longest fifth sets in the history eliminating John Isner 6-7, 6-4, 6-4, 3-6, 18-16.

Career record: 276-306 [302 events]
Career titles: 4
Highest ranking: No. 12 (April 2008)
Best GS result: fourth round (three different venues)

Guillermo Coria (Argentina)

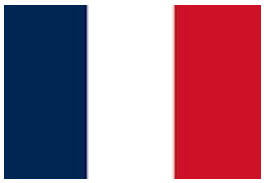
Born: January 13, 1982 in Rufino
Height: 1.75 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

As a junior, Coria reached No. 2 in singles (lost Orange Bowl '98 final when he was 16) and No. 5 in doubles, Andre Agassi and Marcelo Rios belonged to his idols at the time (he had opportunity to play against them both). Therefore when he appeared on the pro level, good things were expected from him. He was nicknamed "mini Moya" due to alleged facial similarity to Carlos Moya, and assumptions he'd be a Roland Garros champion too. Already in his first ATP event (Mallorca '00), Coria had an opportunity to play against Moya, the Mallorcan native. The Argentine finished that season with four consecutive titles at the Challenger level in South America, and the nickname was changed to "El Mago". Everyone realised that the boy was a special talent, his quickness and touch were magnificent. The initial career was fast and he created the media attention because of different issues: sixth ATP event and the first title, second Masters 1000 (Monte Carlo) and the semifinal lost to the best player in the world (Gustavo Kuerten), third Grand Slam event and an opportunity to face the best player in the world again (Kuerten wins easily again) on the Philippe Chatrier court; in the meantime Coria tested positive for nandrolone in April 2001 after a dramatic loss in Barcelona to **Michel Kratochvil** (b. 1979). Coria was initially banned from tennis for two years, starting in August 2001, and was fined $98,565. He claimed that the only supplement that he was taking was a multivitamin made by a New Jersey supplements company. In December 2001, the ATP refused to acquit Coria, but reduced his ban from two years to seven months, which meant that he would be free to continue with his tennis career in March 2002. As a result of the seven months during which Coria was banned from playing tennis, his world ranking dropped from No. 32 to No. 97. 2002 was a rebuilding year for Coria, and he finished ranked No. 45 mixing ATP events with Challengers. The years 2003-05 defined him as a new "king of clay", actually "prince" because he didn't confirm his clay-court supremacy in Paris. Following an unexpected defeat in the Roland Garros semifinal to Martin Verkerk (Coria was almost defaulted after the first set for throwing his racquet towards a ball kid), the young Argentine played like a possessed man in Summer '03 - he won three clay-court events (Stuttgart, Kitzbuhel, Sopot), not playing even a tie-break. It built his self-confidence which was soon

transferred to other surfaces: Coria reached the quarterfinal of the US Open and won a title on carpet (!) in quite lucky circumstances - barely defeated Michael Llodra in the second round, then his friend David Nalbandian withdrew from the final. Admittedly in Hamburg '04 Coria was finally beaten on clay, by Roger Federer, which ended his 31-match winning streak on this surface, but during the match he suffered a big blister on his right hand which could partially explain why he lost his invincibility. He was a heavy favorite to win the French Open, but lost the final to fellow Argentine, Gaston Gaudio after one of the most surreal Grand Slam finals in history. The defeat in such an important final despite an overwhelming 6-0, 6-1, 4:3 advantage, devastated him mentally, he was rarely playing to the end of the season, but somehow regrouped to be fresh in 2005 again. After relatively poor first months of the new season, he regained his vigor during the clay-court swing, but lost his status of the best guy on this surface, losing two finals (Monte Carlo & Rome) to phenomenal Mallorcan kid - Rafael Nadal. It was Nadal, not Coria, the main favourite to raise the Parisian trophy, anyway Coria was expected as the only guy who could (partially with Roger Federer in the mix) thwart Nadal's plans. He was sensationally defeated by Nikolay Davydenko already in the fourth round, and actually never recovered from that defeat. He played some good events that year leading to his third consecutive participation in the season-ending event, but on clay he was never the same. The year 2006 brought an amazing twist in his career, from a clay-court goat, within a year the 24-year-old Coria turned to a clay-court mediocre - an unimaginable slump was initiated with a 2-6, 4-6 Acapulco loss to **Alessio di Mauro** (b. 1979), a typical Challenger guy. Coria showed himself as a specialist of committing an enormous number of double faults (16 in that defeat, but already a few weeks before he'd committed 23 during a four-set defeat to Sebastien Grosjean in a four-setter in Melbourne). Risking the second serve on hardcourt against such a good player like Grosjean could be understood, but there was no explanation of what happened against Di Mauro. Really bizarre things must have been going through Coria's mind, mysterious to some degree. In Sopot for instance, a place where he celebrated his best tennis three years earlier, he suddenly retired against a local player **Michal Przysiezny** (b. 1984) leading 6:5 in the opening set (by the way, it is the only case when I saw a player celebrating a victory after opponent's retirement). Basically it was the end of Coria's career. Afterwards he was rarely playing, losing usually the opening rounds. After a Challenger defeat in 2009 (Bangkok), he never appeared again, it was his only tournament that year, following just two in 2007 and eleven in 2008. **Federico**, Guillermo's ten years younger brother, lately tries hard to make a Challenger-ATP transition. Last year's French Open third round will be tough to replicate.

Career record:	218–114 [117 events]
Career titles:	9
Highest ranking:	No. 3 (May 2004)
Best GS results:	Roland Garros (runner-up 04; semifinal 2003) US Open (quarterfinal 2003, 05)

Nicolas Mahut (France)



Born: January 21, 1982 in Angers
Height: 1.91 m
Plays: Right-handed

The 21st Century brought an end of specialization on particular surfaces, but Mahut somehow broke the code and I'd label him as a grass-court specialist. His serve-and-volley style helped him to get the most valuable/interesting results on the green surface: wins over Rafael Nadal and Andy Murray at Queens Club (the years 2007 and 2012 respectively), involvement in the longest match in history which he lost 68-70 in the 5th set to John Isner at Wimbledon '10, finally participation in all his six ATP finals. When it seemed that the 31-year-old Mahut would become another good player with plenty of matches, who never won an ATP tournament, very unexpectedly as a player ranked No. 240 coming back from a left knee injury, he claimed his first title on his beloved surface in Hertogenbosch taking part in his 136th main-level event. Possibly his positive H2H vs Stan Wawrinka, helped him – they had faced each other twice many years before (Futures & Challenger) and the Frenchman won those matches easily against the teenage man from Switzerland. Other intriguing Mahut's H2H comes from a rivalry against the fellow Frenchman - Arnaud Clement. 9-1 for Mahut (5-0 at the main-level) despite Clement being a better player overall, higher ranked every time when they were facing each other... An excellent doubles player, until he turned 30 he hadn't played a major final (the first one he played and lost - French Open '13, p/Michael Llodra). Afterwards he was able to win all Slams (once each) within a few seasons (all titles with **Pierre-Hugues Herbert**, b. 1991). *"I am speechless now,"* Mahut said during the on-court ceremony after his first major title (US Open '15), *"We worked so hard for so long to win this type of tournament. Before the match, I said let's go for it."*

Career record: 180–225 [227 events]
Career titles: 4
Highest ranking: No. 37 (May 2014)
Best GS result: Wimbledon (fourth round 2016)

David Ferrer (Spain)

Born: April 2, 1982 in Xabia
Height: 1.75 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

Full name David Ferrer Ern... He was a Michael Chang of the generation players born in the 80s given his height, sturdy legs and tremendous will to fight. Ferrer once said *"I'm the weakest player in Top 100"*, and he said it (if I remember correctly) already being a Top 30 player, so it was an exaggeration, but maybe I know what he meant. Namely: he thought that he didn't have even one solid weapon. I couldn't agree with that, since I remember, he was always incredibly fast and persistent, that type of guy you have to be focused event when you lead 6-2, 5:0 (it happened to a young Andy Murray, but he saved a set point to win 6-2, 7-6 avoiding a disaster) because a short moment of hesitation may cost you a bitter defeat. Tennis is not about how fast you serve, and how enormous top-spin you can generate; it's also how you can deal with different adverse circumstances combined together (weather, scoreline in progress, the style of your opponent), and Ferrer knew that he needed to work a lot being resistant to all mentioned. His technical limitation mainly contributed to the fact that against a genius like Roger Federer, he couldn't do too much. 17-0 in their rivalry, and the Spaniard was never really close to get at least one victory. But against other three best players of his times, he enjoyed balanced matches being involved in very long rallies against them; his dedication & his fighting spirit were honoured by the fans. Ferrer not only defeated Rafael Nadal, Novak Djokovic & Andy Murray, each of them a few times, he also did it in the 'best of five' format. Nadal experienced it in very bad timing, because he was on the way to win his fourth straight major when Ferrer crushed him 6-4, 6-2, 6-3 in the Aussie Open quarterfinal '11. Someone could say "Nadal lost because was not 100% fit". Ok, but not once, not twice he won matches not being fully fit, so credit to Ferrer for his arguably biggest victory on that day. Actually defeating Nadal in a major match (US Open '07) opened a new chapter in the career of the man from Xabia (coastal town in the province of Alicante). Following that victory, he switched from Top 20 to Top 10, and stayed there almost permanently until 2015 which is incredible considering his modest height. It seemed that a player of his height couldn't be a top player in the 00s - he was at the top even in the 10s forming a solid second "big 4" along with Jo-Wilfried Tsonga (3-1), Juan Martin del Potro (6-7) and Tomas Berdych (8-8), at the

turn of the decades - their H2Hs in the parentheses. Was Ferrer the fifth best player of his times? It's a matter of discussion, I'd argue that by his technical potential certainly not, but similarly to these three much taller guys, he won at least one big title, and contributed more than any one of them to the Davis Cup triumph (thrice). Clay was Ferrer's best surface, no question about that, but the biggest wins in his career, two in the Davis Cup finals (both after dramatic five-setters) and in the 'Masters 1K' final, they all came indoors! *"It was a dream for me to win here in Paris-Bercy,"* said Ferrer after defeating a sensational runner-up Jerzy Janowicz. *"I had never won a Masters 1000 [title], and I took my chance, because it was not Murray, Nadal, Federer or Djokovic. I played very good these [past] two weeks. It is very important because it was the best season of my career, and I will try to improve my game."* Ferrer's big crisis came when he was thirty-six. In 2018 he had a poor 9-18 record on the tour, that year he was involved in his two tighest five-setters; first he won it over Philipp Kohlschreiber 7-6, 3-6, 7-6, 4-6, 7-5 in Davis Cup, then a few weeks later lost to **Jaume Munar** 6-3, 6-3, 6-7, 6-7, 5-7 at Roland Garros. Munar (b. 1997) seemed like a player who would replace Ferrer, to some degree, as a Spanish grinder; he was in the mix of NextGen players, but the previous two seasons haven't confirmed his aspirations. He'll rather sink in mediocrity. Perhaps a better future lies ahead of **Pedro Martinez**, who is just ten days older than Munar. Martinez has defeated Munar in two of their three matches at lower levels. Munar has won more main-level matches to this date, but currently Martinez plays better (third round at French Open '20 & Australian Open '21) and doesn't need to worry to enter main draws of ATP events this year. They both play similarly to Ferrer, have similar body building but they are significantly taller.

Career record: 727–372 [391 events]
Career titles: 27
Highest ranking: No. 3 (July 2013)
Best GS results:
Australian Open (semifinal 2011 & 13; quarterfinal 2008, 12, 14 & 16)
Roland Garros (runner-up 2013; semifinal 2012; quarterfinal 2005, 2008, 2014-15)
Wimbledon (quarterfinal 2012-13)
US Open (semifinal 2007 & 12; quarterfinal 2013)

Davis Cup champion three times (2008-09, 2011), Masters runner-up 2007

Tommy Robredo (Spain)

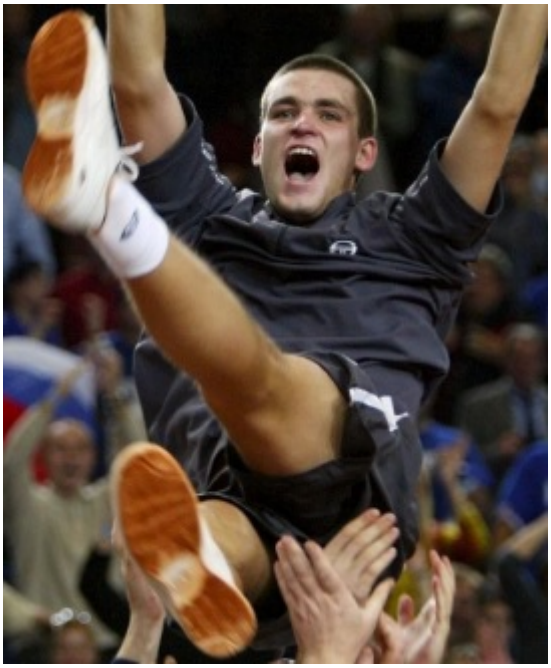
Born: May 1, 1982 in Hostalric
Height: 1.82 m
Plays: Right-handed

Full name: Tommy Robredo Garcés... All Spanish players included in this e-book have one thing in common - good mentality. I cannot indicate anyone with much more dramatic defeats than wins, even Fernando Verdasco, who was questioned so many times, has won five-setters against 5-set specialists (Djokovic, Ferrer, Nadal, Murray). Robredo was distinctive in terms of mentality, I'd say that he did maximize his potential thanks to dealing well with difficult situations. Not a fan-favorite, he was often called "Boredo" due to his style. Indeed, he didn't possess any big weapon, but also no weaknesses in his arsenal; apart from good physical preparation, the second important aspect of his tennis which helped him to survive many tight matches, it was his ability to play more aggressively when it mattered the most. One Masters 1K title & Top 10 player in 2007, a member of the Spanish team which triumphed in Davis Cup (2004) and multiple major quarterfinalist. Could he ask for more? Yes - one Grand Slam semifinal was definitely within his grasp; the problem was that almost always in his seven quarterfinal defeats (the most at this stage in the Open Era without advancing to the semifinal) he was a heavy underdog. The lack of one leading shot caused his big problems against the best players born in the 80s, especially against Roger Federer (1-11 H2H) and Andy Roddick (0-11 H2H, lost twice even on clay). Even though Robredo was a pretty equal player off both wings, the only weakness was more connected to his position on the court than to his technique - id est, he needed to stay far behind the baseline as a receiver, it caused him plenty of problems against big servers. He simply couldn't find his normal rhythm in return games facing big servers, this way I explain his very poor records against Federer (really big server at times) & Roddick. I think it's not accidental that Robredo had bad records against one-dimensional guys like: Ivo Karlovic (0-4), John Isner (1-3) & Wayne Arthurs (0-3). Trivia: Robredo has the second longest streak of tie-breaks won (17 in a row in the years 2008-09), he also has one of the best five-set records of the Open Era (17-5). He's still active, not sure why, since 2016 he's been marginalized.

Career record: 533-357 [363 events]
Career titles: 12
Highest ranking: No. 5 (August 2006)
Best GS results: Australian Open - quarterfinalist (2007) US Open - quarterfinalist (2013)
Roland Garros - quarterfinalist (2003, 2005, 2007, 2009, 2013)

Mikhail Youzhny (Russia)

Born: June 25, 1982 in Moscow (Soviet Union)
Height: 1.83 m
Plays: Right-handed



Михаил Южный ...a son of Mikhail, who served as a Soviet army colonel. Military tradition stayed with him for the entire career, after winning matches he was saluting, covering his head with the "Head" racquet. Like a soldier, he had always short hair, but his style evolved over the years. In the first few years of the professional career he was playing backhand in very similar style to Bjorn Borg & Andrea Gaudenzi, so his swing was two-handed, yet in the last moment before hitting the ball, he was realising the left hand, and it was a difference comparing to the mentioned players who were realising the left hand in the moment of hitting the ball, so they have to be considered as two-handed players. Youzhny was using BH-slice on a regular basis, so it helped him to develop a more natural one-handed backhand. He achieved the best result of his career already as a young player. It was the Davis Cup '02 final against France, in Paris when Youzhny replaced Yevgeny Kafelnikov in the deciding rubber. The Russian lost the first two sets, but won another three, becoming the first man in the Davis Cup history to achieve such a feat in the deciding fifth rubber of a final. The Russian Davis Cup team had been close to him already in the 90s, because in the Davis Cup '95 final he was working as a ball boy. The entire career, Youzhny cooperated with a Russian unemotional coach, Boris Sobkin, who said about his beginnings with Youzhny and his two years older brother Andrei (never played an ATP match) - *"Mischa was all the time breaking racquets and crying. Not so many coaches want to work with a boy with strong character like his. So, they could practise on one court for 15 minutes and then came a member so they must have left court immediately moving to another court. Ten minutes maybe 20 minutes later came another member and like this all day. There was something in Mischa's eyes, a sparkle, maybe, I don't know. Sometimes the eyes tell more than parents. Of course, I did not see Mischa a Top 10 player then. But I could see he had something special."* In 2002, the 20-year-old Youzhny won a big clay-court in Stuttgart, defeating Guillermo Canas in a five-set final trailing *1:4 in the final set. Certainly that triumph made an impact on Samil Tarpischev to give Youzhny a chance in a match that decided about the Davis Cup '02. Nick Bollettieri was praising Youzhny a lot, saying that a bright future would be

ahead of him. Youzhny was a complete player, of course he enjoyed a great career, advanced to the major semifinals twice, but as someone who already as a 20-year-old player had won two dramatic five-setters in important finals, he could have achieved more, it seems. My thoughts go in two directions: the first, purely technical - Youzhny didn't possess a big serve, with his height he should have obtained more points directly behind the serve. I'm quite sceptical about the statistical category of aces, but the fact that he never served at least twenty aces being involved in 39 five-setters is quite telling; another important thing it's his abysmal record against Roger Federer - they faced each other 17 times, and just once (Halle '03 - their fourth meeting) Youzhny was relatively close to win - three points away. There were only two finals between them (Dubai '07 & Halle '13), but you never know how successful Youzhny could have been in tournaments he lost to Federer at earlier stages, and how those potential victories over the Swiss could increase his self-esteem. Only one win separated Youzhny from a nice number of 500 main-level wins. Actually he was quite close to achieving that feat, he wanted to play his last tournament in Russia, and in St. Petersburg he lost a balanced three-set second round match to Roberto Bautista. Youzhny was 36-year-old then, lost a status of a Top 100 player after 17 years, with his style demanding to work a lot, I think it was a good decision to leave the chase for the win no. 500. Trivia: Youzhny defeated in two dramatic matches Novak Djokovic in two consecutive events; it happened in 2007, just before Djokovic turned from a gifted youngest to serious threat for Federer & Rafael Nadal. First in Marseille, Youzhny won 6-4, 4-6, 7-6 trailing *1:4 & 4:5 (0/30); then in Rotterdam, the Russian prevailed 3-6, 7-6, 7-5 saving match points in both sets (!), first in the tie-break, then at *4:5 (15/40) in the deciding set.

Career record:	499–416 [418 events]
Career titles:	10
Highest ranking:	No. 8 (28 January 2008)
Best GS results:	Australian Open (quarterfinalist 2008) Roland Garros (quarterfinalist 2010) Wimbledon (quarterfinalist 2012) US Open (semifinalist 2006 & 2010)

Davis Cup champion 2002 (won clincher) and 2006 (didn't play in the final)

Joachim Johansson (Sweden)

Born: July 1, 1982 in Lund
Height: 1.98 m
Plays: Right-handed

It's a pity Johansson retired prematurely, I really wished he had played much longer. Actually his "normal career" was finished at the age of just 23, it happened after he lost a three-setter to **Jiri Vanek** in Bastad '05. It was just two weeks after he'd played a thrilling four-setter on Wimbledon's Centre Court (the second round) against Greg Rusedski in a gathering gloom. If the Swede had lost the 4th set tie-break, the match would have continued the following day. It seemed that Johansson would play plenty of matches like that one, but another of this calibre and tension didn't occur. After the loss to Vanek, he underwent shoulder surgery, two years later another shoulder surgery. Between Bastad '05 and Stockholm '13, "Pim-Pim" played ten main-level events, so within eight years the amount of that what a regular ATP player has notched by the mid-season. During those frustrating years, he enjoyed one memorable tournament - Stockholm '06. With ranking no. 690, and two Swedish Futures under his belt as a preparation, Pim-Pim received 'wild card', and stunned Rafael Nadal in the second round, calling it "greatest win ever". In the quarterfinal he survived an all tie-break battle against Kristof Vliegen, serving a second serve ace 214 kph at 5:6 (0/40) in the decider! Despite that miracle win and big support of the local crowd, Johansson failed to beat Jarkko Nieminen in the semifinal (led 6:1 in the opening tie-break), and in the consequence he didn't become the lowest ranked ATP titleist. Johansson's inclination to fully risk his second serve, it was his trademark. During Australian Open '05 he faced Andre Agassi on Centre Court following a hard-fought five set win over Feliciano Lopez. Johansson realised that his only chance against the multiple Grand Slam champion would be risking not only second serves, but also his groundstrokes. Johansson fired 51 aces in four sets; at the time non-one knew John Isner while Ivo Karlovic was trying to become a regular ATP player, thus Johansson's number was astonishing. With this attitude, on faster surfaces he could have been involved in fascinating matches against the Big 4 guys. Very telling is Johansson's quarterfinal at the US Open '04. He didn't hit a backhand winner in five sets, won 24 fewer points than the loser (Andy Roddick), yet somehow managed to break the American three times, actually having nothing to say in all other service games of the defending champion. That skirmish, and earlier mentioned match against Lopez, are Johansson's only five-setters he was

involved in. With a full ten year-old career, it's easy to imagine he could have played a dozen five-setters, finished with deciders between 8-6 and 21-19 (the record during his times). He was a prototype of the young Isner - very tall guy (albeit 10 cm shorter) with only two good strokes: serve and forehand, but on a given day, those two strokes were allowing him to hold in very long streaks.

Career record:	70–56 [56 events]
Career titles:	3
Highest ranking:	No. 9 (February 2005)
Best GS result:	US Open (semifinal 2004)

Andy Roddick (USA)

Born: August 30, 1982 in Omaha, Nebraska
Height: 1.88 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

He was the next big thing in the American tennis after the decline of "golden generation" born in the early 70s. His emergence onto the tennis scene was thundering, as soon as he appeared in the ATP ranking (2000) he was the strongest player at the American challenger circuit; just twelve months since he had obtained his first ATP points, he managed to beat two former Nos. 1 in back-to-back matches (Marcelo Rios, Pete Sampras) in straight sets! Unquestionably the new star was born. Of course, as the most promising player of the United States, he benefited from being an American in climbing onto the tennis ladder, receiving 'wild cards' in numerous prominent events, but he took advantage of it emphatically. His energy

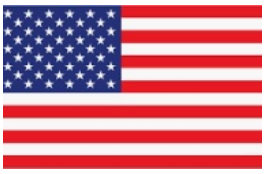
was admirable, actually he had based his game just on two strokes: serve and forehand, but those strokes were working so magnificently that he didn't need to seek other solutions to collect consecutive wins wherever he flew. One-dimensional players tend to find themselves in tight situations more often than others, it was Roddick's case too, but no problem for him, his self-confidence was so huge that every time he was close to lose his serve at crucial stages of sets or matches, he was able to hit an ace, a service winner or a serve good enough to finish a rally immediately with a powerful forehand. He progressed rapidly, needing only 58 ATP tournaments to have won titles on every surface. His physical preparation was awesome, it manifested most profoundly during the American summer swing in 2003, as he was guided by Brad Gilbert (his coach 2003-04): won Indianapolis, afterwards Canadian Open and Cincinnati within two weeks... no-one repeated it until Rafael Nadal in 2013, and what's praiseworthy, A-Rod won those 'Masters' tournaments when six wins were required on both cases, not five as it's currently been in case of the highest seeded players, which makes that effort one of the most impressive tennis achievements in the 21st Century. The elevated Roddick was a main favorite to claim US Open '03 and he didn't disappoint the USTA and local fans, albeit his route to the title was extremely tough given the quality of opponents (excluding his third round scuffle). Roddick became the best player in the world soon afterwards in

the consequence of a phenomenal hard-court summer (won 27 out of 28 matches in seven weeks!). The sky was the limit… At the time it seemed impossible to suppose that US Open '03 would be his first/last major title. In my opinion a key to Roddick's later regressing is connected to the Masters 2003 semifinal (Houston) – Roddick was fresh and sharp, but Roger Federer cut him to ribbons on Roddick's favorite American hardcourt in front of the Texanian supporters. The following years confirmed it wasn't an accident, the Swiss simply figured out a medicine for Roddick's impetus, overwhelming him with his own best weapon: Roddick's serve, so effective on a regular basis, yet not a threat for Federer at all; in turn Roddick had a bitter pill to swallow – Federer used to serve against him better than against anyone else. Well, who lives by the sword, dies by the sword... It's really tough to calculate how many important titles Roddick would have won if Federer hadn't found an anesthetic, anyway he lost to the Swiss four major finals, two Masters Series finals, and a few other semi- or quarterfinals in prestigious tournaments, which established the most lopsided 'Head to Head' between players who reached No. 1 in the world. During those quite painful years, Roddick became a more complex player though, he developed a variety in his serve, improved volley skills, adapted a stable backhand slice – everything in vain – no matter whether he had a mentor in his box (Jimmy Connors 2006-08) or a great tactician (Larry Stefanki 2008-12) the final outcome of confrontations against Federer was the same; even when he was optically better "tennis Gods" were against him (Wimbledon 2009). Roddick in his late 20s, turned from an energetic beast, interacting positively with the crowd, into a heavy-sweating moaner, arguing pointlessly with umpires. In the meantime emerged younger and fitter guys like Rafael Nadal, Novak Djokovic, Andy Murray, Gael Monfils and Thomas Berdych, each of them beating Roddick on several occasions, sometimes harshly, especially in the last twelve months of Roddick's career. Those defeats, and the fact of wasting a status of a Top 10 player after nine years, caused Roddick's decision to retire. He wasn't anymore able to compete with the best guys in the world, certainly it was a big blow for someone who aspired to get the biggest titles. *"It's been a road, a lot of ups, a lot of downs, a lot of great moments. I've appreciated your support along the way. I know I certainly haven't made it easy for you at times, but I really do appreciate it and love you guys with all my heart. Hopefully I'll come back to this place someday and see all of you again."* said the 30-year-old Roddick [27] after his farewell match at US Open '12, arguably the second best player born in the early 80s (behind Federer), who played the entire 00s.

Career record: 612–213 [225 events]
Career titles: 32
Highest ranking: No. 1 (November 2003)
Best GS results:
Australian Open (semifinalist 2003, 05, 07 & 09; quarterfinalist 2004 & 10)
Wimbledon (runner-up 2004-05 & 09; semifinalist 2003; quarterfinalist 2007)
US Open (champion 2003; runner-up 2006; quarterfinalist 2001-02, 04, 07-08)

Davis Cup champion 2007

Robby Ginepri (USA)



Born: October 7, 1982 in Fort Lauderdale, Florida
Height: 1.83 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

The fourth best American player among the generation of youngsters who appeared at the turn of Centuries (behind Andy Roddick, James Blake & Mardy Fish, but in front of Taylor Dent). Ginepri's style was reminding me of Jim Courier. The serve wasn't their main weapon, but they were very efficient from the back of the court. Fish had better backhand than Ginepri, Roddick better forehand, but Ginepri's baseline game was more solid overall. It's not so easy to explain why Ginepri, having quite similar game and posture to Courier, achieved incomparably less. I assume that the most important is that what had been working at the beginning of 90s couldn't be applied in the early 00s. It was a different epoch of taller & physically better prepared guys. The serve-and-volleyers were in extinction, so a guy like Ginepri couldn't win as many matches as Courier more or less ten years before. Anyway, Ginepri had his "fifteen minutes of fame" on the tour, it was the second half of the year 2005. Between Indianapolis and Madrid that year, Ginepri won 27 out of 34 matches, having defeated twelve potential Top 10ers. In his three most impressive events (Cincinnati, US Open, Madrid) - he lost to tennis legends (Roger Federer, Andre Agassi, Rafael Nadal respectively), being eliminated after tight encounters. Ginepri was not able to keep his top form in 2006, quickly lost his Top 20 status. Apart from the career pinnacle (US Open '05) when he won three consecutive rounds in five-setters (defeating seeded players!), he was that type of guy who usually loses tighter matches. Just 2-7 record in deciding 3rd set tie-breaks. He was simply weak when the score reached 5-all in the decider. As opposed to Courier, Ginepri wasn't eager to attack the net or keep the ball in play with a backhand slice; too predictable, too tactically limited to achieve more. In 2010 he lost his quite long status as an ATP player, and for the last four years of his career, he was drifting between the main-level and Challengers. Trivia:
the first player to compete at Wimbledon with a sleeveless shirt (June 23, 2003)
he's the only player I know, who lost two MP-up matches day-by-day; it happened in 2010 - in the Nice qualifying round he lost to unknown French player despite a triple match point in the 2nd set, and quickly joined the USA team during World Team Cup in Dusseldorf where he lost to Nicolas Almagro, blowing MP, that time in the deciding set. He should have defeated **David Guez** easily, and should have lost to Almagro quickly... lost to them both after dramatic matches. Following his defeat

to Almagro, he could have improved his mentality in another match because won the 2nd set vs **Horacio Zeballos** (b. 1985) saving MP, but in the 3rd set he lost again, being within two games of victory.

Career record:	188–204 [198 events]	**Career titles:**	3
Highest ranking:	No. 15 (December 2005)	**Best GS result:**	US Open (semifinal 2005)

José Acasuso (Argentina)

Born: October 20, 1982 in Posadas
Height: 1.90 m
Plays: Right-handed

In the entire history, "Chucho" is rather an obscure figure, but he shares the record of the longest tie-break (20/18 in the Canadian Open over **Bjorn Phau**, b. 1979), and what's more important, he lost two decisive Davis Cup rubbers – they are separated by two years and their stories are different; in 2006 he lost the 5th rubber to Russia (Marat Safin... that year Acasuso ended the run of 11 consecutive wins of Lleyton Hewitt in the competition) while in 2008 he just could keep the Argentinian hopes still alive; in a potential decisive rubber David Nalbandian should have defeated Feliciano Lopez which seemed very plausible. You never know, anyway Acasuso (he replaced the injured Juan Martin del Potro) suffering from a stomach muscle problem in the 5th set, finished in tears while Fernando Verdasco jumped to a new level following the biggest win of his career. The then 26-year-old Acauso shared the experience of Richard Fromberg from the years 1990 and 1993; they are two average Open Era players, who had opportunities to participate in the Davis Cup finals twice. The left knee injury the Argentinian suffered in 2009, forced him to modify his service motion, and in the last few years of career he was falling on his right leg immediately after hitting the service ball. A talented tennis player in general, very good at handling strokes from both wings, unfortunately often giving the impression of being bored and discouraged. He disappointed especially in the Slam tournaments... but in 2009 for instance, when Roger Federer won his only title in Paris, he needed 3 hours 25 minutes to beat the Argentinian in the second round. Hypothetically, Acasuso could even win that match 3-0.

Career record:	193-183 [180 events]
Career titles:	3
Highest ranking:	20 (August 2006)
Best GS result:	Roland Garros (fourth round 2005)

Dmitry Tursunov (Russia)

Born: December 12, 1982 in Moscow (Soviet Union)
Height: 1.85 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

Дми́трий Турсу́нов ...a solid Russian player who grew up tennis-wise in the United States and felt the most comfortably on the American soil. Admittedly he won just 3 out of his 7 titles in the USA, but his only Masters 1K comes from Cincinnati and when he could have chosen between obtaining the points in North America and Europe, the former was almost always his preferable option. As a youngster he was collecting the first ATP points playing a lot in the American Satellites & Futures, his first Challenger it was Dallas and he won the title; first ATP tournament, two weeks later - Memphis - sensationally reached the quarterfinal as a qualifier. Despite a huge ranking jump (from 219 to 172) he had to work almost three full years to finally get out of his comfort zone - the year 2004 was the first one when he played a few events in Australia & Europe. The years 2005-08 made him one of dangerous floaters, especially on hardcourts. The highlight of his career came in Autumn '06 when in the Davis Cup semifinal he outlast Andy Roddick after 4 hours 48 minutes 17-15 in the decider, one of the longest sets played on clay (indoors though). That win significantly helped Russia to advance to the final against Argentina. In the final Tursunov appeared only in winning doubles, but overall that season he was the most important Russian player (ahead of Marat Safin!) as far as all points obtained in four ties are concerned. In general, playing long five-setters was Tursunov's domain. Before the famous encounter against Roddick, he had also defeated in the 5th sets: 15-13 Sargis Sargsian, 8-6, Tim Henman, 7-6 Gustavo Kuerten and 7-5 Richard Gasquet. During those good years he was also two points away from winning one of the tightest Open Era five-setters; in the fourth round of Wimbledon '06 he was trailing against Jarkko Nieminen 0-2 in sets and with a break in the 3rd set, but won it in a tie-break, saved a double match point in another tie-break (the second MP after 42 strokes!) and led 7:6* (30-all) in the decider to lose it ultimately 5-7, 4-6, 7-6, 7-6, 7-9 after four hours. I assume it's his most bitter defeat because he never advanced to the major quarterfinal, which is a failure given the number of his titles and his main-level record after all. The last few years of his career were quite peculiar - he was struggling with a persistent left foot injury and actually showing up only at Slams using his protected ranking. Before Wimbledon '14 and US Open '17 he played only 14 main-level events, and eight of them occurred

at Slams (everything lost in the first rounds). *"Many acquaintances will agree that I do not have everything at home, but I am inclined to believe that everything in my life turned out right. Any experience is good for us. I think that difficulties allow us to learn everything by comparison, you begin to appreciate things that you might not have paid attention to in a different situation. I like how it came out. In addition, I am sure that my life is not the most difficult, for many it is much worse."* Tursunov on moving to the United States at the age of 12.

Career record:	230–214 [224 events]
Career titles:	7
Highest ranking:	No. 20 (October 2006)
Best GS result:	Wimbledon (fourth round 2005-06)

Davis Cup champion 2006 (played doubles in the final but contributed the most in the entire edition)

Gilles Müller (Luxembourg)

Born: May 9, 1983 in Luxembourg City
Height: 1.93 m
Plays: Left-handed (two-handed backhand)

I'd risk a thesis that Muller could enjoy much successful career if he was born ten years before, like Greg Rusedski - the most similar player to Muller: the same height, the same difficult to handle their lefty serves, pushing to usually won tight matches, similar volley & baseline skills, with one significant difference - Rusedski's forehand was much better than his backhand, in Muller's case the other way around, albeit at the beginning of his career Muller's forehand was ok, something happened with that shot in the early years on the tour, and instead of being a threat for the best guys (the young Muller had beaten Andre Agassi in the USA, Rafael Nadal & Wimbledon & Andy Roddick at the US Open), the guy from Luxembourg was drifting between Challengers & main-level events, enough said he had a seven-year-break between participating in the ATP finals. It seemed that he'd be one of those guys who lost the most ATP finals not having won one, but at the beginning of 2017 when he was already 34, the luck was on his side - in the end-match of Sydney he faced an opponent for whom a final of this type of a tournament was a big achievement (Daniel Evans), and kept his composure winning easily. A few months later obtained another title and basically lost his motivation for continuing his career. *"It means a lot. Like you can see, I was pretty emotional out there on the court,"* Muller said after the Evans match. *"For the past two or three years, it was probably my biggest goal to win a title. I always dreamed of that, and I was so close last year... So I was very scared and worried that I was going to be one of those players who never win a title. Now I have it, and it just feels great."* Generally speaking: as a talented junior he could expect a much better future, however, from the perspective of a ten-year-old career he could wish to get only one title... claimed two in the end and almost entered the Top 20 which was unlikely for many years.

Career record: 233–213 [204 events]
Career titles: 2
Highest ranking: No. 21 (July 2017)
Best GS results: Wimbledon (quarterfinal 2017)
US Open (quarterfinal 2008)

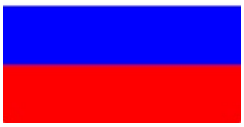
Guillermo García-López (Spain)

Born: June 4, 1983 in La Roda
Height: 1.88 m
Plays: Right-handed

Most popular Spanish surnames? Garcia no. 1, Lopez no. 5 - he certainly needed to adopt a compound surname. An artist in his own right, I remember that I thought something like this watching his five-set win over Juan Monaco at the US Open '12. It was one of the greatest comebacks in the tournament history, the Spaniard trailed 3-6, 1-6, 1:4 against a very sold, but one-dimensional Argentinian. More or less at the time the floodlights were activated, GGL found his rhythm, and levelled up at two sets apiece being two points away to lose in four sets. He led with a break twice in the 5th set when some physical problems pestered him. It was a time of the sunset. Monaco came back from 3:5 (deuce) to hold two mini-match points at 5-all – GGL fought it off with good first serves, one of the points was replayed after unfortunate outcome for the Argentine (his good ball was called 'out'). In the final tie-break, the slightly hobbling Garcia-Lopez went for his shots, he simply did something Monaco couldn't, namely took the risk when the pressure was higher and it paid dividends. The same year GGL came back from a bigger deficit in the decider against Monaco (*0:5 in Stuttgart), but lost that match 3-6, 6-3, 5-7. In many European countries, GGL could be the best player of a decade at least, but in such an amazing tennis-wise area like Spain, he had only once an opportunity to represent his nation in Davis Cup; it happened in Vancouver '13 when the weakened Spanish team lost to Canada: Milos Raonic won two vital rubbers, deciding 4th easily against GGL. A major quarterfinal it's something missing in GGL's resume. Already in his second major appearance (Australian Open '05), he stunned Carlos Moya [5]. Nine years later he ousted the fresh Aussie Open champion, Stan Wawrinka at Roland Garros in the first round; I remember that I expected him to beat an inconsistent Gael Monfils, but that match it was a total failure for the Spaniard, who won just two games in the first two sets. Among GGL's five titles, the most important one comes from Bangkok '10 - in the semifinal GGL notched his arguably biggest win eliminating Rafael Nadal 2-6, 7-6, 6-3 fending off 24 of 26 break points!

Career record: 297-354 [358 events]
Career titles: 5
Highest ranking: No. 23 (February 2011)
Best GS results: Australian Open (4th round 2015)
Roland Garros (4th round 2014)

Igor Andreev (Russia)



Born: July 14, 1983 in Moscow
Height: 1.83 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

Игорь Андре́ев

The Russians had a very strong team in the first decade of the 21st Century. Yevgeny Kafelnikov was the only distinctive Russian born in the 70s, another decade brought five good Russians to the tennis scene - of course Marat Safin was the best, then Nikolay Davydenko, Mikhail Youzhny while fourth place *ex aequo* for Andreev & Dmitry Tursunov - these two Russians, who share quite unusual photo of kissing each other in mouth (after Tursunov's epic Davis Cup win over Andy Roddick), had quite similar style based on heavy top-spin ground-strokes. Andreev belonged to a group of hardest forehand top-spinners. He used to run around his backhand a lot, similar way of thinking about the game to Carlos Moya, but far away from the elegance of the Spaniard. Marcos Baghdatis described Andreev's forehand as being "more deadly than Rafael Nadal's". Perhaps this crazy spin partly explains why Andreev was the last man to beat Nadal on clay before Nadal's amazing run of 81 consecutive wins on this surface. Andreev holds one of the worst tie-break records in deciding 3rd set tie-breaks, but in the first few years of his career he could be considered as one of the toughest mental guys out there. He was able to survive matches like 7-6, 2-6, 7-6(12) vs Nicolas Almagro (two MPs) or 3-6, 7-6(14), 6-4 vs Robin Soderling (nine MPs); during his route to the title in Moscow '05 he defeated in back-to-back matches Tursunov & Nicolas Kiefer being two points away from straight set defeats in both matches, against Kiefer he trailed 5-7, 0:4. Sometimes an unlucky match rewrites someone's career, it was also Andeev's case. In Barcelona '06 he lost a dramatic match to **Teymuraz Gabashvili** (b. 1985, Russian of Georgian origin), suffering an injury in the process. Soon afterwards he underwent left knee surgery to repair cartilage damage, it sidelined him for a half of the year, and after the comeback he wasn't the same even though the gamestyle didn't change.

Career record: 237–231 [219 events]
Career titles: 3
Highest ranking: No. 18 (November 2008)
Best GS result: Roland Garros (quarterfinal '07)

Florian Mayer (Germany)

Born: October 5, 1983 in Bayreuth
Height: 1.90 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

Unorthodox player, although a tall guy, he was constructing a majority of points on serve from the baseline, using double-handed backhand slice which is unusual; but it was working well at times cause you never knew when he would play basic slice or dropshot. Mayer was sometimes compared to Miloslav Mecir, if it's a good comparison we can say he was born two decades too late. Anyway he enjoyed a pleasant career with two titles and two major quarterfinals (both at Wimbledon). Especially his first Wimbledon quarterfinal is memorable because Mayer was playing his third major, not having won a grass court match as a pro. In the second round he stunned No. 3 Guillermo Coria, who was a typical clay-courter though. Mayer said: *"I'm surprised to be in the quarter-final because normally clay is my favourite surface."* He waited eight years for another quarterfinal at All-England Club. An injury to the left index finger made an impact on his nine main-level straight defeats in 2008 because he couldn't play an open backhand. He decided to take a break, have surgery and was sidelined for seven months. The German tennis had born in the 60s guys like Boris Becker & Michael Stich, in the 70s Nicolas Kiefer & Tommy Haas, in the 80s Mayer & Philipp Kohlschreiber... worse & worse with passing decades, similar downhill to the big rival of the 80s - Sweden - as far as players born the 80s are concerned (Swedish counterparts: Robin Soderling & Joachim Johansson). Trivia: before and after the injury, Mayer lost almost identical MP-up matches to Tommy Robredo (6-4, 6-7, 2-6 in Metz '07 and 6-4, 6-7, 4-6 in Shanghai '09), each of them lasted more than two hours and Mayer had his match points in long tie-breaks which he lost 9/11 & 10/12 respectively.

Career record: 243–261 [253 events]
Career titles: 2
Highest ranking: No. 18 (June 2011)
Best GS result: Wimbledon (quarterfinal 2004 & 2012)

Philipp Kohlschreiber (Germany)

Born: October 16, 1983 in Augsburg
Height: 1.78 m
Plays: Right-handed

Well, I guess I may say one of the most interesting second-tier players born in the 80s in my perception. His Grand Slam resume is highly unimpressive, just one quarterfinal in more than sixty appearances. You could expect that a player with so many first round defeats at majors (24 in total) would be a whipping boy for the best players in the world. Even though his H2H records against the best guys of his era are very one-sided (0-14 vs Roger Federer for instance), he was quite often giving them hard matches; against Rafael Nadal for example, Kohlschreiber played four-setters three times, and a decider in their "best of three" meetings, was required four times... the German once in 16 meetings easily defeated Nadal, in Halle. Kohlschreiber defeated Novak Djokovic twice (once blew match points against him), once destroyed Andy Murray - in their first meeting - the Scot always needed a decider in their five following matches, and three of them were exceptionally dramatic, equalling of a tie-break record included (Dubai). Kohlschreiber was always good to watch as a player with varied styles, already in 2009, Fabrice Santoro, who had seen all the best Open Era players in action in person, said that Kohlschreiber was one of a few players he enjoyed watching on TV. For many years, before the skyrocketing of Alexander Zverev, Kohlschreiber was German no. 1. Tommy Haas & Nicolas Kiefer were big disappointment for the German tennis from the perspective of the glory days of Boris Becker & Michael Stich, Kohlschreiber & Florian Mayer achieved much less than Haas & Kiefer, but Kohlschreiber has been a long-lived player at least - he has more than 100 matches won more than Kiefer for instance. Without the Russian-German Zverev, the Germans could wait a few years for someone of the level Kohlschreiber has delivered for the past fifteen years. He is some sort of mystery to me: first his mental attitude. Over the years he was displaying a mode of someone who wasn't particularly interested in fighting, yet for the first few years of his career, he was regularly winning tight matches. I didn't see him in too many matches of that period so it's difficult from me to say what was the reason he finally began losing them I suppose it's a matter of the serve improvement - he possesses very good serve for someone of his height, and I think that at some point of his career when he improved the serve and began holding easier, he was simply much

more often involved in dramatic matches... Currently, at the end of his career, he's probably one of a few shorter Open Era players, who lost countless matches being within a few points from winning them. Another interesting thing about Kohlschreiber, it's his ability to play on equal terms against much higher ranked opponents not from the very top. He was always giving impression in matches against Stan Wawrinka, Juan Martin del Potro, Jo-Wilfried Tsonga, Tomas Berdych & David Ferrer, that with some unspecified off-court changes, he could replaced them as an elite player. Trivia: Kohlschreiber's tie-break record is decent (188-190... 47%), but he has terrible records against two Frenchmen: 2-8 vs Gael Monfils (lost both matches when won the tie-breaks) and 1-8 vs Jo-Wilfried Tsonga.

Career record: 470-375 [370 events]
Career titles: 8
Highest ranking: No. 16 (July 2012)
Best GS result: Wimbledon (quarterfinal 2012)

Fernando Verdasco (Spain)

Born: November 15, 1983 in Madrid
Height: 1.88 m
Plays: Left-handed (two-handed backhand)

"It's the most exciting victory of my life. Playing for my country, against the best players, it's a dream." said Verdasco after his Davis Cup clincher against Jose Acasuso that gave Spain its third trophy in the most prestigious tennis team competition. Known for several years as a dangerous floater, Verdasco did in the decade of the 00s the same what had done before him Nicolas Escude, Mikhail Youzhny & Mario Ancic - the players from a level of major semifinals, who won DC clinchers for their countries: France, Russia & Croatia respectively. The 25-year-old Verdasco hadn't even played a major quarterfinal when Emilio Sanchez appointed him to the final against Argentina, but soon he confirmed that winning a Davis Cup clincher was worth a semifinal in one of the four biggest events. In late December of 2008, Verdasco went to Las Vegas where he was training very hard on his physical preparation with Gil Reyes, the former fitness coach of Andre Agassi. The assiduous work during the month when many players rest, paid off. Verdasco began the 2009 year in sensational form, admittedly he lost a Brisbane final to Radek Stepanek, but avenged that defeat a few weeks later destroying the Czech 6-4, 6-0, 6-0 in the Australian Open third round! The Spaniard advanced to the fourth round dropping just twelve games in three matches, no-one

before him went through the opening three rounds so convincingly. In the following two rounds Verdasco ousted higher ranked Andy Murray (one of the main favourites to the title) and Jo-Wilfried Tsonga (the 2008 runner-up) playing spectacular tennis; I remember that I had an impression at the time, that Verdasco was playing tennis comparable to Marcelo Rios when the Chilean won back-to-back Indian Wells & Key Biscayne titles, becoming the best player in the world. I mean the easiness of hitting the ball off both wings in all directions at various speeds, creating very tight angles. Verdasco had much better serve than Rios though, especially his flat serve down the middle on ad-court was exceptionally impressive. He could keep his opponents in uncertainty because his sliced serve was working very well, so his 160 kph serve out-wide could have been as efficient as his 220 kph bomb if the opponent had chosen a different direction to return the ball. In the semifinal Verdasco faced Rafael Nadal, and the two Spanish left-handed created an unforgettable spectacle, overcoming the record of the longest match played in Melbourne (Becker d. Camporese in 1991). In the 00s there were unexpected Aussie Open finalists almost every year: Arnaud Clement (2001), Thomas Johansson (2002, champion), Rainer Schuettler (2003), Marcos Baghdatis (2006), Fernando Gonzalez (2007), Tsonga (2008). Verdasco was very close to joining the list, perhaps he played a match of his life against Nadal, won only one points fewer (192 vs 1993) and the point which separated them was Verdasco's double fault on the third match point. The old demons caught the new versions of Verdasco, for many years he belonged to the narrow group of players serving often more double faults than aces, against Nadal the service ratio couldn't be questioned though. Verdasco was continuing his very good form in the following few months, impressing with consistency in every tournament winning 2-3 matches before losing to the best guys in the world. Those defeats showed that something was missing in his game, perhaps that loss to Nadal was quintessential. It's been twelve years since Verdasco's best period, he's still active and respectable, over the years cemented his position of a guy who may lose to an inferior player, but the entering the big arena against higher ranked opponents would positively stimulate him to give his best. Trivia: Verdasco skipped the Australian Open '00 ending streak of 67 straight Grand Slams played - the second longest all-time behind Feliciano Lopez' 74. Along with Lopez, Verdasco won a Davis Cup clincher in 2009 making himself a unique player to do this in singles & doubles (before in the Open Era the feat achieved only the icons of the game: Stan Smith, John McEnroe, Boris Becker & Stefan Edberg). Full name: Fernando Verdasco Carmona...

Career record:	552-423 [423 events]
Career titles:	7
Highest ranking:	No. 7 (April 2009)
Best GS results:	Australian Open (semifinalist 2009) Wimbledon (quarterfinalist 2013) US Open (quarterfinalist 2009-10)

Davis Cup champion 2008 (singles) and 2009 (doubles)

Andreas Seppi (Italy)

Born: February 21, 1984 in Bolzano
Height: 1.91 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

The always looking the same Seppi (baseball cup, visor backwards or forwards) would be one of the best players in the world in a fantasy tennis in which you serve underhand and you play the ground-stroke game targeting only no-man's land. I'll never verify this, but I can imagine that he would be very tough to beat with these specific rules. Many times watching his matches I was really impressed how well he hits the ball off both wings - the net clearance and depth of his balls were often amazing during long, fast rallies. But tennis it's not only about forehand & backhand. Seppi's serve was just an average shot, the same I'd say about his net-game, he also didn't belong to the fastest guys out there. I think that the flatter someone played, the better for Seppi. This way I'd explain why among all the best players born in the 80s, Seppi had a positive record only against Lleyton Hewitt (4:3) and what's really remarkable, among those four wins, three came after Seppi had saved match points! I cannot evoke any other H2H before in which a guy defeated the other one thrice being a point from defeat (later the same Novak Djokovic did to Roger Federer which is more astonishing given the prestige of those encounters). Seppi suffered plenty of defeats to the Big 4, but had his moments against them - once he beat Rafael Nadal, once the young Andy Murray, and once Federer - defeating him was the sweetest because it occurred where it matters the most - in a Slam (Australian Open '15). Admittedly Seppi never defeated Djokovic in their twelve meetings, but twice he was close to do that, especially the second opportunity was painful because Seppi led 2-0 in sets at Roland Garros '12 and two games separated him from a 3-1 victory. It happened in the fourth round, and Seppi has never reached a major quarterfinal. He was even closer at Aussie Open '15 when his confidence sky-rocketed after the win over Federer, but his match point was erased by a slice serve of Nick Kyrgios. In my mind, Arnaud Boetsch was the best player born in the 60s who never reached a Grand Slam quarterfinal, Seppi joins him as far as the guys born in the 80s are concerned.

Career record:	377-406 [388 events]
Career titles:	3
Highest ranking:	No. 18 (January 2013)
Best GS results:	Australian Open (fourth round 2013, 15, 17-18) Roland Garros (fourth round 2012) and Wimbledon (fourth round 2013)

Juan Monaco (Argentina)

Born: March 29, 1984 in Tandil
Height: 1.85 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

In boxing, about quite efficient guys who cannot knock opponents down regularly, they say "have pillows in their gloves' '. Making a tennis parallel I'd say Monaco was a tennis counterpart of those boxers with good records, yet weak KO ratio. Monaco's movement was impressive (a lot of small leaping), his technique of every shot was impeccable, yet he couldn't hurt his opponents when they possessed a stable ground-stroke game. He could mainly count on his patience & physical preparation, opponents' errors were crucial for his way of winning. Unquestionably he was a clay-courter, but his clay-court potential was a couple of times brutally verified by the king of clay - Rafael Nadal. They were good friends, but Nadal was usually merciless when they faced each other. During Monaco's best period, Nadal demolished him twice: 6-1, 6-1, 6-2 in the Davis Cup '11 final, then six months later 6-2, 6-0, 6-0 in the French Open fourth round. Monaco waited almost five years for his fourth title, in the meantime losing seven finals (all on clay). *"I'm very happy because I fought a lot, I practised a lot and I was thinking a lot about winning a tournament again. [It gives me] confidence and motivation."* said after raising the Vina de Mar '12 trophy. The boost of confidence was huge, soon afterwards he notched his best result as far as the biggest events are concerned - the Miami semifinal after a stunning 6-1, 6-3 win over Mardy Fish in the quarterfinal. *"I think more than anything else, he shrunk the court extremely well with his movement, and that's why I think you saw a ton of errors from me,"* said Fish. *"It's amazing [to break the Top 10], it's a dream come true,"* declared Monaco after winning his biggest title in Hamburg '12. He couldn't be considered as a mentally tough player throughout his career, however, that week in Hamburg everything worked in his favor: he was two points away from losing to **Cedrik-Marcel Stebe** (b. 1990), saved five set points vs **Daniel de la Nava**, a mini-match point vs Nicolas Almagro and in the final he trailed *1:4 in the 1st & 0:2* (30/40) in the 2nd set vs Tommy Haas.

Career record: 342–270 [269 events]
Career titles: 9
Highest ranking: No. 10 (July 2012)
Best GS results: Roland Garros (fourth round 2007 & 2012)
US Open (fourth round 2007 & 2011)

Mario Ančić (Croatia)

Born: March 30, 1984 in Split (Yugoslavia)
Height: 1.95 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

Obviously it's a pity Ancic went to the retirement prematurely but I don't consider him as an underachiever, I think - taking into account his potential - he had a good career and has inscribed himself to the history books winning the 5th rubber in the Davis Cup final (against **Michal Mertinak** b. 1979; it would be difficult to imagine a weaker player to face in the most important match of career), it's something which vast majority of tennis players can only dream about. *"I played very aggressively, I felt everything was under my control,"* Ancic said. *"It's an unforgettable match and an unforgettable day. This has been a spectacular year for me."* That year Ivan Ljubicic contributed more to the Croatian success, but Ancic's had a pleasure to make the final statement. Personally, Ancic was a slight disappointment for me. He began his career at the time when finished his own Richard Krajicek (my favorite player through eleven years), so I thought that in some sense Ancic would replace the Dutchman because there were resemblances: the same height and weight, the same racquet (Yonnex) and even the same coach - Rohan Goetzke, but before they split (2005), I realized Ancic wouldn't a material for a Grand Slam or - at least - Masters Series champion. Ancic was trying to be a serve & volley player, however, his serve wasn't as good as Krajicek's, he also didn't hit groundstrokes with similar easiness to Goran Ivanisevic (Ancic's mentor in the first few years on the tour). Moreover he hadn't that Ivanisevic's madness to play risky shots in the most crucial moments, so he could be called "Baby Goran" only in regard of being Ivanisevic's protégé... I think it's worth to mention that Ancic is the only player (in the final stages of his career) that I know, who used to make fist-pumps after losing points, it was some form of perverse positive thinking "you lost the point but don't worry, you're aggressive, you play out your tactical ideas".

Career record: 208–135 [128 events]
Career titles: 3
Highest ranking: No. 7 (July 2006)
Best GS results: Roland Garros (quarterfinal 2006)
Wimbledon (semifinal 2004; quarterfinal 2006 & 08)

Davis Cup champion 2005(won clincher)
Bronze medalist at the Olympics in Athens 2004

Janko Tipsarević (Serbia)

Born: June 22, 1984 in Belgrade (Yugoslavia)
Height: 1.79 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

Јанко Типсаревић... one of three representatives of the golden generation in the Serbian tennis - much worse than Novak Djokovic, but distinctively better than Viktor Troicki. When they all three (with the help of Nenad Zimonjic in doubles) won the Davis Cup for Serbia in 2010, Tipsarevic got three points in the entire edition (two very important in the semifinals against higher ranked Czechs), but Troicki, who got one point less, replaced him in the final rubber to notch the decisive victory. At the time Tipsarevic had a 3:0 H2H against Michael Llodra, he could be a favorite in that rubber and could win the most important match of his life. Anyway, that Davis Cup triumph, similarly to Djokovic's case, elevated him to another level - Djokovic became one of the best players in tennis history in the aftermath of that Belgrade success while Tipsarevic, who had been known as a solid player participating in all biggest events, quite often being seeded, became a Top 10er for two seasons, highlighting them with thrilling US Open quarterfinals (led 4:1*, 30/30 in the 5th set against David Ferrer in 2012). The first such a good player in history with many visible tattoos, one of them quoting the famous Russian writer of the 19. Century - Fyodor Dostoevsky "Beauty will save the world". Underwent seven surgeries between 2014 and 2017: left foot (2), right knee (2), left hamstring (2) and right hamstring. Because of the injuries, he didn't play in 2014 and 2018 at all. Very good server with his height, flat strokes off both wings, when he was on fire during some matches in the period mentioned earlier, he was able to hit flatter winners with higher frequency than everyone else. Trivia: at the Australian Open '11 he lost a five-setter to Fernando Verdasco leading 2:0 in sets & blowing three match points in the 4th set, it seemed that a match like that could be repeated two years later at Roland Garros when Verdasco came back from 0:2 saving two match points that time, but ultimately 'Tipsy' prevailed 8-6 in the decider.

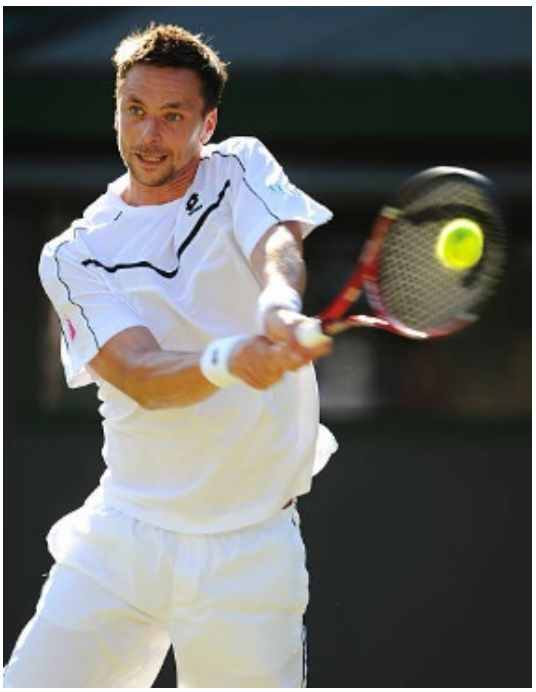
Career record: 288-257 [245 events]
Career titles: 4
Highest ranking: No. 8 (April 2012)
Best GS result: US Open (quarterfinal 2011-12)

Davis Cup champion 2010

Robin Söderling (Sweden)

Born: August 14, 1984 in Tibro
Height: 1.93 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

Soderling is the last Swedish player who mattered. Beginning with the great Bjorn Borg in the 70s, the Swedes had constantly players who could reach quarter- & semi-finals of the biggest events; it was clear that Soderling (28 years younger than Borg) would be the last big Swedeish name for longer, unspecified time. Soderling

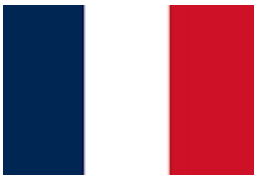


was rather awkward, his game at the net I'd describe as "wooden", one-dimensional from the baseline, but there was sheer power in his basic strokes. As far as players born in the 80s, Gonzalez seemed to possess the fastest forehand, Marat Safin the fastest backhand, but Soderling could deliver the fastest shots off both wings combined. His serve was also very powerful, the first serve above 200 kph on average, the second serve above 170 kph. With these tools Soderling could do some damage, but the early years on the tour indicated his mental instability, he was prone to lose dramatic matches more often than winning them. Moreover, he felt himself the best indoors, when the acoustic is louder and perhaps it gave him better mental state as he heard the noise of his strokes, more intimidating the opponents. Unfortunately for him, no major is played indoors (first nine finals he played under the roof), thus a few years he remained among those players who had potential to do something big, but couldn't. Everything changed in 2009 when Magnus Norman became Soderling's coach. Norman hadn't Soderling's power, but reached No. 2 in the world thanks to tactical skills and total dedication to improve every detail in his shots. He convinced Soderling to work on the weakness (the net-game) and helped him to prepare different tactical plans depending on the opponent. Under the Norman's guidance, Soderling enjoyed the best two years of his tennis life (2009-10), he reached two French Open finals, and paradoxically he defeated the champions of those events, but not in the finals: stunned Rafael Nadal in the fourth round of 2009 to lose the final to Roger Federer, another year he stunned Federer in the quarterfinal (with 0:12 in their H2H) only to be beaten by Nadal in the final. At the end of 2010 Soderling split with Norman, but continued to play tennis from the two past years. The beginning of 2011 was great, he claimed three titles in his first four events. Admittedly he didn't reach another final in Paris, but the task was exceptionally tough as he faced Nadal again, that time in the quarterfinal. After a rather

sensational defeat to Bernard Tomic at Wimbledon, Soderling played the event of his life on the home soil in Bastad, which would be the last in his career. Soderling won easily four matches, blowing away the Top 10 players Tomas Berdych (71 minutes) & David Ferrer (67 minutes). *"It has been a dream week,"* said Soderling [5] after the final, *"I feel really good. Now finally, my body feels good. I struggled a little bit with some injuries the past couple of months."* The 175th and last main-level event in Soderling's career… The Swede was 27-year-old at the time, he seemed to be in great shape having won four titles in 2011, but soon after Bastad he began to struggle with mononucleosis, an illness that forced him to withdraw from the US Open '11 at the last minute. In the following four years he believed he would return to competitive tennis, but ultimately announced his retirement from professional tennis on December 23, 2015. Currently the two best Swedish players (brothers **Elias & Mikael Ymer**, born in the late 90s), sons of Ethiopian parents whom Soderling helped when they were teenagers, try to establish themselves as Top 100 players. The two years younger Mikael played well at the last Australian Open.

Career record:	310–170 [176 events]
Career titles:	10
Highest ranking:	No. 4 (November 2010)
Best GS results:	Roland Garros (runner-up 2009-10) Wimbledon (quarterfinalist 2010) US Open (quarterfinalist 2009-10)

Gilles Simon (France)



Born: December 27, 1984 in Nice
Height: 1.83 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

The most interesting week of Simon's career is connected to the Masters 1K event in Madrid '08. The 23-year-old Simon [16] had already played four ATP seasons and his experience in winning tight matches couldn't impress anyone at the time. It's really remarkable that a guy who had just won one match in the deciding tie-break set at the main level, suddenly wins four matches of this type within one week, and what's more astonishing - he does it escaping from difficult situations every time in the deciders (saved triple match point vs Igor Andreev, double match point vs Robby Ginepri, then trailed in the deciders: 0:3 vs Ivo Karlovic & 2:4 vs Rafael Nadal - that last win turned to be the most valuable in Simon's career, it lasted 3 hours 28 minutes, and the Frenchman was relatively close to lose the 2nd set as well). Simon's feature has been his backhand; the two-handed players use backhand slice rarely, Simon's almost never, so I'd say that his anticipation & timing are splendid. It helped him to deal with long baseline rallies, but the disadvantage of that style it's inability to play backhand volleys responding to the well played passing-shots. In my eyes Simon is "poor-man's Murray"; similar way of thinking about the game, patience, flat strokes, wise point construction, but in every element of the tennis craft, Murray seemed slightly better (more than slightly as far as the backhand volley was concerned). When two players with similar skills face each other, usually wins the one who does everything a bit better, that's a good explanation why Simon, despite playing so many years in the tennis elite, has defeated Murray just twice in eighteen meetings, at times losing badly. With a grain of salt: Simon = "poor man's Murray", Seppi = "poor man's Simon"; the Italian has faced the Frenchman six times, always leaving the court as a loser. They both are in Top 10 in numbers of main-level events played in the Open Era... One major semifinal it's something missing in Simon's career, he deserved it playing regularly in the biggest events since 2006. As a player with a modest Grand Slam record, Simon has won exceptionally many ATP titles.

Career record: 493-372 [374 events]
Career titles: 14
Highest ranking: No. 6 (January 2009)
Best GS results: Australian Open (quarterfinal 2009)
Wimbledon (quarterfinal 2015)

Stan Wawrinka (Switzerland)

Born: March 28, 1985 in Lausanne
Height: 1.83 m
Plays: Right-handed

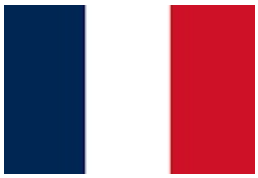
Czecho-Polish ancestry from the side of the father, but his surname suggests me that his Czech grandfather had Polish roots, and the surname was initially written *Wawrzynka* ("laurel", which is quite funny because Roger Federer's wife - Miroslava Vavrincová - has a maiden name derived from the same word). Usually when I watch young players at the beginning of their careers, I know more or less what they would achieve in the future. I mean I think "this one should win one major, that one should advance to the Top 20" etc. and often I'm right within a minimum of that I had predicted. Wawrinka totally fooled me though, and he did it many times. When I was watching his advancement to the Rome '08 final, I thought it was his career best result. He was 23 y.o. then, ranked 24, and defeated three former (and one future) Nos. 1, but those former best players (Marat Safin, Juan C. Ferrero) were already behind their prime, so the Swiss player didn't impress me. Later that year he helped Federer in winning the gold medal at the Olympics in Beijing in doubles, so it was something not anticipated at all, but not very strange either given Federer's amazing form in those years and Wawrinka's good skills overall with one-handed backhand above the average... Australian Open '14 - a tournament which completely rewrote the career of the Swiss. When he began it, his records against the best players in the world looked depressing: 14 straight defeats to Novak Djokovic, 0-12 vs Rafael Nadal, 1-13 Federer. He was already 29, so actually I was close to fulfilling my prediction from 2008. Wawrinka somehow managed to beat Djokovic in the quarterfinal, and he did the same to an injured Nadal in the final. Quite shocking was his reaction too, he didn't lie on the court in disbelief, just raised his hand like many times before winning incomparably less important matches. *"For me it is the best Grand Slam ever,"* said Wawrinka holding the trophy. *"Last year I had a crazy match, lost it and was crying a lot after the match. In one year a lot happened. Right now I still don't know if I'm dreaming or not, but we'll see tomorrow morning."* I automatically associated that success with those achieved by Andres Gomez, Petr Korda & Thomas Johansson, the examples of players who had plenty of experience and suddenly at the latter stages of their careers, they won the sweetest trophies in tennis. Wawrinka's following major even confirmed my

estimation - he lost in Paris already in round one, even though fully confident he'd triumphed on clay in Monte Carlo (his first Masters 1K title) which put him among the favorites in Paris. What he couldn't do in 2014, he achieved in 2015 - playing in quite specific shorts, he overpowered Djokovic in the Parisian final, he did the same to the Serb one year later in the final at the US Open - three major titles, and three claimed at different venues! A total shocker, Wawrinka known for many years as someone rather a bit behind guys like David Ferrer, Jo-Wilfried Tsonga & Tomas Berdych (each of them reached one major final) suddenly put himself in a rivalry against Andy Murray, the weakest link of the Big 4! Of course Wawrinka couldn't be compared to Murray in terms of major finals, but the Swiss has equalled the achievement of the Scot in the number of titles, and defeated him in the French Open '17 semifinal - one of the best five-setters I've ever seen, which allows to alternatively look at the best players of the 10s: Big 3, then Murray/Wawrinka, then the rest of the peloton (using the cycling terminology).

Career record: 533-307 [310 events]
Career titles: 16
Highest ranking: No. 3 (January 2014)
Best GS results:
Australian Open (champion 2014; semifinal 2015 & 17; quarterfinal 2011 & 20)
Roland Garros (champion 2015; runner-up 2017; semifinal 2016; quarterfinal 2013 & 19)
Wimbledon (quarterfinalist 2014-15)
US Open (champion 2016; semifinal 2013 & 15; quarterfinal 2010, 14 & 19)

Davis Cup champion 2014
Olympic Gold medal in doubles (2008)

Jo-Wilfried Tsonga (France)



Born: April 17, 1985 in Le Mans
Height: 1.88 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

The son of Congolese father Didier and French mother Évelyne (née Rosier). He is an example of someone who entered the luxury tennis saloons out of nowhere, but it'd made sense if we dug deeper into his first steps on the tour... China 2004: the 19-year-old Tsonga, US Open junior champion of 2003, receives 'wild card' to play in Beijing and defeats No. 6 in the world Carlos Moya 6-3, 6-3 in the first round! If someone who is unknown, ranked 209, eliminates a former best player in the world, there must be something special about him. It's confirmed more than three years later

when Tsonga, participating in his just 16th main-level event, advances to the Australian Open final defeating i.a. Andy Murray & Rafael Nadal. Between his sensational debut in Beijing and the career-biggest success in Melbourne, he struggled with many injuries (herniated disc & shoulder, moreover back and abdominal problems), because of that instead of becoming a regular ATP player already in 2005, for two years he'd been drifting between Challengers & Futures events before made a Challenger-ATP transition in 2007, making his face recognizable at the beginning of the year in Melbourne, winning a record-tying tie-break 20/18 vs Andy Roddick on Rod Laver Arena (the American won the match in four sets though). Mats Wilander belonged to a big group of pundits delighted by Tsonga's appearance at the Australian Open '08, the Swede even said that Tsonga would be better than Roger Federer... Relatively unknown players can hide their weaknesses and I think it was also Tsonga's case during that amazing Australian fortnight. The following years exposed Tsonga's backhand hole. I'd risk a thesis that Tsonga achieved more than you could expect from a guy with his backhand, mainly thanks to his very good mentality. Tennis is such a psychological game, admittedly it's not boxing, you cannot punch your opponent (maybe Tsonga would be good at this with his nickname "Ali", due to facial resemblance referring to the greatest boxer in history, Cassius Clay), but you can intimidate him (her), and this is what in my opinion Tsonga was doing very well throughout his career, especially in France, feeling the energy of the partisan crowd. I suppose the vast majority of players knew that in crucial moments playing to his backhand was required, but only the best guys (Novak Djokovic, Nadal, Murray) could do this often (Djokovic needed to figure it out, initially Tsonga was one of his toughest opponents, and the great Serb lost to him 5 out of the first 7 meetings); others were making many mistakes or were playing too softly, allowing the Frenchman of the African origin, running around his backhand to play big forehands, attacking the net, and gaining the points with crispy volleys or eye-catching overheads. There's no other player like Tsonga, who has won the record tie-break, the longest deciding 3rd set (25-23 against Milos Raonic) and one of the longest 5th sets (19-17 against John Isner).

Career record: 464-224 [230 events]
Career titles: 18
Highest ranking: No. 5 (February 2012)
Best GS results:
Australian Open (runner-up 2008; semifinal 2010; quarterfinal 2009, 13 & 17)
Roland Garros (semifinal 2013 & 15; quarterfinal 2012)
Wimbledon (semifinal 2011-12; quarterfinal 2010 & 16)
US Open (quarterfinal 2011, 15-16)

Davis Cup champion 2017
Olympic Silver medalist in doubles (2012)

John Isner (USA)

Born: April 26, 1985 in Greensboro, North Carolina
Height: 2.08 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

Isner and Ivo Karlovic are very special players. There were great servers in the 80s, 80s, 90s & 00s, but in the 10s these two giants proposed something absolutely new (they established themselves as tour players already a decade before, Karlovic has been a regular ATP player since 2003, Isner since 2007). Facing them it's somewhat a new discipline, "tennis without tennis". They have been both involved in countless matches when only 1-2 points separated them from victory/defeat; countless aces, countless tie-breaks... Isner showed what he was capable of already in his second main-level event - Washington '07. He advanced to the final winning five consecutive matches in deciding third set tie-breaks! Something absolutely incomparable to anything before. Actually in 2005, Federer won three straight matches in deciding tie-breaks, but he did it in two different tournaments - Isner was winning deciding tie-breaks five consecutive days on the same courts! Many people would think he was the strongest mentally player ever. There was an uncanny aura around him. Of course it wasn't the case for those who knew his Challenger results and those obtained during University years, simply that week the capital city of the United States was exceptional, the luck was on Isner's side against probability. Among five players he defeated 7-6 in the 3rd, as many as three were from one shelf higher (Tim Henman, Tommy Haas & Gael Monfils). Thirteen years later, Isner is behind his prime, I guess he should be fulfilled because has achieved much more than six years older than Karlovic - a player with potentially the same skills. Miami '18 it's Isner's biggest title, and what's most surprising - he claimed that title with a little help of tie-breaks, breaking his opponents many times during the week, very good ones, and also giants, albeit considerably shorter than him (Marin Cilic, Juan M. Del Potro & Alexander Zverev). Throughout his career, Isdner has always been dependable on tie-breaks and two-game advantage sets in deciders at majors. He has lost more match point-up matches than anyone in tennis history (I cannot be 100% sure, but I'm convinced), yet in contrary to a common opinion that you lose a match being one point away from victory because you weren't enough mentally tough, I cannot say anything bad about Isner's mentality. A popular term "choke" doesn't suit him in my opinion at all. Of course, like every very experienced player, he lost some matches he should have

won (because he was serving for the victory or had a big advantage in a tie-break), but in majority cases, he was losing those dramatic matches due to two factors: weak backhand & limited movement. Regardless of the skills players possess, and regardless of how good they feel the ball in particular day, entering the court against Isner they know what would be expected - a moment in the 2nd or 3rd decisive set when they may face a match point on serve, and then their destiny would depend on attacking Isner's backhand, and pushing him to run fast on the baseline if he hits the ball back.

Career record:	435-274 [267 events]
Career titles:	15
Highest ranking:	No. 8 (July 2018)
Best GS results:	Wimbledon (semifinal 2018)
	US Open (quarterfinal 2011, 18)

Marcos Baghdatis (Cyprus)

Born: June 17, 1985 in Paramytha
Height: 1.79 m
Plays: Right-handed (double handed backhand)

Μάρκος Παγδατής... developed his talent in France where he moved as a 12-year-old boy, but his career highlights were tightly connected to the Australian Open where he always could count on big support of the Greek diaspora (he comes from the southern part of the island which is Greek while Northern Cyprus belongs to Turkey)... First time Down Under he showed up in 2005 when as a player ranked 155, he defeated two seeded guys; one year later he improved advancing to the final (in both events defeated by Roger Federer). En route to the final he outlasted three higher ranked opponents in five-setters, but the fifth set wasn't his domain overall - he finished his career with a decent 14-10 record (9-2 in Melbourne). The arguably most painful five-set defeat he experienced at Aus Open '08 when lost a 4:43h thriller to Lleyton Hewitt after the latest finish in Melbourne - at 4:33 a.m. despite coming back from 1:5 in the 4th set. In the first two rounds the Cypriot had defeated the finalists of 2002. His appearance in Melbourne 2009 marked the only time when he shaved his head throughout his career. One year later he stunned David Ferrer - then considered as one of the biggest five-set specialists - in the second round, producing the biggest comeback of his career - trailed 4-6, 3-6, 3:4 on return. The Australian Open '12 brought different face of Baghdatis; always cheerful & smiling, occasionally throwing his equipment, that time facing Stan Wawrinka for the first time he showed unprecedented anger smashing four racquets in just one minute during the change of ends! *"I cannot have any regrets. Maybe the only regret, I always say I have, is the message I gave by breaking those four racquets in Australia to the young fans."* he admitted a few years later after retirement. Trivia: he defeated all the best players born in the 80s he faced, except Novak Djokovic (0-8 H2H), but was relatively close to doing that at Wimbledon '07. Baghdatis had overcome the two years younger Serb (6-2, 2-6, 7-5) when they faced each other the only time as juniors, in 2002.

Career record: 349-274 [278 events]
Career titles: 4
Highest ranking: 8 (August 2006)
Best GS results: Australian Open (runner-up 2006)
Wimbledon (semifinalist 2006; quarterfinal 2007)

Nicolás Almagro (Spain)

Born: August 21, 1985 in Murcia
Height: 1.83 m
Plays: Right-handed

Full name: Nicolás Almagro Sánchez. The year 2011 was Almagro's best. He played in five finals including two "500 Series". That year he entered the Top 10 for the first time. I'd say that in 2011 he belonged to the Top 5 clay-courters in the world (he didn't confirm it in Paris though, losing a five-setter in extraordinary circumstances to Polish journeyman - **Lukasz Kubot**, b. 1982 - having actually match won in three different sets!) as the third best Spaniard, but the difference between them was huge and their H2Hs reflect it: Nadal vs Ferrer 26-6, Ferrer vs. Almagro 15-1. Paradoxically Almagro defeated Nadal (also once in 16 meetings) two years before he managed to do this against Ferrer. The H2H between Ferrer and Almagro is astonishing, a great exemple how the beginning of the rivalry may influence the continuation. It was Cincinnati '06 when they met for the first time, on one side of the net a natural shot-maker, much more powerful Almagro, and on the other the exceptionally ambitious Ferrer, who needed to work hard on almost every point. Almagro led 6-4, 5:4, but blew six match points as a receiver, and his rivalry vs Ferrer turned into a nightmare. The older Spaniard won the following 14 matches, surviving three times in potentially hopeless situations. Very similar story in H2H between Novak Djokovic and Gael Monfils... Almagro was a typical clay-courter, no doubt about it: 23 main-level finals - all on clay, the only Masters 1K semifinal - clay, historically speaking Roland Garros was his best major, finally his matches against the toughest opposition - the only wins over Nadal & Andy Murray on clay, never defeated either Federer or Djokovic (H2H 0-5 against each of them), but found himself at 5-all in the deciding third sets against them, on clay of course. Inability to deal well with the pressure prevented him in achieving better results. Some facts: he had lost five MP-up matches before won his first MP-down; 0-4 in deciding 3rd set tie-breaks when survived for the first time in those circumstances; five-setters? lost his first five, and four of them were actually brutal. I have to admit that Almagro mentally improved in 2009 and in his four best years (2009-2012) he won many dramatic matches, but in the meantime he suffered a few painful defeats too. It is worth mentioning his Paris-Bercy march against Nadal. One of the all-time greatest, had bad day, clearly out of his top form, he should have been finished 6-3, 7-5, but demons of Nadal's four previous easy wins, haunted Almagro and he somehow wasted five match points serving at 6:5 in the 2nd set (40/0 included), and again

couldn't finish off leading 5:3 in the decider (6-3, 6-7, 5-7 in the end). Among those players with the biggest potential, who could do some damage in the 00s, mentally the weakest, I could mention Almagro and James Blake, but both guys with completely different on-court attitudes. Blake was always giving me an impression of someone who walks under rainy clouds, being ready to suffer a heart-breaking defeat, but Almagro was always walking like a peacock (I don't give players nicknames, he is one of exceptions), like someone if not the best ever, at least the best on a particular surface - definitely clay in his case. Despite his artificial aura of enormous self-confidence, it seems a complex of inferiority was lurking inside his head, hurting him so many times, especially in confrontations with Nadal and Ferrer. I really think that under specific circumstances, he should have won at least one big title on clay. His combinations of big serve and powerful baseline shots were very impressive, I'm not sure how to explain it, but on clay he was able to serve much better than on other surfaces. Here is an example: second round in Valencia '07 against Jan Hajek. Almagro serves just 34 points in that match, and 16 of them are aces! Unbelievable on clay eliding from the opponent's quality. The man from Murcia could write down his surname to the history of tennis anyway. He got a chance to play a decisive rubber in the Davis Cup '12 final against Czechia. Radek Stpenaek on the other side of the net. Almagro had won their previous match a few months earlier on hardcourts in four sets, ok, in the Davis Cup final Stepanek was supported by the local crowd in Prague, but still it was a hardcourt, not grass where Stepanek could be a big favorite. So it was basically something like a 50/50 match, a lifetime opportunity for them both, Stepanek took his chance, and astonishingly he repeated it the following year when he defeated Dusan Lajovic in the Davis Cup clincher against Serbia.

Career record:	397-278 [287 events]
Career titles:	13
Highest ranking:	No. 9 (May 2011)
Best GS results:	Australian Open (quarterfinalist 2013) Roland Garros (quarterfinalist 2008, 2010, 2012)

Tomáš Berdych (Czechia)

Born: September 17, 1985 in Valašské Meziříčí (Czechoslovakia)
Height: 1.96 m
Plays: Right-handed (double-handed backhand)

Stan Wawrinka achieved more or less what I expected from Berdych. Quite revealing is their Australian Open '14 semifinal, Wawrinka beat Berdych in a tight four-setter (6-3, 6-7, 7-6, 7-6) winning just one more point in the entire contest, then he outplayed an injured Rafael Nadal in the final and afterwards collected another two major titles. Would Berdych have done the same if he had been more lucky in the tie-breaks against the Swiss? In my opinion the Czech had all the ingredients not only to win a few majors, but also to become No. 1 in the world at some point of his career. At the end of 2005, when Roger Federer & Nadal already established themselves as tennis kings for the years to come, Berdych triumphed in Paris-Bercy, having defeated only top players, so it seemed that a bright future was ahead of him: big serve, effortless flat & quick strokes off both sides, good volley technique, cool under pressure (after the US Open '06 he had a stunning 9-0 record in five-setters; at the time had defeated both, Federer & Nadal after tight matches). It's really difficult to explain what happened to him in the next few years that he didn't become at least a solid Top 5 player; the place which should have been his, took Novak Djokovic & Andy Murray away from him in the late 00s. He needed to play a lot to finally reach his first (and only) major final - Wimbledon 2010. In that final he easily lost to Nadal - the Spaniard and the Serb turned to be Berdych's nightmarish opponents, he finished his career with two terrible H2H records: 4-20 (from 3:1!) and 3-25 respectively against them. Inability to defeat Nadal & Djokovic for many years, it's a main explanation why he didn't win another Masters 1K title or didn't reach another major final. I've got two ideas why Berdych couldn't manage it:

1) as a well established Top 10 player he invented himself as a "second Borg", he was always trying be so cool, no matter how bad things were going, in my opinion he needed to show much more emotions to be involved in psychological battles against guys like Nadal & Djokovic;

2) over the years in the Davis Cup ties, Berdych was very successful in doubles, especially along with Radek Stepanek, and what's really interesting, Berdych

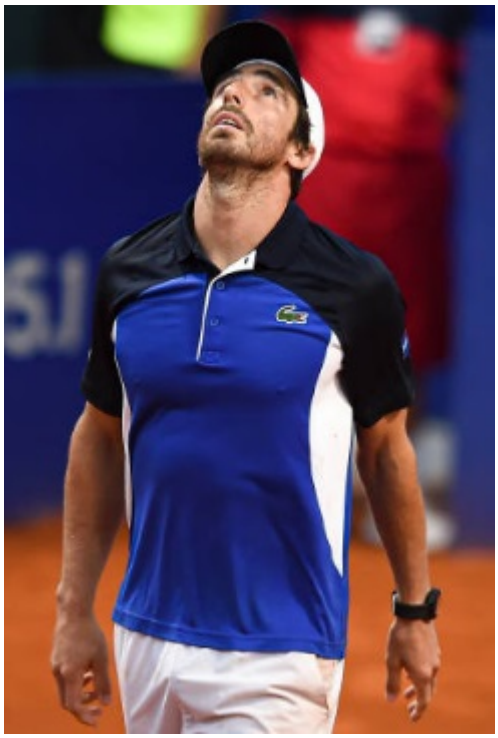
collected an impressive 21-2 record, playing serve-and-volley on a regular basis. It's beyond me why at times he didn't use this game-style playing big matches in singles
By the way, in 2013 Berdych partnering **Lukas Rosol** (b. 1985), won the longest doubles match in history; the Czechs defeated Stan Wawrinka/Marco Chiudinelli 6-4, 5-7, 6-4, 6-7, 24-22 after 7 hours 1 minute! If I have to point out the biggest underachiever among the best players born in the 80s, I have no doubts it's Berdych. Admittedly he made up for many disappointments with back-to-back Davis Cup titles (2012-13), but he couldn't be really fulfilled because he didn't win a clincher in the finals; he was a slight favorite to beat David Ferrer in front of the home crowd on a fast indoor court... lost in straights. Trivia: from the beginning of his career to the end of 2014 he was always playing with a baseball cap, regardless of indoors or outdoors and the length of his hair which were very long in the first years on the tour. He ended his career in 2019 but announced his performance at the Tokyo Olympics '20. It was not given to him due to the cancellation of the event by the Covid-19.

Career record:	640-342 [330 events]
Career titles:	13
Highest ranking:	No. 4 (May 2015)
Best GS results:	Australian Open (semifinal 2014-15; quarterfinal 2011-13, '16) Roland Garros (semifinal 2010; quarterfinal 2014, '16) Wimbledon (final 2010; semifinal 2016-17; quarterfinal 2007, '13) US Open (semifinal 2012; quarterfinal 2014)

Davis Cup champion 2012-13
(in both editions contributed more than Radek Stepanek, but in both finals Berdych lost rubbers that could give Czechia the trophy)

Pablo Cuevas (Uruguay)

Born: January 1, 1986 in Concordia (Argentina)
Height: 1.80 m
Plays: Right-handed



For many years, Marcelo Filippini was the most successful Uruguayan tennis player. In 2008, Cuevas sensationally triumphed in doubles at French Open (along with Luis Horna), but nothing indicated that he would surpass Filippini in singles achievements, especially at the beginning of the 10s - Cuevas suffered a serious injury at French Open '11 which sidelined him for a long time. He underwent knee surgery on October 11, 2011 and didn't play any competitive tennis for nearly two years! After such a long break, it'd be very tough to expect an improvement of the 27-year-old player. But Cuevas [762] came back to the main-level in the place where he left it - at French Open, with an apic win over Adrian Mannarino. Cuevas was gradually improving his ranking, and just one year after the comeback, he won two ATP titles (Bastad, Umag), doing it within three weeks! *"This is an amazing week,"* said Cuevas, raising the trophy in the Swedish summer resort. *"Today I played unbelievably. I'm so happy to win my first title. This city is beautiful and for sure I'll be back next year."* It was the beginning of the second tennis life for Cuevas. Since then, he has established himself as one of the most attractive clay-courters, with beautiful backhand and a bunch of unconventional shots. He added another titles to his résumé (three times in Sao Paulo) and notched a valuable win over the "King of Clay", Rafael Nadal in Rio de Janeiro '16 after one of the longest 'best of three' matches of the decade - one year before he'd lost to Nadal on the same court in the second latest finished match in the ATP history (3:19 am). *"I'm really happy because Rafa is a great player,"* Cuevas said after the RdJ victory. *"I came out here thinking I could win, and I knew I had to stay relaxed, which I was able to do for almost the entire match."*

Career record: 232-208 [204 events]
Career titles: 6
Highest ranking: No. 19 (August 2016)
Best GS result: Roland Garros (third round, four times)

Sergiy Stakhovsky (Ukraine)

Born: January 6, 1986 in Kiev (Soviet Union)
Height: 1.93 m
Plays: Right-handed

Сергій Стаховський... There's one special thing about Stakhovsky - his record in ATP finals, he has not only won all four ATP finals (years 2008-10) he took part in, he has done the same in doubles (years 2008-19). It's quite remarkable that he won his maiden title as a 'lucky loser' (Zagreb '08) and another title as a qualifier (St Petersburg '09). The second title was won in exceptional circumstances. After losing the opening set to Horacio Zeballos (shocking participant in the final), the Ukrainian saved six break points in the 2nd set before winning two long tie-breaks, and the match 2-6, 7-6(8), 7-6(7) - he needed to save just one match point in the process. Also with the help of tie-breaks, Stakhovsky notched the biggest win of his life as he ousted Roger Federer at Wimbledon '13 in the second round. Federer was a defending champion so it was an eye-opener, but it made sense because the Ukrainian played the entire match in his favorite style, so attacking the net behind the serve constantly. It was pretty obvious that on a fast surface Federer, who hadn't played for a longer time against a natural serve-and-volleyer, would have some problem adjusting his returns. Anyway he still could have won that match in straight sets if he had converted his chances. Despite such a huge win over a tennis legend, Stakhovsky has never passed beyond the third round at majors, so it's a big deficit in his résumé (played all majors in the years 2010-15). In the past few years, the last player implementing classical tennis style, based on attacking the net, often with a backhand slice as an approach shot.
Trivia: Stakhovsky got his two successive wins in 2010 having defeated **Michael Russell** from match points down (first the did it in Kuala Lumpur, then lost another two matches having match points - second round in KL and first round of his following event in Shanghai), and defeated Russell again, that time in the Moscow first round. He's been drifting between Challengers and ATP qualifying rounds since 2017.

Career record: 176-213 [200 events]
Career titles: 4
Highest ranking: No. 31 (September 2010)
Best GS result: third round (six times)

Viktor Troicki (Serbia)

Born: February 10, 1986 in Belgrade
Height: 1.93 m
Plays: Right-handed (double-handed backhand)

Among three Serbian players born in the 80s who played on the tour for more than a decade, only Troicki didn't advance to the Top 10, however, neither the great Novak Djokovic nor Janko Tipsarevic had a privilege to win a decisive rubber in the Davis Cup 2010 against France in Belgrade; Troicki replaced Tipsarevic, Michael Llodra replaced Gilles Simon, and people could expect a gruelling battle - it didn't happen as Troicki completely neutralized Llodra's serve-and-volley game-style breaking him eight times to clinch the tie with a 6-2, 6-2, 6-3 scoreline. *"This is the most intense pressure ever in my life and to win it in front of my home crowd I think is the best possible way,"* Troicki said. *"I'm lost for words, it's unbelievable."* I'd say that Troicki's style of play reminds me of Gael Monfils - the tall guys who prefer to play in defense, stretching a lot, using a lot of forehand slices for retrieving. In the second half of the 2013 season Troicki was suspended for 18 months for refusing a blood test in Monte Carlo earlier that year. I thought it'd be the end of his career as he was 27 at the time, so the ban meant he'd return to the tour as a 29-year-old player. The ban was reduced to a year though, in the meantime the Serbian accidental hero dropped in the ATP ranking from No. 53 to 847, but when he came back he received a 'wild card' in Gstaad advancing to the quarterfinal. Shortly afterwards he triumphed in two Challengers and much sooner than I'd expected he enjoyed his life as a regular ATP player again. In Sydney '16 he defended his title after a dramatic win over Grigor Dimitrov saving a match point in the deciding tie-break. Quite intriguing is the fact that until that match Troicki had been known as a player losing dramatic matches much more often than winning them, and this proportion changed after the final – in the years 2016-17 he was winning dramatic matches with very high frequency. For the past two years he's been playing more at the Challenger circuit, it will be tough for him to get 300 main-level wins...

Career record: 293-271 [260 events]
Career titles: 3
Highest ranking: No. 12 (June 2011)
Best GS result: Fourth round (Roland Garros 2011, 13 & 16; Wimbledon 2012 & 15)

Davis Cup champion 2010

Marcel Granollers (Spain)

Born: April 12, 1986 in Barcelona
Height: 1.91 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

Full name Marcel Granollers Pujol... I saw him for the first time in the first round of Vina del Mar '08 when he defeated Boris Pashanski (b. 1982), a guy who was embroiled in an alleged betting scam and racist comments, or maybe it was the first round of Acapulco a couple of weeks later when he defeated in the first round **Bruno Rodriguez**. Anyway it was one of the first matches I watched with an Internet stream, I remember it was not possible to watch it on the entire screen. I knew he was 22 at the time, a Challenger guy, so I was surprised with his self-confidence, he looked like someone who had already won many ATP matches. Because of that I thought "Ok, he will be an ATP player soon" (and he was for ten years), but I had no idea that his another ATP event would be concluded with a title - Houston - his just 8th main-level event. In the semifinal he saved two match points against **Wayne Odesnik**, then in the final stunned a heavy favorite James Blake, trailing 0:3 in the final set... Generally a solid player who found an interesting balance between defensive attitude during rallies and quite often attacking the net (he was playing doubles a lot, and it helped him to drastically improve the net-game, even though it was never close to aesthetic delights). In 2011 he won two titles on different surfaces: his title in Valencia is the biggest, he overcame Juan Monaco in the final saving a break point at 1:3 in the 3rd set and losing his shoe at the end of the contest. Lack of flair deprived him of achieving good results in the biggest tournaments (never advanced to a major quarterfinal or Masters 1K semifinal). His most enjoyable, attention creating Grand Slam appearance, he ended up being destructed by Novak Djokovic in the fourth round of the US Open '13; Granollers had advanced there having won three consecutive matches in five-setters, two '7-5' sets in the deciders, being two points away from defeat in both (Rajeev Ram & Tim Smyczek). Since the end of 2019 he's been playing only in the doubles competitions.

Career record: 202-250 [250 events]
Career titles: 4
Highest ranking: No. 19 (July 2012)
Best GS results: Roland Garros (fourth round three times)
US Open (fourth round in 2013)

Kevin Anderson (South Africa)

Born: May 18, 1986 in Johannesburg
Height: 2.03 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

When I saw Anderson for the first time (third round of Miami '08), I absolutely didn't expect he'd be a two-time Grand Slam finalist. I watched his match against Igor Andreev being curious "Who's this guy who ousted Novak Djokovic a round before?" I remember I was a bit disappointed because I noticed that despite two-meter height, Anderson's serve was very average. In a long three-setter (Andreev won 6-4, 6-7, 6-4) Anderson fired just two aces. I thought "How is it possible?" Really strange twelve years later with the knowledge that the South African giant has many times delivered more than 30 aces. Anderson made amazing progress in the previous decade, I'd call him one of those few guys who squeezed career like a lemon. He has improved each and every department of his game. Over the years he was very reserved in showing emotions, possibly he figured out that it's something he could improve too, increasing his chances of winning important matches. During the US Open '17 he was exceptionally emotional, showing fist-pumps in every game he was obtaining points. Perhaps it helped him to overcome difficult obstacles in quarterfinal and semifinal as he faced opponents in more or less 50/50 matches, so the pressure was big. I assume his positive, affirmative attitude helped him a lot in defeating them (Sam Querrey, Pablo Carreno) to reach the maiden major final. He was already 31, without any big title. It seemed like a career-fulfillment, meanwhile in the following season Anderson moved one step further. During the more prestigious Wimbledon, he did something no-one had done before him, and very likely no-one will do in the future - won two titanic deciding 5th sets in back-to-back matches. First he saved a match point before prevailing 13-11 the deciding set against Roger Federer, then in one of the longest matches in history, survived against John Isner after 6 hours 36 minutes 26-24 in the decider! That victory actually placed him as no. 2 in history of South African tennis, only behind Johan Kriek, but in front of Kevin Curren & Wayne Ferreira. It's a matter of discussion, especially comparing Anderson & Curren... Trivia: Anderson lost all twelve matches he played against Tomas Berdych (!) and only three of their matches were concluded in deciders. **Lloyd Harris** (b. 1997) will replace Anderson soon as the best Afrikaner, but won't be similarly successful.

Career record: 342-237 [239 events] **Career titles:** 6
Highest ranking: No. 5 (July 2018)
Best GS results: Wimbledon (runner-up 2018); US Open (runner-up 2017; quarterfinal 2015)

Rafael Nadal (Spain)

Born: June 3, 1986 in Manacor (Mallorca)
Height: 1.85 m
Plays: Left-handed (two-handed backhand)

September 11, 2001, popularly known as 9/11 - memorable date for the Western World, especially for the United States due to a series of four coordinated terrorist attacks which resulted in almost 3,000 fatalities. It's a special day in Nadal's story of conquering the tennis world. He was 15-year-old, and played his first Futures match losing to seven years older compatriot **Guillermo Platel**, who never even won a match at the Challenger level... 6-2, 5-7, 2-6 squandering unbelievable 13 match points! A heartbreaking beginning of a tennis journey for a boy from Mallorca who had been anticipated as a promising youngster. In May that year, in an exhibition match in Mallorca, he replaced his mentor Carlos Moya, and defeated a former Wimbledon champion, Pat Cash (he was four years on his retirement at the time). The loss to Platel wasn't completely accidental, in the first few years on the tour, Nadal didn't show signs of his great mentality. Already in his first 22 main-level events he had lost three matches wasting multiple match points, a set leading 5:1, two matches with the same "6-7, 3-6, 6-7" scoreline, and two matches despite leading 5:2* in deciders. At the age of 18, Nadal conquered his first title (Sopot), but the route to the title was rather easy, a few months earlier he had defeated Roger Federer 6-3, 6-3 in Key Biscayne, so he was rather giving an impression that his potential was big, but the kid didn't deal well in tight situations. If I have to indicate a match which turned Nadal's career, it would be the second rubber of the Davis Cup final against the USA. Nadal faced Roddick in front of a record crowd. Roddick could still realistically think about regaining the position of the best player in the world at the time, he was known as a superior player when tie-breaks were required. Nadal won 6-7, 6-2, 7-6, 6-2, but at the time, based on Nadal's previous results, the last two sets lost "6-7, 2-6" by him, couldn't surprise, especially that at US Open '04, he was

destroyed by Roddick on Arthur Ashe Stadium in their first encounter. *"I think he can be a great champion,"* Moya said about his protegee. *"He's the kind of guy that likes to play these kinds of matches. So I really trust him. I believe in him."* Spain claimed the trophy for the second time, and Nadal was a little hero even though he didn't win a clincher. That victory accelerated his development. In 2005 he won back-to-back titles for the first time (Costa do Sauípe, Acapulco) before losing the Miami final to Federer, despite being close to beat the best player in straight sets again! That final it was more a matter of tiredness than inability to close the matches out. Soon afterwards, Nadal won three European clay-court titles in a row, much bigger than those in America. Within five months he moved from no. 51 to 5 (!) and for the first time in history occurred a situation when a player making his debut in a Grand Slam event, was a favorite to the title! (Nadal skipped the event in the years 2003-04 due to injuries). He lived up to expectations, triumphed in Paris for the first time, and no-one was able (Federer included) to win two sets against him; the runner-up was close, but Nadal fought off a bunch of set points in the 4th set. The new star was born, all tennis fans realised that Federer, who'd established himself as the best player of the past two years, would have a very challenging opponent in the years to come, much better one than Lleyton Hewitt, Roddick & Juan C. Ferrero combined. Even if it wasn't so obvious in May '05, it would be confirmed at the season's end. Following his maiden major, Nadal won two big titles in surroundings different from clay (Montreal on hardcourts, Madrid indoors), in both events having defeated several Top 20 players. Many years later Andre Agassi said about facing the youngster for the first time (Montreal final): *"I've never seen anyone move like that on a tennis court"*. Indeed, Nadal's movement was second to none. Marcelo Rios had perhaps the best anticipation before Nadal, but the Spaniard's athleticism was far superior; the teenage Nadal not only was able to foresee where the ball was going, he could hit winners from positions majority of very good players couldn't touch the ball at all! With his amazing forehand top-spins, played high above the net-court, and unseen defensive skills before, Nadal was labeled "clay-courter". Many people expected that with his style of running all over the place and putting enormous amount of energy into almost every rally, he would be finished at the age of 25 at most, after winning the biggest titles only on clay. Nadal had other ideas, at the time he was trying to become one of the best players in the world in singles, he did not shy away from playing doubles (i.a. US Open '04 semifinal, partnering Tommy Robredo). It was a smart move because Nadal was not only improving his volley skills, he also developed very efficient slice serve on ad-court, essential for left-handers. Although Nadal, as a fresh player no. 2 in the mid 00s, didn't serve many aces, he developed a pattern of easy holds obtaining many points directly, especially on ad-court when right-handed opponents were standing on the other side of the net. He was very modest, saying that Federer was the best, but their mutual meetings were telling otherwise - Nadal was able to regularly beat Federer on clay, but lost to him in their first two Wimbledon finals. Nadal was patient, he kept improving all the details, over the years his serve was better as well as his

volleys and overheads (I consider Nadal's backhand-volley as one of the best shots in history); he adjusted his game to faster surfaces standing closer to the baseline (comparing to clay), and it paid off in the third consecutive Wimbledon final against Federer. Nadal defeated the Swiss after a five-hour thriller in fading lights, despite blowing chances to win it in three and four sets; he tasted the peak of tennis pyramide then, and his dedication was soon reflected in the ATP ranking; after winning the Gold medal at the Olympics in Beijing, Nadal became the best player in the world at the age of 22. At the same time, two younger players marked their high aspirations (Novak Djokovic, Andy Murray), and the year 2008 initiated the so-called "Big 4": the rivalry of four players at the highest level lasting eight years, longer than any other quartet had created something similar before. The year 2016 brought a sudden twist, Nadal and Federer suffered injuries, the Spaniard dropped to no. 9, the Swiss to no. 17. It seemed the end was near, in 2017 though, they both came back to the top while Djokovic and Murray were exhausted & sidelined! Currently Federer is off the tour, so I'd say that the Nadal-Djokovic's rivalry at the highest level already lasts 14 years (!), since Miami '07 when Djokovic defeated Nadal 6-3, 6-4 in their third meeting, suggesting that he would disrupt the Federer-Nadal long time reign, anticipated two years before. Regardless of how it will end, one thing is sure - Nadal's record on clay will be insuperable, especially his mind-blowing thirteen (at least!) French Open titles; when he triumphed in Paris for the 7th time in 2012 it was already astonishing because for many years no-one could even imagine to tie Bjorn Borg's six titles obtained in the years 1974-81; each additional title is beyond linguistic capabilities expressed with adjectives. This year, Nadal turns 35, and he will be an overwhelming favorite to capture another title in Paris, given the way he won for the 13th time last year in the "corona season". The event was moved from May to October, the weather was ugly which caused the courts were slower than usually (Nadal prefers fast clay-courts when his vicious spins do more damage), besides the stands were empty which in theory could made an impact on the Spaniard who had played on Philippe Chatrier court numerous matches in completely different atmosphere... Nothing disturbed him, he jumped over seven obstacles without dropping a set, only Jannik Sinner was relatively close to stealing a set from him - something even the arch-rival Djokovic couldn't do. Nadal has already shown a couple of times that he raises like a Phoenix from the ashes. Not counting a few poor season-ending performances, apart from the mentioned year 2016 when Nadal couldn't win a title between April '16 and April '17, the Mallorcan had suffered a serious setback in 2012 - after a shocking defeat to Lukas Rosol at Wimbledon '12, he didn't play for seven months, and after the comeback he arguably lost to the weakest opponent counting his all finals (**Horacio Zeballos** in Vina del Mar), his haters could prophesy the downhill... amazing that it was eight years ago, in the meantime he won US Open thrice and played three finals in Australia. One thing that significantly changed since Nadal's sensational defeat at Wimbledon '12, it's his inefficiency in the third major of the year. In the years 2006-11 he played five finals at Wimbledon, but none ever since. Nadal's early departures

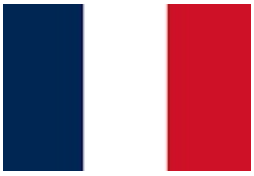
from London were somewhat expected after Rosol's disaster. In the years 2012-17, Nadal didn't even play a quarterfinal on grass in London, but in the last two Wimbledons (the event not held in 2020) he reached the semifinals, losing to greatests players of all-time, thus I cannot be even sure that he wouldn't put himself in a position to play a Wimbledon final again. More or less since the times Nadal's coach, uncle Toni, has been replaced by Moya (2017), Nadal serves better, which is the most important on grass (arguably return as the second most important shot), so if the draw is good, and he wins matches 3-0 and 3-1... why not? For many years, when Nadal was in his 20s he had an aura of the most reliable five-set player. It was changed when he lost to Djokovic in Australia '12, in the longest final in history (almost six hours). Entering the final, Nadal had a 15-3 record (two defeats to Federer, one to Hewiit) and when he levelled at two sets apiece, he celebrated it on his knees, never before or after I've seem doing that at the moment different than winning a match point... he led 4:2 in the decider, but lost the match and his five-set record is only 7-10 since then, his last two quarterfinal defeats in Australia to Dominic Thiem (Nadal's tighest four-set loss) and Stefanos Tsitsipas may worry his most devoted fans. Nadal lost those four-hour matches losing all three sets when both players were relatively close to the finishing line, thus it seems that he cannot do anymore something that he had been known for, namely played his best when it matters the most. In terms of pushing himself to the limit within matches he cannot overcome transcendency anymore facing ~ten years younger opponents. The '00 decade belonged to Federer, the following decade belonged to Djokovic. If the tennis Gods want to be righteous, they should give the Spaniard the edge over two other greatest players. Nadal with 21 Slams, Federer with 20, Djokovic with 19 or 20 when they all are on retirement? Keeping in mind the style in which Nadal won the last Roland Garros, I can imagine this scenario, but I slightly doubt it will end this way. The only trophy which is missing in Nadal's career it's the season-ending title, he played two finals in London (missed the event six times as a Top 10 player). Full name: Rafael Nadal Parera.

Career record: 1008-205 [286 events]
Career titles: 86
Highest ranking: 1 (August 2008)
Best GS results:
Aus Open
(champion 2009; runner-up 2012, 14, 17, 19; semi- 2008; quart- 2007, 10-11, 15, 18, 20-21)
Roland Garros (champion 2005-08; 10-14; 17-20; quarterfinal 2015)
Wimbledon (champion 2008 & 10; runner-up 2006-07, 11; semifinal 2018-19)
US Open (champion 2010, 13, 17, 19; runner-up 2011; semifinal 2008-09, 18; quarterfinal 2006)

Davis Cup champion 2004, 08 (didn't play final), 09, 11, 19
Olympic Gold medal (Beijing 2008)
Masters runner-up 2010 and 2013

Year-end ranking in years 2001-20: 811-200-49-51-2-2-2-1-2-1-2-4-1-3-5-9-1-2-1-2

Richard Gasquet (France)



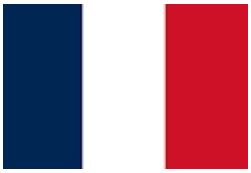
Born: June 18, 1986 in Béziers
Height: 1.84 m
Plays: Right-handed

There were great expectations in France about Gasquet once he appeared in his first main-level event - Monte Carlo '02. In the first round, as a qualifier, he stunned a former French Open semifinalist Franco Squillari becoming one of the youngest tour winners of the Open Era. It'd happened before he played his first Challenger which he won by the way (Montbaun), and soon afterwards at French Open he stole the first set from Albert Costa, who raised the trophy two weeks later! No-one doubted that the boy was exceptionally gifted. For the next two years Gasquet was mentioned many times in the same sentence with his peer Rafael Nadal. They faced each other in an intriguing semifinal in Monte Carlo (after Gasquet had defeated Roger Federer a round before withstanding three match points). Since then, their initially similar path was completely torn apart - the Spaniard became the 'King of Clay', unquestionable no. 2 in the world for a couple of years while Gasquet didn't even become a Top 10 player, he quickly realized that one year younger Novak Djokovic and Andy Murray had a better future ahead of themselves. Quite telling was a fourth round match at Wimbledon '08 in which Gasquet, who had defeated Murray in their two previous meetings, lost to the Scot despite being close to win in three, rather comfortable sets. That match wasn't accidental, it confirmed Gasquet's unstable mentality. His awesome backhand could delight spectators in the biggest arenas, but in tennis there are so many tight moments when mental strength is required - Gasquet was deprived of it. This lack of adding something special cost him even more brutal defeats at the Australian Open in two consecutive years (to Fernando Gonzalez & Mikhail Youzhny). I think those defeats defined Gasquet's future, even though he was just 24-year-old. The year 2013 was the most successful in Gasquet's career - he won three titles and reached the US Open erasing a bit his five-sets demons defeating in back-to-back five-setters Milos Raonic & David Ferrer, especially that second win could impress because Gasquet overcame a streak of five.defeats to the Spaniard not winning a set.

Career record: 548-330 [339 events]
Career titles: 15
Highest ranking: No. 7 (July 2007)
Best GS results: Roland Garros (quarterfinal 2016); Wimbledon (semifinal 2007 & 2015); US Open (semifinal 2013)

Davis Cup '17 champion (he didn't play final)

Gaël Monfils (France)



Born: September 1, 1986 in Paris
Height: 1.93 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

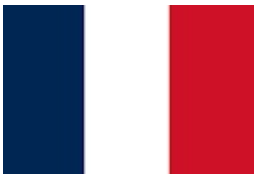
"Every circus needs its clown" - I read this sentence somewhere about Ilie Nastase, the greatest Romanian player in history. Nastase won two Slams and four times Masters, he was No. 1 in the world for a while, perhaps his behaviour prevented him from achieving more, he is one of the greatest players of the 70s anyway. Monfils, the biggest clown of the ATP among born in the 80s, never even played a major final.

From the perspective of French hopes, he's a big disappointment along with another super gifted French kid, also born in 1986 - Richard Gasquet. But their careers were different, Gasquet already as a teenager began regularly playing with adults while Monfils stuck in the junior circuit, becoming one of the most accomplished players under-18 in the entire Open Era. In 2004 he won three out of four junior majors, Viktor Troicki defeated him in the US Open third round. Monfils' transition to professional tennis was smooth; already in his ATP debut (wild card) he reached the quarterfinal in Metz. A few weeks later he went through qualifying rounds in Paris, and in the first round ousted a very experienced, the former champion of the event - Thomas Enqvist. Third main-level event, and Monfils defeated the French Open champion - Gaston Gaudio. It was obvious that the kid had big potential, the future was wide open. I'd risk a thesis that the most important match in Monfils' career occurred actually at the beginning, when he lost to Novak Djokovic in the first round of the US Open '05. Djokovic "stole" Monfils' spirit in that match. The young Serb was dehydrated, he was lying on the court being close to retirement, yet somehow found enormous will to prevail and left the court as a winner after a 4-hour battle despite winning 24 points fewer! Fifteen years later Djokovic has a 17-0 record against Monfils, the Serb has turned into one of the greatest players in tennis history while Monfils will be remembered as a "great athlete" at most. Over the years I became very critical about Monfils. Every player develops throughout his career, one slower, other faster, but Monfils remained very defiant for changing his insufficient game-style. Monfils is known for his involvement in spectacular points that mean nothing at the end of the day. Tennis it's not ski jumping when you receive additional points for the style, the most important thing in tennis (in terms of success) is efficiency, Monfils seems to know very little about this. His so-called great athleticism doesn't impress me at all. Being aware how flexible his wrist is, how he's

able to accelerate the ball, especially from his right wing, I cannot watch as he runs so fast to the ball only to hit it with a forehand slice. He's been giving this impression when he's on the run that more important for him is to please the crowd with his movement than with winning the point. Plenty of sliding, diving, generally all in vain. Boris Becker used to dive a lot, but at the net, especially on grass with a clear intention to win the point; Monfils used to dive at the baseline (even on hardcourt!) when a chance to win the point is maximum 10%, yet the risk of getting injured is much higher. I suppose he's going to lose his status of a seeded player at majors next year.

Career record:	493-280 [289 events]
Career titles:	10
Highest ranking:	No. 6 (November 2016)
Best GS results:	Australian Open (quarterfinalist 2016) Roland Garros (semifinalist 2008; quarterfinalist 2009, 11 & 14) US Open (semifinalist 2016; quarterfinalist 2010 & 14)

Jérémy Chardy (France)



Born: February 12, 1987 in Pau
Height: 1.87 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

He is much better player than his one title would indicate (in three finals), it reminds me of Paul Haarhuis born in the 60s and Hicham Arazi born in the 70s - they all have won just one title, but they advanced to the major quarterfinals (Arazi multiple times), reached the highest ranking around no. 20 and defeated several elite players on the biggest tennis arenas. Chardy [145] caught attention first at Roland Garros '08 when as 'wild card', in his sixth main-level event, ousted David Nalbandian [7] in a five-set match trailing 0-2. Another big Slam win comes from Australian Open '13: Chardy stunned Juan Martin del Potro in five, producing an enormous number of forehand winners (forty-three, by each set: 12-7-14-4-6). No doubt the forehand is Chardy's most reliable shot, evokes the style of Magnus Gustafsson, running backhand around and hitting the ball with a huge swing. At one point of his career, he had an impressive 10-2 record in five-setters, so going for his shots at crucial moments paid off many times when the things got tighter. In the 'best of three' format Chardy has taken two valuable scalps: Cincinnati '12 (Andy Murray) and Rome '14 (Roger Federer from MP down). For many years Chardy was considered as a secondary player for the French Davis Cup team, but due to injuries of a couple better countrymen, he had an opportunity to represent his country in the 2018 final - the last edition in the classical formula, he played only the opening rubber losing it quickly. Trivia: Chardy has never won a set in fourteen meetings against Novak Djokovic (0-33 in sets!, had one set point, in set no. 30) which makes it the most one-sided H2H of the Open Era; the first match and the last one (so far) on Rod Laver Arena, separated by twelve years. They had faced each other once as juniors, and the Serb won it also in straights (6-4, 7-5) in Germany '03. *"The more I play it, the more difficult it is. I feel great but when I get on the court to play against him, it's tough. I wish I could at least do better. He got me into trouble right away."* said Chardy after his most recent defeat at Australian Open '21.

Career record: 284-288 [286 events]
Career titles: 1
Highest ranking: No. 25 (January 2013)
Best GS result: Australian Open (quarterfinal 2013)

Robin Haase (Netherlands)

Born: April 6, 1987 in The Hague
Height: 1.90 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

Dutch tennis suffered a big crisis entering the second decade of the 21st Century. There were four very good players in "golden Dutch decade" of the 90s (Paul Haarhuis, Jan Siemerink, Jacco Eltingh & Richard Krajicek), Eltingh disappeared at the end of 90s, but appeared - generally speaking - a more successful Sjeng Schalken, also **Raemon Sluiter** (b. 1978) and Martin Verkerk made some noise in the first few years of the new millennium. When all guys born in the 70s finished their careers, Haase could be counted as the only Dutchman born in the 80s who was regularly participating in the biggest events. He underwent right knee surgery in May 2009 and was out for the first ten months of that season before playing two Challengers in November, so it's difficult to say how big impact made that injury on his development. One thing is sure, Haase was mentally unreliable; it wasn't so obvious before the injury. Over the span of the years 2012-13, Haase established an infamous record of the most tie-breaks lost in a row at the main-level - 17 - he couldn't win a tie-break more than a year (in the meantime he won two tie-breaks in Challengers & one in qualifying ATP round; the previous longest losing TB streak belonged to **Graham Stilwell** [lived: 1945-2019], who had lost 15 tie-breaks in a row in the years 1972-73). Weak in tie-breaks, weak in five-setters, given just his skills (very good in defense, proper at all strokes) he could play a major quarterfinal, but never entered the fourth round; he could play a Masters 1K final, but played only one semifinal (Canadian Open '17). Both titles he won in Kitzbuhel, back-to-back, his third final comes from Gstaad, so definitely Alpine climate suited him as well as clay-courts. He got some good results in doubles, he's tall & his volley technique is good, but he always had a tendency to construct the majority of points in big defence. At the end of 2019 he dropped outside the Top 100 and very likely he won't come back there. Two best current Dutch players? Both outside the Top 100: **Botic van de Zandschulp** (b. 1995) and **Tallon Griekspoor** (b. 1996). Young men, but not in terms of tennis development on the professional circuit, thus neither of them will have a career comparable to Haase.

Career record: 231-269 [256 events]
Career titles: 2
Highest ranking: No. 33 (July 2012)
Best GS results: Australian Open & Wimbledon (third round 2011)

Andy Murray (Great Britain)

Born: May 15, 1987 in Glasgow (Scotland)
Height: 1.90 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

When I ponder on Murray's brilliant career, I ask myself "how many major titles he could have won if he had defeated Novak Djokovic 5-6 times more". They haven't met for four years, the Serb leads 25:11 in H2H, but what's more important, he has beaten Murray in their all five meetings in Melbourne as well as in both Parisian clashes (all those matches were played in the semi- and finals). The Djokovic-Murray rivalry reminds me of the one co-created by Goran Ivanisevic & Pete Sampras almost two decades earlier. These are two rivalries of players born in the same year (1971 and 1987), in which - at least in my opinion - the one possessing a bit more tools, and the one who also coped well with tight situations at a very good percentage, somehow couldn't find the medicine for his biggest nemesis. These rivalries show how physical and mental aspects are important when two almost identical players stand face to face, the physical one especially in the Djokovc-Murray rivalry. Over the years when they were facing each other regularly, I noticed that the Scot could play on equal terms with the Serb for 2.5 hours more or less, afterwards he couldn't keep at the same level of intensity, whilst Djokovic was always prepared to be involved in punishing baseline rallies constantly for four hours (or longer). It was especially noticeable in their three four-setters they played at majors between Australian Opens 2013 and 2015 (in the meantime US Open '14). In all those three matches tie-breaks were exchanged in the opening two sets, then another two sets meant one-way traffic. Admittedly the Scot found his way to defeat Djokovic in a five-setter once, extremely important for himself US Open '12 final when he raised his first Grand Slam trophy being defeated in four previous final attempts, but the pattern of that final was very similar to those three four-setters: first two sets tight,

they lasted more than two hours, and then Djokovic dominated his peer. The one vital difference - in the US Open '12 final, Murray managed to take both opening sets, and it allowed him to control the rest, he was outplayed in sets 3 and 4, not giving everything, Djokovic had to do so, thus in the decider Murray was relatively fresh, and prevailed 7-6, 7-5, 2-6, 3-6, 6-2 equaling record for the longest final played at US Open, I consider that victory as the most important in his career. *"After the third and fourth sets it was tough mentally for me… Novak is so, so strong. He fights till the end in every single match and I don't know how I managed to come through in the end. It was close to five hours and I've had some really long and tough matches. I just managed to get through."* said Murray, he celebrated that success in very untypical fashion, crouching at the intersection of baseline and doubles sideline... the man at the verge of the world, in that moment he fulfilled his dreams about winning a major title. He reasonably waited for that moment actually four years. At the end of 2008, when the Roger Federer-Rafael Nadal rivalry had already been established, Murray suggested to be a bit closer to them than Djokovic. The Serb had already won his maiden major title (Australian Open '08), but Murray simply seemed to be a better, more complex player in the second half of that season. Between Wimbledon '08 and Australian Open '09, he defeated Djokovic twice, Federer thrice and Nadal once (in the US Open semifinal; I think Murray played in that match the best tennis of his life) which put him in eyes of many not only as a main contender for the title in Australia, but also the future no. 1 in the world... in the fourth round Murray suffered a loss to an inspired Fernando Verdasco, who had then become a national hero clinching the Davis Cup final '08. Murray had to wait four and seven years respectively (first Grand Slam title and reaching the top of the pyramide) for those achievements which had been anticipated from him already when the year 2009 kicked off. As opposed to several players who reached no. 1, to be quickly forgotten as leaders, Murray did it in great & memorable style: the year 2016 belonged to him. It was a year when Federer stopped playing after Wimbledon, while Nadal was struggling with his form and his body (that year he was eliminated from tournaments several times in the rounds when it seemed actually impossible; withdrawal for the French Open third round included). Basically, Murray had one huge rival that year, instead of three, and dealt with him well - the Scot and the Serb met five times, Djokovic won thrice, but the most important match of the year, the season-ending final in London, took Murray... the only time in history happened that a match between two guys decided which one of them would finish the year as no. 1. *"It's a very special day,"* Murray said during the trophy presentation. *"It's been a tough rivalry. I've lost many of them but obviously I'm happy I've got the win today. To finish the year No. 1 is very special. It's something I never expected."* The pursuit of finishing the year at the top was crazy, after US Open the Scot played the Davis Cup semifinal (lost the longest match he ever played, to Juan M. Del Potro), then five events and won them all; the winning streak was extended to the year 2017, being ultimately finished at 28 (his last meeting against Djokovic?) Murray paid the price for the enormous effort of overcoming own physical limitations. He lost the fourth round at Australian Open

'17 to Mischa Zverev; I assume before the match, the vast majority of fans/pundits couldn't have thought that the older Zverev would win one set at least, not only because at the age of 30 he had never went so far at majors, also because of his serve-and-volley style - Murray used to be merciless facing similar opponents... but on that day, his body felt the burden of the previous season, he was one step slower and it made the difference in the end. It was the beginning of Murray's downhill, soon afterwards he lost matches to a few inferior opponents in early rounds (Vasek Pospisil, Albert Ramos). He partially regained his form in the mid-season advancing to the semifinal of French Open (lost there one of the best major semifinals I've seen, to Stan Wawrinka) and Wimbledon's quarterfinal. Following those five-set defeats at majors, Murray's career collapsed like a house of cards. It's been 3.5 years later, and in the meantime he has played just 19 main-level tournaments, thus, more or less the number of events expected to be notched within one season in case of someone of Murray's calibre. There was a period (Spring of '19) when it was possible that Murray wouldn't return at all, after he underwent a surgery to his right hip. He still believes he may be competitive again, but I have my doubts, it's mainly based on his abysmal performances at majors last year when he had no chance in three-setters against Wawrinka (Paris) and Felix Auger (New York). Murray skipped this year's Australian Open and began his '21 campaign with a Challenger in Biella where he reached the final before losing to his peer **Illya Marchenko** [212], not earning a break point...

Career record: 676-201 [245 events]
Career titles: 46
Highest ranking: No. 1 (November 2016)
Best GS results:
Australian Open (runner-up 2010-11, 13, 15-16; semifinal '12; quarterfinal '14)
Roland Garros (runner-up 2016; semifinal 2011, 14-15 & 17; quarterfinal 2009 & 12)
Wimbledon (champion 2013 & 16; runner-up 2012; semifinal 2009-11; quarterfinal 2008, 14 & 17)
US Open (champion 2012; runner-up 2008; semifinal 2011; quarterfinal 2013-14 & 16)

Two-time olympic Gold medalist (London '12 and Rio de Janeiro '16)
Davis Cup 2016 champion
Masters 2017 champion

Year-end ranking 2003-20: 540-411-64-17-11-4-4-4-4-3-4-6-2-1-16-240-125-122

Leonardo Mayer (Argentina)

Born: May 15, 1987 in Corrientes
Height: 1.91 m
Plays: Right-handed

Mayer - the most popular surname in this e-book, four bearers of it with three different nationalities are included. The name stems from the German word "Meier" meaning mayor. Looking at Leo's face, I don't see Germanic features, I had always the impression that his facial features evoke Incas ancestry (?) I don't know anything about his German ancestry, anyway there was a big exodus from Germany to Argentina in the last two Centuries: it occurred during five main time periods: pre–1870, 1870–1914, 1918–1933, 1933–1940 and post–1945. I'm very curious whether his great-grandfather lived in the Schleswig-Holstein state because Mayer has lately been the best in the biggest city of that area (albeit not included in that state) - Hamburg; he won both his titles there (playing 3 out of 5 ATP finals). Especially the first of his two titles claimed was significant because the beaten finalist (David Ferrer) was a Top 3 clay-courter at the time. I like Mayer's second serve, great kick, one of the most efficient second serves I've seen among players born in the 80s. Trivia: Mayer has played the longest singles rubber in the Davis Cup history, defeating **Joao Souza** 7-6, 7-6, 5-7, 5-7, 15-13 after 6 hours 43 minutes in 2015 (first round). Souza (b. 1988) was serving at 6:5 in the decider to be finally beaten on Mayer's eleventh match point (Souza escaped twice from 0/40 and once from 15/40!). The Davis Cup format was reduced to deciding 5th set tie-break, so Mayer may be sure that his record won't be overcome. He has never defeated a Big 4 player (0-14 record combined), but played balanced matches against Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal. Mayer's loss to Federer (Shanghai '14) must have been one of the most painful, the Argentinian squandered five match points (only centimeters separated him to convert the first MP) and left the court in tears. *"I was so disappointed after that match. There was nothing that could make me being a bit less sad than how I was."* recalled Mayer five years later. Mayer is at the twilight of his career, tough to expect anything positive from him in the years to come.

Career record: 179-196 [195 events]
Career titles: 2
Highest ranking: No. 21 (June 2015)
Best GS results: Roland Garros (fourth round 2019)
Wimbledon (fourth round 2014)

Novak Djokovic (Serbia)

Born: May 22, 1987 in Belgrade (Yugoslavia)
Height: 1.88 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

Roger Federer owns Wimbledon (8 titles), Rafael Nadal owns Roland Garros (13 titles), Djokovic owns Australian Open (9 titles). Regardless of the end of their unique rivalry, it's almost certain that the records of most triumphs in those particular majors are reserved for each of them. US Open is undecided: Federer leads with 5 over Nadal's 4 and Djokovic's 3, but five times in New York also celebrated Jimmy Connors & Pete Sampras. I could follow Djokovic's amazing journey in Australia from its very beginning, but didn't do that. I remember that I was disappointed that in the first round of the '05 event, Marat Safin - one of the best players at the time - was supposed to play at night session against a 17-year-old Serb, who hadn't been known even as an outstanding junior. I thought "it doesn't make sense to watch this potentially one-sided confrontation", and the scoreline confirmed it, Safin won 6-0, 6-2, 6-1. The Russian, who finished the event as a champion said about Djokovic: *"The guy tried everything. I just told him he's going to be a great player."* Did Safin really think that the Serb would be great after giving him such a lesson? Djokovic kept improving, but I didn't think he would be great until the American Indian Wells-Miami combo of the year 2007 when he was approaching the 20th year of his life. He came to the United States from Dubai where he lost in three sets to Federer, and had a 0:4 record against the Swiss then, but for the first time in their four matches, Federer needed to be focused from start to finish. Djokovic reached the Indian Wells final, then he triumphed in Miami. What's very important is the fact he won 11 matches in those two events not dropping a set. Already in the first two years of his career on the Tour, I noticed that he was dealing well with pressure situations (for instance, at Wimbledon '05 he won two five-setters withstanding five match points in total, first as he defeated **Wesley Moodie** (b. 1979) in a qualifying round being a point to lose the match in four sets, then in the second round as he ousted Guillermo Garcia-Lopez facing match points in the 3rd set. Later that year, at the US Open he survived a match against another gifted youngster,

Gael Monfils, despite huge problems with breathing and cramping. Those initial years indicated that the will to win was tremendous, hypochondria is secondary (over the years, especially in his youth, Djokovic was many times accused of exaggerating his physical problems) because you never know what goes through players mind and psychological battle is a part of the game, thus until the moment the opponent retires, the player without injury symptoms should be fully aware that lapse of concentration may cost him leaving the court as a loser... So when Djokovic was able to win back-to-back '07 matches with relative ease, I knew how lethal he would be in the future having already proven in the past his mental resistance when the things didn't go his way. I remember his victory in Miami over Rafael Nadal (6-3, 6-4). Nadal had defeated Djokovic 6-2, 7-5 at Indian Wells (their second meaning), thus the Miami win told me another important thing about Djokovic - "he analyzes the game and is open-minded to try different things to succeed". In Miami he was more aggressive from the baseline, and during that win over Nadal, I realized for the first time, how cleanly he could hit the ball from the baseline in all directions, also from quite uncomfortable positions on the court. *"When you play a final nothing is easy,"* said Djokovic after the final victory over Guillermo Canas. *"I played unbelievable tennis in Indian Wells and here. It was the best tennis of my life. I didn't lose a set. I'm always comparing myself to the best players in the world because that is what I want to be one day."* After that victory I thought that Djokovic would be the second best Slavic speaking player in the Open Era, assuming that he was on his way to be compared with Ivan Lendl some day. Today when I'm writing it, I know that Djokovic could be almost certain that he would achieve more than Lendl when he was already 25 (the year 2012). When the season 2009 ended up, it wasn't certain that Djokovic would create the Big 3 along with Federer & Nadal. At the time he was more in the mix with Andy Murray and Juan M. Del Potro. The Belgrade native won one major and Masters then (both titles from 2008), Del Potro captured one major, while Murray claimed just one Masters 1K title fewer than Djokovic (4 to 5, one year younger Del Potro didn't win any then). Djokovic's rise to the pantheon of the greatest players in history, arguably should be counted since the Davis Cup '10 final when Serbia defeated France, and he convincingly defeated two French players, beginning his awesome streak of wins - 43 in a row (46 adding three Hopman Cup matches) before he lost the French Open semifinal to Federer after a dramatic four-set contest. There were seven titles during the streak, including six in big events, two different surfaces (hard and clay). There was no doubt, Djokovic's form would lead him to reach no. 1 in the world, especially that during the streak, he had defeated Nadal four times and Federer twice. The coronation came at Wimbledon, after the semifinal victory over Jo-Wilfried Tsonga, one of Djokovic's toughest opponents in the early years (the Frenchman led 5:2 in their H2H before the Wimbledon match which rewrote their rivalry completely). Appetite comes with eating - for a few years Djokovic was dreaming about reaching no. 1 and claiming the most prestigious title (Wimbledon), once he achieved both honors within a few days, he didn't want to stop, being fully aware that all records of Federer and Nadal

were in his grasp. The decade of 00s belonged to Federer (he finished five seasons as the best player in the world), as far as the decade of the 10s is concerned, I have to say, Djokovic was the best being on the top of the ranking five times as well (in this stats the Serb is better than the Swiss because he began another decade, the 20s, as the best player for the sixth time). Nadal should be considered as the second best player of the 00s (one season finished as No. 1) and 10s (four seasons finished as No. 1). This surreal rivalry between three players is ongoing, Federer and Nadal have won 20 major titles, Djokovic has 18. The Grand Slam events are the most important, so we can compare different data to prove that Federer, Nadal or Djokovic is the best player in history. From my point of view, the statement is legitimate only when they all have finished their careers, and one of them is a leader in this most important category. If you ask me "who's going to finish with the most titles?" I'll reply "Djokovic", but it's nothing new, already a fe years ago, when the difference between them in conquering major titles was bigger, I thought that the Serb had the best cards to finish as the greatest. Nadal seems to be currently limited to winning only in Paris; Federer, if adds another major title (I don't believe in it), looking realistically may do this only at Wimbledon; Djokovic, who is six years younger than Federer and one year younger than Nadal, plays a type of tennis allowing to expect him triumphing everywhere (in Paris, rather only if Nadal isn't the last hurdle; at Roland Garros they have played eight times against each other, Nadal leads 7:1, in finals 4:0). Also one extremely important thing, pondering about chances of winning Slams, it's Djokovic's unique on court mentality, in my opinion the most extraordinary in the entire Open Era. Djokovic has defeated in five-setters all the best guys born in the 80s he played fifth sets against, when they were in their prime. He is the only man to have defeated a player four times in five-set matches, and he did it against both best Swiss players (4-1 vs Stan Wawrinka, 4-0 vs Federer)! It's almost beyond comprehension that three of those four wins against Federer, he manufactured facing match points (twice as a receiver!). Already in 2012 Djokovic stepped onto a territory no-one had explored before him... Australian Open, the last two rounds: 7-5 in the 5th set against Andy Murray (almost 5-hour match), then 7-5 in the 5th against Nadal (almost 6-hour match - the longest final in history). Both Murray and Nadal had great five-set records at the time, 12-5 and 15-3 respectively. In the years 2009-16, Murray won 15 out of 17 five-setters, both defeats when Djokovic was standing on the other side of the net... Djokovic's ability to win "lost matches" is uncanny as well as his ability to win matches when he sniffs the finishing line (he had not lost a match wasting MP for nine years before he experienced it against Marin Cilic at Queens Club '18). Having seen so many matches of the Serb over the years, some of them 2-3 times, I noticed that one aspect of his brain processing is unmatched, namely his ability to switch from a total concentration to a total relaxation (shouldn't be confused with recklessness). Two examples: US Open '11 semifinal vs Federer, Shanghai '12 vs Murray. In both those matches, Djokovic erased match points and defeated very demanding opponents, giving an impression that he accepted defeat, that simply wanted to enjoy the atmosphere of a great match

remaining on the court a bit longer. If I had to indicate a match that has turned him into a 5-set monster, it'd be his QF sensational loss to Jurgen Melzer in Paris '10. Djokovic jumped to a 6-3, 6-2, 2:0 lead against a player who had defeated in their previous two matches, who never played a major quarterfinal. Djokovic should have won that match, but after a four-hour battle he was eliminated by the Austrian, who was in trouble at the end of sets 4 & 5. I guess Djokovic realized then that he overheated, he understood that it's better to be physically/mentally well prepared at 4-all in the 5th set instead of keeping a very high level of concentration from start to finish, being focused on winning 3-0. After that loss, he found a great balance between high concentration from the beginning and controlling the final outcome, keeping in mind the biggest truism of tennis" the last point of the match is the most important". The other very important thing when two players of similar skills face each other is a calculated risk. Djokovic has mastered it, he likes to deliver his second serve with the speed of the 1st serve, but he always chooses right situations, I have never seen him hitting the second serve with full force when he faced a match point - then he goes for his most successful solutions, these are different depending on the opponent though. I've noticed that against his three most challenging opponents he's been applying different strategies: against Federer he's glued to the baseline, convinced that at crucial moments the Swiss will attack the net, so better patiently wait to hurt him with passing-shots; against Murray he's keen to attack the net often, against Nadal he's more focused on accurate baseline shots than against anyone, knowing that the Spaniard must be finished 2-3 times during a rally, so there's no room for improvisation, he knows that the ball will come back to his side after a great shot, and another one or two more shots will be required to finish the point. Head-to-heads: Djokovic leads 25:11 vs Murray, 27:23 vs Federer and 29:27 vs Nadal. Staggering numbers of matches against them all, enough time to figure out what to do to avoid repeating bitter defeats (US Open '12 to Murray, French Open '11 to Federer, '09 Madrid to Nadal). I cannot exclude the possibility that the aging Djokovic will finally start losing matches being close to victory with noticeable frequency, but for now, he's the best example of how to deal with tense moments in all configurations you can imagine.

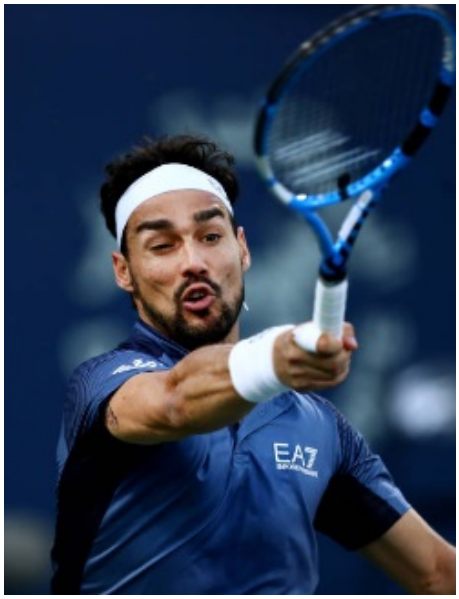
Career record: 943-192 [268 events]
Career titles: 82
Highest ranking: 1 (July 2011)
Best GS results:
Australian Open (champion 2008, 11-13, 15-16, 19-21; quaretrfinal 2009-10, 14)
Roland Garros (champion 2016; runner-up 2012, 14-15, 20; semifinal 2007-08, 13, 19; quarterfinal 2006, 10, 17-18)
Wimbledon
(champion 2011, 14-15, 18-19; runner-up 13; semifinal 2007, 10, 12; quarterfinal 2009, 17)
US Open (champion 2011, 15, 18; runner-up 2007, 10, 12-13, 16; semifinal 2008-09, 14)

Davis Cup champion 2010... Olympic Bronze medal (Beijing 2008)
Masters champion 2008, 2012-15; runner-up 2016 & 18

Новак Ђоковић **Year-end ranking 2003-20:** 679-186-78-16-3-3-3-3-1-1-2-1-1-2-12-1-2-1

Fabio Fognini (Italy)

Born: May 24, 1987 in San Remo
Height: 1.78 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)



I didn't think about him until I watched his 4R match of Roland Garros '11 when he faced Albert Montanes on Suzanne Lenglen court. It's one of the most amazing matches I've ever seen. The Italian saved five match points in the decider being injured. I was shocked due to two factors:
- Fognini was playing shots with enormous risk off both sides not being able to run
- I knew what Montanes was capable of, and this knowledge told me that he was not a guy losing matches being close to victory
For the Spaniard it was also a lifetime opportunity to play a major quarterfinal, perhaps it made him more tense, anyway my impression was that Fognini won that "thriller" mainly thanks to his incredible talent of shot-making. Soon afterwards I analyzed Fognini's results and realized it wasn't accidental. The guy already as an ATP contender - a few years before - had been winning qualifying matches like 17/15 (**Simone Bolleli**), 10/8 (**Lamine Ouahab**) or 11/9 (Alberto Martin) in the tie-breaks of 3rd sets. Actually in Paris, a year before defeating Montanes, Fognini created first attention around himself being involved in a dramatic match on Philippe Chatrier court against Gael Monfils. Fognini squandered three match points at 5:4 arguing with the chair-umpire, the match was suspended 9:55 p.m. The following day the Italian saved one mini-MP at 5-all & 6-all to survive 9-7 in the 5th set... A capricious player, sometimes behaving in a very bad way, throwing racquets, insulting people around, but once finding himself in proximity of winning the match, amazingly tough to beat... I cannot indicate another player born in the 80s prone to such a big fluctuation; he loses 5 games in a row, then wins 6 games in a row, loses 4 in a row... The examples of his three-set roller-coasters are numerous. I will give you some extremes: Santiago '11, Fognini leads vs Thomaz Bellucci 4:0 in the 3rd set, then escapes from 4:5 (0/30) to win 1-6, 6-2, 7-6. Two years later against Monfils (again!) leads *5:0, 5:3 (40/15) in the 3rd set (Umag), only to save two match points with risky play at 5:6 to leave the court as the winner with a 6-0, 3-6, 7-6 scoreline. With that victory over Monfils, Fognini ended the best period of his career when he won two titles (the first two in his career at the age of 26, both on clay), and collected 13 consecutive wins before being destroyed in the final by Tommy Robredo. Two years earlier their semifinal in Santiago ended up in a heated atmosphere, Fognini called his rival "Hombre de mierda", and there was no handshake. Fognini, quite similarly to Hicham Arazi, rises to the occasion. When he

faces a theoretically better player, he plays his best tennis cause the pressure is not on him. Rafael Nadal knows it very well, the "King of Clay" lost four times to Fiognini (thrice on clay!) The last time Fognini defeated Nadal, he won the biggest title of his career. The Italian stunned the eleven-time champion of the event in the semifinal, then defeated Dusan Lajovic in the totally unexpected final (in the first round Fognini was almost eliminated as he trailed 1:4 to Andrey Rublev in the decider, saving five mini-match points then). *"I was preparing for the match as best I can because he has my ex-coach and I knew it was going to be really tough, a lot of running,"* Fognini said after the final. *"[It's an] incredible achievement. I'm really, really happy."* I'm not sure how to explain why Pablo Carreno is Fognini's toughest opponent beside Novak Djokovic. Fognini has lost eight times to the Serbe (at the main-level, once beating him in a qualifying round to Rome '06). Fognini needed constant support from his bench during an ATP Cup tie between Italy and Spain, to recently beat Carreno.

Career record: 370-318 [316 events]
Career titles: 9
Highest ranking: 9 (July 2019)
Best GS result: Roland Garros (quarterfinal 2011)

Mischa Zverev (Germany)

Born: August 22, 1987 in Moscow (Soviet Union)
Height: 1.91 m
Plays: Left-handed (two-handed backhand)

Михаил Зверев

As opposed to his younger and much more successful brother Sascha, Mischa was born in Russia. He moved with parents to Germany at the age of 4... Very good player from a technical point of view, I assume he would achieve much more if he was born ten years earlier to have an opportunity to apply his natural serve-and-volley game on the turn of millennials. After a very promising junior career, Zverev turned pro in 2006 and quickly got recognition as he reached the quarterfinal in Bangkok eliminating two very good players and losing a dramatic encounter to Marat Safin. A smooth transition to the Top 100 could be anticipated in the following year, but it didn't happen, and with passing years Zverev ground to a halt. In 2015, he dropped outside the Top 1000 (!) and then slowly began to rebuild his career at the time when his younger, more gifted brother began to build his own. Hard work was rewarded, as a qualifier Zverev reached the quarterfinal of a big event in Shanghai '16 being within a few points of defeating Novak Djokovic. It was a huge confidence booster which was followed in his another event with a victory over Stan Wawrinka (the US Open champion); the beginning of 2017 marked Zverev's best result - in the fourth round of Australian Open he played a match of his life against No. 1 in the world - Andy Murray. Zverev shocked his opponent with constant attacking and great physical preparation to notch one of the biggest upsets of the decade with a 7-5, 5-7, 6-2, 6-4 win in 3 hours 34 minutes. *"There was no Plan B, really,"* he said. *"I can't stay on the baseline, a couple feet behind the baseline, try to out-rally him. He's very strong physically. He has a good baseline game. I knew I had to come in. That was my only chance to win."* Currently the older Zverev is outside Top 200, given his age, and the style of play, very unlikely to see him in the biggest tournaments again.

Career record: 133-198 [199 events]
Career titles: 1
Highest ranking: No. 25 (July 2017)
Best GS result: Australian Open (quarterfinal 2017)

Sam Querrey (USA)

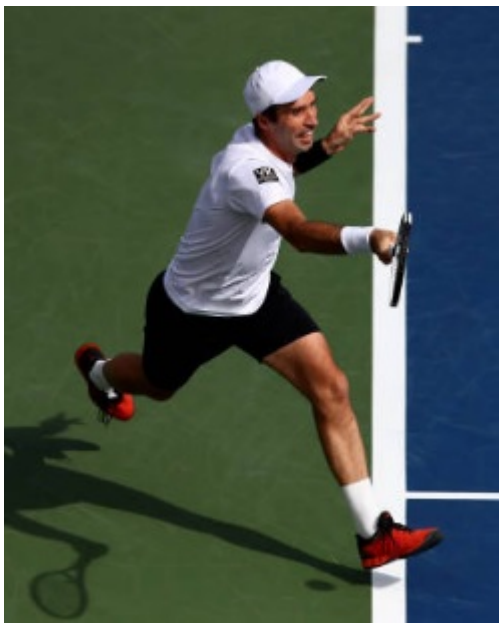
Born: October 7, 1987 in San Francisco, California
Height: 1.98 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

Is Querrey a Marc Rosset of the 21st Century in some sense? I have never seen this comparison so here it goes: Querrey, just like the Olympic '92 gold medalist, is a two-metre tall guy with a big serve & big forehand, prone to beat the best players on a good day. Querrey's biggest upsets come from Wimbledon (in back-to-back editions): in 2016 he shocked the tennis world as he fired 31 aces to beat Novak Djokovic in four sets in the third round. The Serbian was on a record 30-match winning streak at Slams (the first man who won four straight majors since **Rod Laver** in 1969), so obviously he was a huge favorite to win his fifth straight major title. No-one could expect his defeat to Querrey given his four convincing wins over the American (Djokovic had lost to Querrey in Paris '12 though). Yet the American dealt better with nerves in two tie-breaks, the serve didn't desert him. *"It's incredible, especially to do it here at Wimbledon,"* said 28-year-old Querrey, *"I'm so ecstatic, so happy. I played the break points well and every time he had a break point I was able to come up with a big serve."* The following year, Querrey defeated No. 1 in the world on Wimbledon's Centre Court, that time in a shorter match, but in five sets: Querrey destroyed "6-1" in the last two sets the defending champion Andy Murray. Querrey, the 24th seed, reached his first semi-final at his 42nd Grand Slam - a new record. His biggest title (500 Series) it's Mexican Open in Acapulco. The American defeated Rafael Nadal in the final not losing his serve which is always admirable against such an amazing receiver like Nadal. *"It's definitely a tournament that I'm going to remember for the rest of my life,"* said Querrey. *"It's just one of those weeks where I got in the zone and everything was working for me. I hope I can have more like this."* Querrey has never defeated Roger Federer, it's certainly a defect in his activity, yet they have faced each other just four (or three) * times, the truth is Querrey had no chance in all those meetings. Trivia: Querrey is a record holder in number of aces served in a row (10 when defeated James Blake in an all-tie-break match at Indianapolis 2007).

Career record: 374-306 [303 events] * Their last meeting it's Laver Cup '17
Career titles: 10
Highest ranking: No. 11 (February 2018)
Best GS results: Wimbledon (semifinal 2017; quarterfinal 2016 & 19)
US Open (quarterfinal 2017)

Mikhail Kukushkin (Kazakhstan)

Born: December 26, 1987 in Volograd (Soviet Union)
Height: 1.83 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)



There were three ATP players born in the Soviet Union in the late 80s, who represented Kazakhstan instead of Russia: **Evgeny Korolev** (b. 1988), **Andrey Golubev** (b. 1987) and Kukushkin. Among these three who changed nationalities in the years 2008-10, Golubev seemed to be the most gifted (won Hamburg 2010), but Kukushkin has had the most stable career, already extended over fourteen years at the main-level. *"I got invited (by the Kazakhstan Tennis Federation). They give me a good deal in the way of everything and I'm very happy to represent the country. They want to be in the World Group in Davis Cup. They are building new cities, investing lots of money, but most of all taking care of the players. They call you, make sure everything is OK. They give you everything — everything that Russia doesn't want to do anymore."* Korolev described his choice in 2010. *"Unfortunately in Russia nobody was interest(ed) in me,"* said Kukushkin three years later. *"Nobody supports me. Kazakhstan, more than three years ago, they came to me and they just provided me everything, like practice conditions, coaches. I have so much support behind my back."* Kazakhstan, backed up by the Russian secondary force, didn't reach the Davis Cup semifinal, which seemed a reasonable task, but played a few quarterfinals, and once being relatively close to get the final four - in 2015 the Central Asian country unexpectedly led 2-0 against Australia after the opening day on grass in Darwin. It was a time when Korolev was already replaced in the team by **Aleksandr Nedovyesov** (b. 1987), who stunned Fabio Fognini 7-5 in the 5th set of a clincher against Italy in round one.... Kukushkin is a solid player, who may be awkward for guys of the Top 20 when he feels the ball well, once even Novak Djokovic felt efficiency of Kukushkin's moderate, flat and well-placed groundstrokes off both wings; the Serb won their Davis Cup 2016 match after almost five hours (but the last two sets won firmly).

Career record:	167-211 [197 events]
Career titles:	1
Highest ranking:	No. 39 (February 2019)
Best GS results:	Australian Open (fourth round 2012) Wimbledon (fourth round 2019)

Thomaz Bellucci (Brazil)

Born: December 30, 1987 in Tietê
Height: 1.88 m
Plays: Left-handed (two-handed backhand)

The bearer of the most common name in this e-book and the surname, derived from the adjective "bello" (beautiful) he shares with the beautiful Italian actress. In his style I haven't noticed anything beautiful, he based his game style on heavy top-spin forehands and loud grunting. Bellucci, as a potential threat on clay-courts, was first recognized in 2007. In the first quarter of the season he claimed four Challenger titles and played a very good first set at Roland Garros against the two-time champion Rafael Nadal. At the time he looked like a potential conqueror of many ATP titles in South America, multiple Roland Garros quarterfinalist and perhaps a Masters 1K champion. It didn't happen, yet Bellucci was quite close to reach at least one Masters 1K final in Madrid '11 when he led by a set and a break in the semifinal against Novak Djokovic, who was unbeaten since the beginning of the season. Well, those years at the turn of the decades verified Bellucci's mental resistance: he was losing too many tight matches to think about stepping into another level. The Olympics in Rio de Janeiro '16 meant his last chance to make a stamp on his career. Supported by the local fans, Bellucci went through three rounds defeating two seeded opponents, then in the quarterfinal against Nadal, just like in Madrid '11 vs Djokovic, the Brazilian played his best tennis, but only for a set and half, and lost 6-2, 4-6, 2-6. It's the only time in six meetings against Rafa, when Bellucci was close to beating the Spaniard. Also 0-6 H2H vs Djokovic, having won the opener against the Serb three times, once even a bagel (Rome '16). Since the beginning of 2018, he's been downgraded to the Challenger level, and like in cases of other guys born in 1987, who are included to the e-book (Robin Haase, Leonardo Mayer, Mischa Zverev), it's difficult to expect from him something interesting to offer in this decade. **Thiago Monteiro** (b. 1994) is currently the best Brazilian player, he plays in similar style to Bellucci, but rather he's not going to emulate career of the seven years older compatriot.

Career record: 200-217 [207 events]
Career titles: 4
Highest ranking: No. 21 (July 2010)
Best GS result: Roland Garros (fourth round 2010)

Albert Ramos (Spain)

Born: January 17, 1988 Barcelona
Height: 1.88 m
Plays: Left-handed (two-handed backhand)

I remember watching a Casablanca final in 2012. There were two Spaniards, 24-year-old Ramos in his first ATP final and two years older **Pablo Andujar**, in his fifth final. Andujar won the match 6-1, 7-6; I didn't see anything interesting in either of them, just another two clay-court Spanish players among many. Nine years later they are still active: Ramos is 33, Andujar 35. The older Spaniard leads 6:3 in their H2H (10:4 counting lower levels too), has won four titles while Ramos two, but I decided to introduce to the e-book Ramos with big letters of his name because he's been better than Andujar in the biggest events, has distinctively won more matches, but what's more important, he notched two events when could feel that he was a better player than accidental numbers derived from his biography could indicate; namely he reached the French Open '16 quarterfinal, defeating Milos Raonic [9] in the fourth round, and the Monte Carlo '17 final, defeating in back-to-back matches two Top 10 players: Marin Cilic [8] and Andy Murray [1] - the Scot led *4:0 in the decider ending up losing 6-2, 2-6, 5-7; he'd never lost before a match with such a big advantage in a set leading to victory. *"I improved my tennis a little, my backhand a little bit,"* said Ramos after his semifinal win over Lukas Pouille. *"I improved my physical condition. I improved a little bit my mental condition. I also have more confidence. I think there are a lot of things that are going better. It helps me get better results than before."* Rafael Nadal rather brutally verified him in the final. Judging by the "corona season", Ramos' gradual dropping in the ranking in 2021 is quite possible (albeit in the last week of me writing the book, he reached the Cordoba final), at some point next year I can easily imagine him outside the Top 100. He's played three vital matches in Davis Cup ties, Andujar has played two (Spain lost on both occasions). Full name: Albert Ramos Viñolas.

Career record: 222-247 [246 events]
Career titles: 2
Highest ranking: No. 17 (May 2017)
Best GS result: Roland Garros (quarterfinal 2016)

Roberto Bautista (Spain)

Born: April 14, 1988 in Castellon de la Plana
Height: 1.83 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

Full name: Roberto Bautista Agut... a late bloomer. Until 25 he was playing mainly in Challengers, so when he finally became an ATP player per se, it'd be difficult to expect so many titles he has already gathered. Surprisingly he claimed his first title on grass (Hertogenbosch 2014), on the surface he could be the least expected rising a cup. From a player of his height certainly it'd be expected to serve better. In my opinion his biggest asset it's his footwork, generally very important in tennis, perhaps the most important on grass where the ball bounce is lower and you need to think more how to bend your knees, therefore Bautista's semifinal at Wimbledon was less unexpected than his maiden title. Every time when I watch Bautista I have an impression that he moves so smoothly around the court, he must have trained dancing as a kid. His timing is perfect, he always seems to be in the right position to play the ball off both wings. His forehand is a more dangerous stroke (inside-out!), especially when he has more time to play it, then with the same swing he's able to place the ball in every direction, but his backhand is more consistent, mainly cross-court - you can imagine that with this consistency he may exchange "backhand vs backhand" forever. For a few years he was very predictable in terms of his results - good against the majority of Top 100 players, but helpless facing the Big 4 guys. When he finally defeated one of them (Novak Djokovic in Shanghai 2016), he had 0-13 record against them, not playing a decider even once (0-5 vs Federer & Djokovic, 0-2 Murray, 0-1 Nadal). After overcoming the mental barrier, he became one of Serb's toughest opponents, defeating him twice in similar matches in 2019 (Doha & Miami). The same year he helped Nadal to capture Davis Cup for Spain in a new format which broke with the centennial tradition. As a player who doesn't rely on serve, Bautista has lost too many matches blowing match points (two matches of this type lost to Gilles Simon, blowing six & three match points respectively).

Career record: 311-184 [188 events]
Career titles: 9
Highest ranking: No. 9 (November 2019)
Best GS results: Australian Open (quarterfinal 2019)
Wimbledon (semifinal 2019)

Davis Cup champion 2019 (the first edition in a new format)

Ernests Gulbis (Latvia)

Born: August 30, 1988 in Jurmala
Height: 1.90 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

One of the biggest underachievers born in the 80s. I have to admit that at the end of 00s I thought he would be a Grand Slam champion. His groundstrokes were impressive, his serve very fast, the second serve quite often above 170 kph which is highly impressive with a few double faults on average, good execution of dropshots, no fear of playing the best players in the world, and he never seemed to be tired. Unfortunately his mind didn't work well enough. His initial results clearly indicated that he had problems in tight situations, especially in longer tie-breaks (prior to 2013 he had lost all eight tie-breaks when the score reached 8-all). The year 2008 told a lot about Gulbis' potential achievements; he lost in four sets at majors to Rafael Nadal & Andy Roddick, lost very tight three-setter at Roland Garros to just one year younger Novak Djokovic, in Miami wasted a match point in the 2nd set to Nikolay Davydenko who went to win the event, at Queens Club lost to Murray in three sets, in Toronto lost to Jose Acasuso despite a *5:1 lead in the decider, finally in Vienna he lost to Fernando Gonzalez squandering five match points in the 2nd set. He finished the year as No. 53, yet given the way he was dealing with the best players in the world, he would have theoretically finished the year in the Top 20 only if he had won at least a half of the matches mentioned above. He somewhat stuck in mediocrity the following year. The year 2010 seemed to be a breakthrough because he won his maiden title and notched finally consistent results in big events (Barcelona - quarterfinal, Rome - semifinal, Madrid - quarterfinal; in the Masters 1K events Nadal & Roger Federer had to play their best to beat him). He was on his way to the Top 10 when a setback occurred at Roland Garros - he retired already in the first round and the great form disappeared for several years. The year 2014 brought back memories of his 2010 form, Gulbis played well again in Barcelona & Madrid, at Roland Garros he delivered his best tennis (five-set win over Federer in the fourth round, then a destruction of Tomas Berdych). Gulbis played against his old acquaintance (they were training together in Germany as ~14-year-old boys) in the semis - Djokovic - and lost in four sets. It's been a highlight of Gulbis' career. He was 26 year-old at the time, just two matches away from something what in my opinion was within his grasp. Gulbis had a big impact on Dominic Thiem in the first years of the Austrian on the tour. They were guided by the same coach - Gunther Bresnik.

Currently the best tennis player in Latvian history, is close to the end of his career, there's a good chance he will finish with a positive win/loss record though. Gulbis' record in ATP finals was impeccable for many years, he had won all six finals he took part until he was beaten by Stefanos Tsitsipas in Stockholm.

Career record: 245-236 [237 events]
Career titles: 6
Highest ranking: No. 10 (June 2014)
Best GS result: Roland Garros (semifinal 2014; quarterfinal 2008)

Juan Martín del Potro (Argentina)

Born: September 23, 1988 in Tandil
Height: 2.00 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

One of the strangest careers among players born in the 80s. If Del Potro comes back to the circuit in 2021, it'll be his third comeback after a long break: he didn't play almost the entire 2010 (just three events that year), then he was sidelined in the years 2014-15 (just six events in two seasons). His third long break lasts since June '19 when he withdrew from the second round match at Queens Club. The first two breaks were caused by his chronic left wrist injury, the third break because he fractured his kneecap. It's a shame that his career has been tormented by injuries because when he was away from the tour for the first time (January 2010) he was fresh after winning at the US Open and playing a 'Masters' final in the first London edition, he had already beaten Roger Federer (twice) & Rafael Nadal (thrice) so at the time it wasn't so sure that something like "Big 4" could be known for several years, it could be "Big 5" or maybe "Big 4" in a different configuration because Del Potro could have won several times in important events against Novak Djokovic & Andy Murray, and the careers of one year older players could go in a different direction... Del Potro was considered as a potential threat since the beginning of his career with his lethal ground-strokes and amazing movement for a two-metre tall guy. Del Potro wasn't very tall as a young teenager though, his height suddenly increased when he began playing professional events,

and he didn't adjust his gamestyle to his height in terms of the serve. As opposed to other guys of his size who rely on two-shot combo (serve & forehand), Del Potro established himself as a player with one of the most ferocious forehand (a solid serve at most). The year 2008 meant a breakthrough - Del Potro, who was losing tight matches often, matured, cut his pony-tail, became more focused, more reserved in showing emotions, and his potential exploded in Summer when he notched a 23-match winning streak (collecteding four titles and advancing to his first major quarterfinal). Despite that improvement, he was still defeated but the best players in the world. Another breakthrough came at Miami '09 - prior to that tournament, Del Potro had records: 0-4 vs Federer & Nadal, 0-2 vs Djokovic & Murray with a record in sets just 2-28! Then he stunned in the quarterfinal Nadal 6-4, 3-6, 7-6 trailing 0:3 in the decider with two breaks. That victory had double significance, not only did he finally defeat one of the best players in the world, he also did it in dramatic circumstances; it was the second of ten consecutive matches won when the deciding third set tie-break was required. *"I had two dreams this week,"* said Del Potro looking at Federer, after claiming his first (then it seemed unlikely it would be the last) major title. *"One was to win the US Open and the other one is to be like Roger. One is done, but I need to improve a lot to be like you. You fought until the final point. You are a great champion. I'm very happy to be here with this crown, with these people, on this court. This will be in my mind forever."* Nine months earlier, Federer humiliated Del Potro in the Australian Open quarterfinal (6-3, 6-0, 6-0).

Career record:	439-173 [191 events]
Career titles:	22
Highest ranking:	No. 4 (January 2010)
Best GS results:	Australian Open (quarterfinalist 2009, 2012) Roland Garros (semifinalist 2009 & 2018; quarterfinalist 2012) Wimbledon (semifinalist 2013; quarterfinalist 2018) US Open (champion 2009; runner-up 2018)

Davis Cup champion 2016 (won two rubbers in the final)
Olympics: silver medal (2016), bronze medal (2012)

Marin Čilić (Croatia)

Born: September 28, 1988 in Međugorje (Yugoslavia)
Height: 1.98 m
Plays: Right-handed (two handed backhand)

Just like nine years older compatriot Ivan Ljubicic, Cilic was born in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in the same city where **Ivan Dodig** (b. 1985) was born as well. Since 1981, Medugorje has become a popular site of Catholic pilgrimage due to Međugorska Gospa, an alleged series of apparitions of the Virgin Mary to six local children. I couldn't call Cilic's career "miraculous". He was consequently realizing his potential and the fulfillment came at the US Open '14 when Cilic raised a major trophy for the only time in his career. *"This is all hard work in these last several years, and especially this last year,"* he said during the trophy ceremony looking at Goran Ivanisevic, the best Croatian tennis player, who helped Cilic as a coach during the years 2013-16. *"My team has brought something special to me, especially Goran. We're working really hard, but most important from all the things he brought to me was enjoying tennis and always having fun, and I think I enjoyed my best tennis over here and played the best ever in my life."* There were a few youngsters who appeared on the big stage in the mid 00s and showed skills allowing them to expect they would challenge the Roger Federer/Rafael Nadal supremacy. The careers of born in 1987 (Novak Djokovic & Andy Murray) have been intertwined for a dozen of years as well as the careers of one year younger and distinctively taller players (Marin Cilic & five days older Juan M. Del Potro); the first two reached much higher levels, no doubt about it. Cilic & Del Potro became the Grand Slam champions too. Comparing Cilic & Del Potro by the most basic numbers I'd say the Croat has enjoyed a better career thanks to better health, but the first few years didn't indicate it'd be like this. Very telling is their US Open quarterfinal of 2009. Del Potro won it in four sets, took the title and became a serious threat for the newly created Big 4 at the time, Cilic needed to wait many years for his glory. It happened five years after Del Potro's triumph in New York. When Del Potro was struggling with injuries, Cilic reached his tennis maturity, and established himself as a Top 10 player for five years, playing another two major finals (both lost to Federer). Cilic game-style never impressed me, he doesn't possess Del Potro's powerful forehand, but he's been more stable off both wings, especially

compared to Del Potro's older version when he adopted his backhand slice to his style due to problems with left wrist. The Croat improved his serve and the net game with years, it allowed him to triumph in New York (especially his serve down the T was working very well then), always mentally a bit unstable, you couldn't count on him in tight situations, but the good thing has been his ability to forget wasted chances, to be focused on that what lies ahead, thus he won many matches 2-1 or 3-2 he should have won 2-0 or 3-1. One of the most experienced players in five-setters all-time, I can imagine he may win the most five-setters in the Open Era. The next few years he should be steadily dropping in the ranking, but will be still good enough to compete at majors, defeating newmakers and peers.

Career record:	516-285 [288 events]
Career titles:	18
Highest ranking:	No. 4 (October 2017)
Best GS results:	Australian Open (runner-up 2018; semifinalist 2010) Roland Garros (quarterfinalist 2017-18) Wimbledon (runner-up 2017; quarterfinalist 2014-16) US Open (champion 2014; semifinalist 2015; quarterfinalist 2009, 12 & 18)

Davis Cup champion 2018

Alexandr Dolgopolov (Ukraine)

Born: November 7, 1988 in Kiev (Soviet Union)
Height: 1.80 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

Олекса́ндр Долгопо́лов Jr. a son of Oleksandr Sr., who was a professional tennis player for the Soviet team in the mid 80s. The senior Dolgopolov was a coach of young Andrei Medvedev (early 90s), because of that his son was living on the tour, and had an opportunity not only to frequently spend time on the court with the rising Ukrainian star, but also hit some balls from time to time with the best players in the world. It was a fairytale, but the young Oleksandr didn't easily transfer his exceptional experience from childhood into adult tennis. The first few professional years were very frustrating for the talented player with a pony-tail. He needed four years since his ATP debut before he became a regular tour player. In the meantime he suffered for example a period in which he couldn't qualify to nine consecutive tournaments, including a bitter loss to **Sam Warburg** 7-5, 6-7, 12-14 at the Aussie Open '08 squandering four match points. One point away from his first major cost him waiting additional 2.5 years before he played at Roland Garros '10 (reached the third round). That season, as he turned 22, meant his breakthrough. At the Australian Open '11, Dolgopolov was a tournament sensation winning two lopsided five-setters against quality opponents (Jo-Wilfried Tsonga & Robin Soderling in back-to-back matches); in the quarterfinal he lost a tight four-setter to Andy Murray, thus it seemed there was a potential in his game to make some damage in the years to come, it didn't happen though. Dolgopolov suffers from a hereditary disorder known as Gilbert's Syndrome, which affects his liver, blood and often causes fatigue. His condition worsens when he has to cross continents in extensive travel, requiring intravenous drug treatments and monitored diets to get himself back on track. He hasn't played since May 2018, even if he comes back to the tour, it's really difficult to expect he may play an important role. I consider him as an underachiever. He has defeated Rafael Nadal twice in a row, he upset several elite players of the previous decade (Jo-Wilfried Tsonga, Tomas Berdych & David Ferrer). He's been one of the best servers among guys under 180 cm; very quick, flexible, possessing unorthodox style from the baseline, mixing a lot slices & dropshots with big forehand topspin and flat, effortless backhands. A fun player to watch, usually producing more winners than his opponents. Very relaxed, careless, during bad days an error machine, especially as a receiver, never interested to be pushed to deep defence to retrieve plenty of balls... Trivia: Dolgopolov

experienced a 6-1, 6-7, 6-7 loss to Martin Klizan (Brisbane '15) despite winning twenty-five points more! It's a record as far as "best of three" matches are concerned. The Ukrainian wasted six match points (quadruple in the first tie-break, and two more in the second).

Career record:	221-201 [203 events]
Career titles:	3
Highest ranking:	No. 13 (January 2012)
Best GS result:	Australian Open (quarterfinalist 2009, 2012)

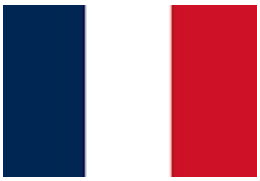
João **Sousa** (Portugal)

Born: March 30, 1989 in Guimarães
Height: 1.85 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

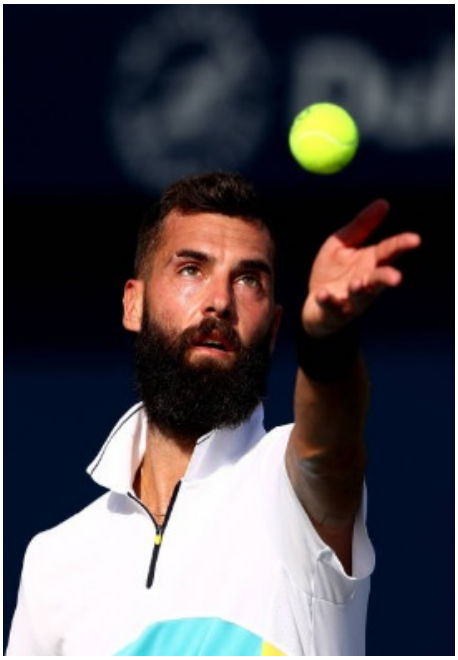
Full name: João Pedro Coelho Marinho de Sousa. The best Portuguese player in the Open Era. Before him there were guys like those playing in the 90s - **Joao Cunha-Silva** (highest rank. 108) and **Nuno Marques** (highest rank. 86) as well as **Fred Gil** (highest rank. 62) - the first man from Portugal to reach an ATP final. It's a bit strange that for so many years the Portugueses couldn't produce a regular ATP player. The weather conditions are very similar to those in Spain, you can train for most part of the year outdoors, they were receiving 'wild cards' in the Portugal Open for so many years (its first edition in 1990), yet no-one couldn't seize the opportunities until... Sousa. He [95] created some attention for the first time at the US Open '13, advancing to the third round having beaten two well established players like Grigor Dimitrov & Jarkko Nieminen, both in five sets. That result certainly helped his self-confidence, shortly after the Open, Sousa reached the semifinal in St. Petersburg and won the title in Kuala Lumpur becoming the first Portuguese who achieved such a feat; he saved a match point in the 2nd set of the final against Julien Benneteau; for the Frenchman it was 9th of ten lost ATP finals which makes him an infamous record-holder. *"I just gave my best, it was a tough shot there, I just went for it and it went it... Tennis is like this, if you don't go for it, you'll never make it, so I just went for it,"* said Sousa about his passing-shot when the Frenchman had a point for the title. *"We both played a great match... He had a lot of chances to win."* Since Kuala Lumpur '13, Sousa has been a regular ATP player, he added another two titles to his résumé. Good fighter, solid baseliner, irrelevant at majors. He has no weapon to threaten the big boys (0-19 record against the Big 4, never being in a position to beat any of them, albeit playing decisive sets vs Federer & Nadal, once against each of them). Rather at the end of his career, tough to expect he may overcome his best results at majors (fourth round) or Masters 1K (quarterfinal in Madrid '16). He's not related to **Pedro Sousa** (b. 1988), the second best active player from Portugal.

Career record: 198-225 [213 events]
Career titles: 3
Highest ranking: No. 28 (May 2016)
Best GS results: Wimbledon (fourth round 2019)
US Open (fourth round 2018)

Benoît Paire (France)



Born: May 8, 1989 in Avignon
Height: 1.95 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

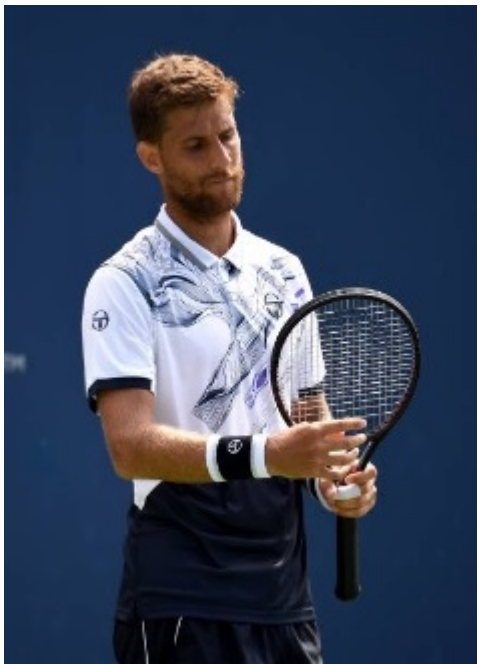


A guy with a big beard, high-collar shirts, rather unconventional style of play and unpredictable behavior... I saw him for the first time at the French Open 2010. I was then in Paris and before entering the courts, I went to a bar for a beer, and asked a guy sitting on a stool *"Who is playing against Olivier Rochus?"*, he replied something like *"Paire, young French guy, he is good."* Paire lost that match, but after a tight four-setter. It was his first main-level match, he played then as a qualifier, ranked No. 216. It's not strange I had no idea about him, before that French Open '10, Paire had been mainly playing at the Futures level. The same year he drew my attention at the US Open because in the first round defeated Rainer Schuettler coming back from a 2:5* deficit in the final set before losing a dramatic five-setter to Feliciano Lopez in the following round. The year 2012 meant his breakthrough at the ATP tour. I think people who wished him well, could expect much more from him at the time, especially after Rome '13 when he played a good match in the semifinal against Roger Federer, having defeated four good players in a row. A couple of months later he destroyed his racquets in quite bizarre fashion, after a third round defeat to Lukasz Kubot - Paire was calmly leaving the court, then suddenly began devastating his racquets with the help of a wall. I am not sure whether it was the beginning of building his image as *enfant terrible*. Colorful personality, with inclination to trick shots, overusing dropshots, extremely moody player, someone who may be hated by people who bet money. You never know what he may bring on court, quite often he gives an impression that doesn't care at all about the final outcome of his matches. One of very few players (I can evoke Gilbert Schaller, b. 1969, as someone thinking the same way) who prefer to hit with his backhand when the ball is slightly on the forehand side.

Career record: 224-242 [241 events]
Career titles: 3
Highest ranking: No. 18 (January 2016)
Best GS result: fourth round everywhere except Australian Open

Martin Kližan (Slovakia)

Born: July 11, 1989 in Bratislava (Czechoslovakia)
Height: 1.91 m
Plays: Left-handed (two-handed backhand)



A man with a big tattoo on his right calf (a cross), in contrast to the four years older neighbour (Lukas Rosol), who has a similar size of his tattoo, and also symmetric shape, yet on his left calf. What they also have in common is the fact they gathered some attention on big stages in 2012: Rosol stunned Rafael Nadal at Wimbledon, Klizan ousted Jo-Wilfried Tsonga at the US Open. I think I can use the past simple in his case despite him being still around - he was a player who seemed to be predisposed to bigger things. Natural left-handed talent to create tighter angles with the serve and baseline shots (especially backhand), being able to survive tight matches - for instance in Autumn '12 he won one of the longest "best of three" matches in history overcoming Mikhail Youzhny (6-7, 6-4, 7-6) after 3 hours 48 minutes. When he raised a trophy in Rotterdam '16 he joined a modest group of players to win a title being one point away from defeat in two different matches - Klizan survived five match points in the quarterfinal vs Roberto Bautista, the following day he withstood three match points vs Nicolas Mahut.... eight in total, no-one saved more as far as this peculiar stats is concerned. *"I cannot believe that it happened,"* said Klizan after the final against Gael Monfils. *"It was my dream to be on the board with these unbelievably great players. It's an amazing feeling. Every day I was just fighting. Most of the time I had three-hour matches every day, so the only thing I could do was fight. In the end I saved so many match points. I still cannot believe it."* The best Slovakian player born in the 80s (second best was **Lukas Lacko**, b. 1987), quite recently he has lost the status of the best player in his country to **Norbert Gombos** (b. 1990), who has participated in the last four majors while Klizan hasn't appeared in any of them since 2019.

Career record: 149-153 [152 events]
Career titles: 6
Highest ranking: No. 24 (April 2015)
Best GS result: US Open (fourth round in 2012)

Kei Nishikori (Japan)

Born: December 29, 1989 in Matsue
Height: 1.78 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

One of the best players of the previous decade; in terms of mental and technical abilities, I put him at the same level as Novak Djokovic & Andy Murray. From my point of view the serve separated the Japanese from the biggest titles the Serb & the Scot collected. Nishikori is also a bit unlucky in a broader sense because with his skills, he deserved to win at least one Masters 1K title or "Masters" (took part in four editions) - unfortunately for him, in the Masters 1K finals he always faced the best guys in the world: twice Rafael Nadal and twice Djokovic. Nishikori had his big chance when he advanced to the US Open '14 final, because in the final he faced Marin Cilic, whom had beaten a couple of times before (also in New York), but that year, the Japanese won very demanding five-setters against Milos Raonic & Stan Wawrinka as well as a tricky four-setter against Djokovic and in the final he run out of gas. Without the bronze medal obtained in Rio, Nishikori could be considered as an underachiever. Nishikori was the youngest titleist of 2009, he joined in some sense Djokovic & Murray (both born 1987) as well as Cilic & Juan Martin del Potro (both born in 1988). At the end of 00s he was the youngest player on the tour along with a few months older **Donald Young**, who utterly failed. Behind Nishikori, for many years no-one younger appeared, who could threaten the Big 4, until Alexander Zverev marked his name in 2017 as someone who would conquer the biggest titles and overthrow the best guys. What I really like about Nishikori it's his ability to control the final outcome. There were many matches when he was wisely calculating that there was no point to fight for a set, or he was quite disinterested in games as a receiver, being focused on saving energy for his own service games. He mastered this skill, because many times he seemed like someone physically exhausted, yet at the end of those matches he was able to deliver his best tennis. Short-time memory it's also something in Nishikori's arsenal I praise a lot, similarly to Murray, he never seemed to be upset blowing a lead at the end of a set; you can usually feel that when they lose a 5:3* (40/30) lead for instance to be at *5:6, the odds to win the tie-break were still on their sides. From a technical point of view, something that always seemed a bit strange to me was Nishikori's return position. He's been putting his left leg in front of him, somewhat blocking his body balance to play the backhand - his great shot, quite often more efficient than the forehand. I only suppose that it's a matter of his early days when his forehand was

much better and the servers he faced were incomparably less hurting to the professional days, and his specific position meant to attack the opponents' serves with a top-sping forehand (the teenage Nishikori was playing forehand with much more spin), and at some point of his development, no-one put attention to change his leg position, giving him fractions of a second to put more balls in play when his opponents serve down the T on deuce-court or out-wide on ad-court. Between Shuzo Matsuoka and Nishikori, there was one Japanese player, appearing at majors - **Takao Suzuki** (b. 1976) with very modest results. Nishikori has initiated much better times for the Japanese tennis, and in the last few years he's been accompanied during the biggest events by: **Yuichi Sugita** (b. 1988), **Yasutaka Uchiyama** (b. 1992), **Taro Daniel** (b. 1993) and **Yoshihito Nishioka** (b. 1995). None of them has been able to reach 4R during Grand Slam events.

Career record:	405-197 [204 events]
Career titles:	12
Highest ranking:	4 (March 2015)
Best GS results:	Australian Open (quarterfinals 2012, 2015-16 & 2019) Roland Garros (quarterfinals 2015, 17 & 2019) Wimbledon (quarterfinals 2018-19) US Open (runner-up 2014; semifinalist 2016 & 2018)

Olympic Bronze medalist (Rio 2016)

...Born in the 90s...

Guido Pella (Argentina)

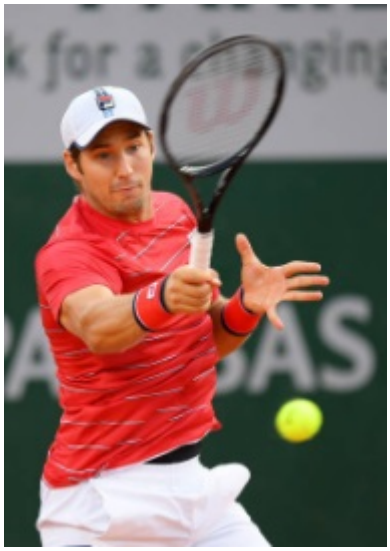
Born: May 17, 1990 in Bahia Blanca
Height: 1.82 m
Plays: Left-handed (two-handed backhand)

The second/third best Argentinian player born in the 90s beside Diego Schwartzman & Federico Delbonis (Pella has had his highest ranking better than Delbonis and at majors advanced further). Pella needed to work hard in Challengers to become a Top 100 player who can compete in the Grand Slam events. It happened when he was 23. Another two years meant drifting between Challengers & main-level events, and finally at the age of 26 he made his breakthrough reaching a final in Rio de Janeiro. Before it happened, I had seen him for the first time in the second round of the Australian Open '16 when he was involved in a very tight match against Feliciano Lopez. The Spanish veteran ultimately prevailed 7-6, 6-7, 7-6, 6-7, 6-4 after 4 hours 31 minutes. Lopez fired 42 aces, and lost his serve four times. It was just the second match in the Australian Open history featuring four tie-breaks in a five-set encounter: in 1993 Richard Fromberg defeated (b. 1968) **Markus Zoecke** 7-6, 6-7, 7-6, 6-7, 6-3 (one of the tallest matches of the 90s at Slams, both ~196 cm). Pella had lost his first four ATP finals before claiming a title in Sao Paulo '19. *"I couldn't believe it. That forehand usually, on this surface, doesn't go in because of the altitude. I hit it not so clean,"* Pella said. *"But today was my day, it was in and I couldn't believe it. After five finals, it was time that I won the match. I didn't know what to say, what to think. It was a very emotional moment for me. I'm not used to crying a lot and today was unbelievable."* A few months later he unexpectedly advanced to the Wimbledon quarterfinal ousting two big servers, former finalists of the event (Kevin Anderson & Milos Raonic). He's already ~31, so I assume the 2019 season would remain his best.

Career record: 112-122 [116 events]
Career titles: 1
Highest ranking: 20 (August 2019)
Best GS result: Wimbledon (quarterfinalist 2019)

Dušan Lajović (Serbia)

Born: June 30, 1990 in Belgrade (Yugoslavia)
Height: 1.82 m
Plays: Right-handed



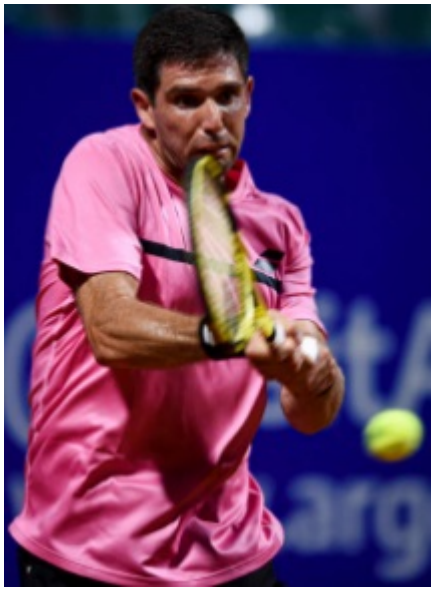
Душан Лајовић

When he had a privilege to play a clincher of the Davis Cup final 2013, I thought it would be a highlight of his career. He was already 23, known as a Challenger guy, who unexpectedly joined the team due to a ban of Viktor Troicki and an injury of Janko Tipsarevic. Lajovic lost "the match of his life" badly to Radek Stepanek, but perhaps that experience of taking part in something much above his daily routine, worked as a quick self-confidence booster. *"Right now I'm of course very disappointed,"* said Lajovic after the final. *"This match was not just a match in my personal career but a match for my team, for my nation, and now I feel really disappointed that I lost. I was trying to give my best."* Lajovic became a regular ATP player in 2014, and after many years of playing in the shadow of his great compatriot Novak Djokovic, experienced a fantastic week in Monte Carlo 2019 - advanced to the final not dropping a set, defeating en route to the final a clay-court prince - Dominic Thiem and Daniil Medvedev (from 1:5 in the 1st set), who had eliminated Djokovic a round before and a few months later turned into one of the best players in the world. Lajovic is a solid baseliner, mixing topspin backhands with slices in similar proportions which makes this wing stronger in my opinion. With his height the serve should be better, also mental resistance cannot be considered as his virtue (poor 2-10 record in five-setters). *"I'm an architect, which is like [a] 90 per cent introverted person,"* Lajovic said about his personality test based off the work of Carl Jung. *"All the persons with this personality are scientists or professors or stuff like that. There are not so many athletes. So with my personality, it's weird being a professional athlete. But I think it came out great. I'm really grateful that I'm able to do the job that I love since I was a kid."* Lajovic has very similar career to his two years younger compatriot **Filip Krajinovic** (b. 1992, record: 84-80); they both have played one Masters 1K final (Krajinovic at Paris-Bercy '17), but Lajovic has at least won his maiden title and contributed to the ATP Cup triumph which puts him in front of Krajinovic (three lost finals). Both very calm, reserved guys, mentally not prepared to make some noise at majors.

Career record: 137-170 [158 events] ATP Cup '20 champion (4-2 in singles)
Career titles: 1
Highest ranking: 23 (April 2019)
Best GS result: Australian Open (fourth round 2021); Roland Garros (fourth round 2014)

Federico Delbonis (Argentina)

Born: October 5, 1990 in Azul
Height: 1.90 m
Plays: Left-handed (two-handed backhand)



As far as the Open Era is concerned, the Argentinians produced every decade either Grand Slam champions, or guys who made a big impact on the most important events. There is a great champion Guillermo Vilas (born in the 50s) and one of the best players born in the 80s Juan Martin del Porto. Between them many distinctive names, and finally Argentinian tennis reached its crisis looking at the guys born in the 90s, the crisis not so severe like in Sweden, rather something similar to the one of the US tennis. Two best Argentinians born in the 90s are arguably Delbonis & Diego Schwartzman. The latter enjoys a better career despite the fact a much taller Delbonis had theoretically bigger potential and more noticable results turning 20. In my mind Delbonis' tennis is so dull: perhaps the highest ball toss in the 21st Century, decent shots off both wings, but absolute lack of finesse. When Delbonis reached the Hamburg '13 final having defeated Roger Federer in two tie-breaks, it seemed it'd be a turning point in his career. Nothing like this happened, Delbonis quickly returned to his position of a regular ATP player, who is supposed to lose in the first week of Slams. His career would be considered as a total failure without the Davis Cup '16 final. Del Potro made the main job in the entire edition, and Delbonis didn't waste everything Del Potro worked out, playing the clincher against Croatia (Ivo Karlovic). On that day everything clicked for Delbonis, he converted all his break points and defeated the Croatian giant easier than anyone could expect at indoor conditions. *"We played with our heart and tried to do the best,"* said Delbonis. *"This is amazing."* He has showed many times that dramatic moments don't favor him, so tight 4-set or 5-set defeats may be expected to the end of his career. Last year I was watching his five-hour marathon against Juan Ignacio Londero in an all-Argentinian duel held during heavy rain. In the 5th set Delbonis saved a match point at 8:9* with total calmness, like a mental giant, then wasted own MP sending Londero's casual second serve long, and lost 4-6, 6-7, 6-2, 6-1, 12-14: this is tennis... truism.

Career record: 131-155 [154 events]
Career titles: 2
Highest ranking: 33 (May 2016)
Best GS result: Australian Open (third round 2016)

Davis Cup champion 2016 (won clincher)

Jerzy Janowicz (Poland)

Born: November 13, 1990 in Łódź
Height: 2.04 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

There are three players who could give professional tennis much more, but they didn't due to injuries and premature retirement: Martin Verkerk, Joachim Johansson & Janowicz. Each of them needed to play many Challengers before becoming a regular ATP player, each of them needed to work hard to add something extra to the lethal service to increase chances of competing at the highest level; in Verkerk's case it was his backhand, Johansson's forehand & Janowicz's dropshots. The 22-year-old Pole shocked the tennis world as a qualifier in Paris-Bercy '12. He brought a novelty because before him, overusing dropshots had been associated with grinders without powerful serve, who simply needed them to change the pace of monotonous rallies. Seven months later Janowicz shocked again, that time at Wimbledon, taking advantage of a favorable draw in his advancement to the semifinal. During those seven months between these two great results, Janowicz was decoded. I assume there are two things players (or their coaches) realized:
1) because of his overused dropshots, a position closer to the baseline during rallies was required against him
2) his serve was exceptionally fast, but predictable; those bombs mainly towards the middle of the court, especially on ad-court ...and when many fans could expect from Janowicz breaking to the Top 10, he bagan frequently ending tournaments as a first round loser, in 2014 he lost nine consecutive matches which is quite staggering regardless of the two things mentioned above, because he still had very good flat ground-strokes and good touch at the net (both parents were volleyballers). Instead of trying to find new solutions, Janowicz was blaming everything around except his intellectual limitations. He began struggling with injuries at the beginning of 2016, significantly dropped in the ATP ranking, came back to Challengers where he was able to lose matches against theoretically much inferior opponents and virtually finished his career at the age of 27.

Career record: 102–95 [85 events]
Career titles: 0
Highest ranking: No. 14 (August 2013)
Best GS result: Wimbledon (semifinalist 2013)

David Goffin (Belgium)

Born: December 7, 1990 in Rocourt
Height: 1.79 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

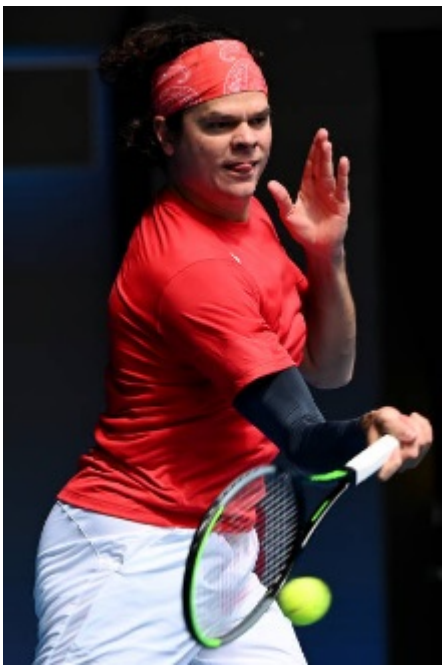
Goffin is a very good example for skinny, not tall youngsters who dream about becoming tennis stars. He proved in the previous decade, dominated by tall, well-built guys, there was still a place in the elite for someone gifted who reminded a polite high-school boy. The 22-year-old Goffin looked like a teenager when he made his breakthrough at Roland Garros '12. The Belgian advanced to the fourth round as a 'lucky loser' (replaced Gael Monfils) and met his childhood idol in the last 16 - Roger Federer; instead of an expected beatdown, Goffin was two points away from leading two-sets-to-love. *"I had his photos and posters in my room,"* said Goffin on Federer. *"Since I was very young, I watched him play on television. For me, for a long time, he plays near-perfect tennis, with perfect technique. And I also like him in human terms."* Federer replied joking *"I hope he didn't have my posters naked."* Since that tournament, Goffin has been a regular ATP player, one of those solid Top 20 guys, who are very skilful and even though they lose to the best players in the world, they can sometimes threaten them. Goffin has beaten Novak Djokovic, Rafael Nadal & Federer; he has never done this against Andy Murray in their six official meetings, but the Scot left the court as a loser too, in an exhibition event (Abu Dhabi '17) when had won five tournaments in a row! In the years 2015 and 2017, Goffin, being backed up by **Steve Darcis** (b. 1981; two titles) introduced Belgium twice to the Davis Cup finals and won opening rubbers there. The team captain, **Johan van Herck** (b. 1974: best result as a player - almost 4R at French Open '98) did a great job encouraging his younger compatriots like crazy, clapping and leaving his chair after ever point they played. A few week before the second Davis Cup final, Goffin lost the 'Masters' final in London to Grigor Dimitrov. Perhaps he has two-three good years ahead, and with luck on his side, he may win one Masters 1K title and advance to a major semifinal. He was in a slump since last year's Australian Open though, ended with Montpellier '21 title.

Career record: 285-185 [184 events]
Career titles: 5
Highest ranking: No. 7 (November 2017)
Best GS results: Australian Open (quarterfinalist 2017)
Roland Garros (quarterfinalist 2017)

Masters runner-up 2017

Milos Raonic (Canada)

Born: December 27, 1990 in Titograd (Yugoslavia)
Height: 1.96 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)



In my opinion Miloš Raonić (Montenegrin heritage through his parents) has pushed his career to the limits. Quite often in my mind, I was comparing him to another very tall player born in 1990 - Jerzy Janowicz. I think that the Pole was playing all the basic strokes better (except the serve, but the speed was quite comparable), yet his achievements are nowhere near to Raonic's. The Canadian was a big thinker on-court, and supposedly off-court too. He was changing coaches like gloves trying to find the right solutions to add something new to his rather boring game. In short: he has done everything he could to achieve more than was anticipated from him judging by his technical skills. In my eyes, a one-dimensional player, a serve-bot as some people labelled him on the Internet. When he made his breakthrough in 2011, I was carefully watching him, seeing a potential to do some damage against the Big 4 (and indeed, his initial H2H record against Andy Murray had been very optimistic - 3:1 before the clever Scot figured out how to increase his chances of breaking Raonic's serve and took another eight meetings). I had noticed that Raonic based his service games on a pattern of increased focus in crucial moments, as he was trailing 0/30 or 15/40 for instance. In those moments, serving on deuce-court he could go with a higher percentage of the 1st serve in, usually out-wide (cautiously, yet uncomfortably for the receiver): if it hadn't given him the point directly, he would have played inside-out forehand as a response to the opponent's average return. So he was running his backhand around a lot because it's been a very poor shot in his repertoire, perhaps worse than the one of John Isner. My intuitive assumption is that Raonic had a good ratio of games won facing break points, something opposite to Janowicz, who was very impatient, and in his case facing a breakpoint meant the loss of the game in 3 out of 4 games (quite often in a consequence of a double fault), I guess. The brainy Raonic hired coaches who should have helped him to improve his baseline game as well as those who were responsible for the net-game. This combination of trying different things paid dividends in Raonic's best year - 2016; he advanced to the Wimbledon final defeating the event's legend (Roger Federer in five sets) in the semifinal, and the last four at Masters when he lost one of the longest "best of three" matches in history, concluded in a dramatic tie-break vs Murray (7-5, 6-7, 6-7 after 3 hours 38 minutes).

Career record:	368-172 [181 events]
Career titles:	8
Highest ranking:	No. 3 (November 2016)
Best GS results:	Australian Open (semifinalist 2016; quarterfinal 2015, 17, 19-20) Roland Garros (quarterfinalist 2014) Wimbledon (runner-up 2016; semifinal '14; quarterfinal 2017-18)

Grigor Dimitrov (Bulgaria)

Born: May 16, 1991 in Haskovo
Height: 1.91 m
Plays: Right-handed

Григор Димитров

February 2009: Dimitrov was proclaimed "new Federer". The 18-year-old Bulgarian [478] as 'wild card' defeated Tomas Berdych [23] in the Rotterdam first round, and in the second round he played a 2.5 hour match against Rafael Nadal, who finished the previous season as the best player in the world. There were many similarities between Dimitrov and Federer: both Wimbledon junior champions at 17 years-old (Federer '98, Dimitrov '08), both with natural talent to effortlessly play all basic strokes, both using Wilsons (Dimitrov's service motion looked like an unashamed copy of Federer's serve), finally the Rotterdam connection - actually people began talking about Federer as a huge talent after he reached (in his fifth main-level event) the quarterfinal in the Netherlands '09 where he lost in three sets to the best player at the time - Yevgeny Kafelnikov, while Dimitrov notched his barely second main-level event in Rotterdam. Both Federer and Dimitrov, despite showing great potential as boys, needed some time to make a transition from Challengers to the ATP tour, but the first few years of Dimitrov's career clearly indicated he wouldn't achieve even a small percentage of Federer's successes. There were two things that separated them: serve and backhand. Dimitrov wasn't able to hold so comfortably, and his inclination to keep the ball in play with backhand slice was huge - backhand slice it's an efficient shot as long as you face impatient offensive baseliners, the guys like Juan Martin del Potro, Marin Cilic or Tomas Berdych. The Bulgarian has beaten each of them a few times, but holds a negative record overall. Dimitrov was regularly losing to the Big 4 guys, also notched a 1-5 H2H vs David Ferrer, who was among Top 5 players at the time when Dimitrov was improving his

tennis. With passing years he stepped out of Federer's shadow, developing his own style, changing his technique a bit and displaying amazing flexibility (the only department in which I praise him more). The 2014 season allowed to expect that to some degree at least he'd fulfill his talent - he won three titles on three different surfaces (hard, clay, grass) and reached the Wimbledon semifinal where played a very balanced four-setter against the eventual champion Novak Djokovic (Dimitrov defeated Murray twice in those events). This what could be perceived as Dimitrov's destiny in 2015, happened two years later, in 2017. He began and finished that year with titles. In the meantime he won his lone Masters 1K title (Cincinnati). In both his biggest titles to date (Cincy & London-Masters), Dimitrov enjoyed favorable draws, he escaped from facing the Big 4 guys. It was an open period in men's tennis considering the previous decade because after Wimbledon '17, the guys who dominated the entire 2016 season (Murray, Djokovic) were spent and pulled out for several months. In London, in his only appearance among the best eight players of the season, Dimitrov avoided matches against his toughest opponents (Nadal, Federer - he had 1-16 record combined against them) thanks to his final opponent, David Goffin who ousted them both. Lucky triumph, but let's say deserved through the prism of his indubitable talent and showmanship. That title reminded me of Manuel Orantes' Masters success in Houston '76 - the best three players at the time (Bjorn Borg, Ilie Nastase and Jimmy Connors) withdrew. Djokovic & Murray were sidelined when Dimitrov enjoyed his biggest success, Nadal played just one match before withdrawing from the event due to injury.

Career record:	328-214 [220 events]
Career titles:	8
Highest ranking:	3 (November 2017)
Best GS results:	Australian Open (semifinalist 2017; quarterfinal 2014, 18, 21) Wimbledon (semifinalist 2014) US Open (semifinalist 2019)

Pablo Carreño (Spain)

Born: July 12, 1991 in Gijon
Height: 1.88 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

Full name: Pablo Carreño Busta... In a broader tennis world, Carreno created attention around himself for the first time in the year 2013 when he notched a 39-matches winning streak (all wins on clay)! Admittedly 35 of them at the Futures level (seven titles between January & March), then went through qualifying rounds in Casablanca to be easily beaten in the second round by Kevin Anderson, paradoxically a player who at the time had almost non-existent clay experience. I noticed some similarities between Carreno and Juan Carlos Ferrero then:

- double R in the surnames
- both dark blonde hair
- similar game-styles, based on solid ground-strokes off both wings
- impressive run ended in Casablanca (in 1999, Ferrero won 24 matches in a row, 19 at the Satellite circuit, before losing in the Casablanca semifinal, his first main-level tournament).

The main difference: Carreno was almost three years older in "his Casablanca" than Ferrero in "his own" 14 years before, so obviously I couldn't assume that Carreno's career would be compared on equals terms with Ferrero's in the future. In some sense Carrerno appeared on the ATP tour, soon after Ferrero's retirement, exchanged him. "Mosquito" played his last tournament in Valencia '12... but five years later he made his doubles cameo in Barcelona partnering... Carreno. Anyway, at the end of 2013, I expected that Carreno - along with Vasek Pospisil - could be a man to watch in the rest of the decade; that year they both became new Top 100s. Carreno has enjoyed much better career than Pospisil, especially the year 2017 was successful - Carreno advanced to the quarterfinal at French Open (very dramatic 4R win over Milos Raonic, on 7th match point) and the semifinal of the US Open (as No. 19, Carreno took advantage of unusually beneficial draw defeating in back-to-back matches guys ranked: 308-225-115-69-33 respectively). These two big results allowed him to take part in the season-ending event in London as an alternate. He finished the season with a 1-8 record though, following the UO semifinal loss to... old acquaintance - Anderson. To me it was pretty clear that he reached his limits at the time... The past few years have actually confirmed it, but at the last US Open, played without spectators, he was in the last four again, and even led 2-0 in sets against Alexander Zverev.

Career record: 196-168 [166 events]
Career titles: 4
Highest ranking: 10 (September 2017)
Best GS results: Roland Garros (quarterfinalist 2017)
US Open (semifinalist 2017 & 2019)

Tennys Sandgren (USA)

Born: July 22, 1991 in Gallatin, Tennessee
Height: 1.88 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

Sandgren plays quite interesting tennis; most of the time it looks heavy, especially with inside-out forehands, but he's very fast for a guy with muscular body & he's able to improvise a lot. Sandgren's career is actually defined by two Australian Open successful appearances: as a Challenger guy he reached the quarters in 2018 (having destroyed i.a. the former champion Stan Wawrinka, who was returning after a six-month break) and last year for the second time he reached that stage with low ranking (no. 97 three years ago, no. 100 last year); the previous similar achievement - German **Alexander Popp** (b. 1976), who reached two quarterfinals at Wimbledon being ranked no. 114 (in 2000) and no. 198 three years later. Prior to the Australian Open 18, thirteen times Sandgren tried to qualify for a Grand Slam tournament, and always failed. At the Australian Open, he had never even made it to the final round of qualifying in his five previous attempts. *"Losing in qualies is awful,"* Sandgren said. *"It's one of the worst experiences I've had professionally, and I've had it a lot of times."* Last year he almost shocked the tennis world on Rod Laver Arena, he had seven match points to beat Roger Federer. *"I'm just holding on like on a raft in the middle of the ocean,"* Sandgren said about the loss. *"I don't take losses particularly well in general, that one being extremely difficult."* In terms of the game style he reminds of another American player, **Steve Johnson** (b. 1989, four titles, record: 169-169) - they faced each other in Sandgren's first ATP final (Houston '19) and the older American won it in three sets. He's a late bloomer, physically powerful, so maybe a few years on the Tour ahead of him and some good matches on hardcourts from time to time against superior opposition.

Career record: 40-58 [59 events]
Career titles: 1
Highest ranking: 41 (January 2019)
Best GS result: Australian Open (quarterfinal 2018 & 20)

Márton Fucsovics (Hungary)

Born: February 8, 1992 in Nyíregyháza
Height: 1.88 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

I don't know anything about his Yugoslavian ancestry, but his surname cleary indicates me that one of his forebears was called "Vučović".

Lengyel, magyar – két jó barát,
Együtt harcol s issza borát...

...there's saying in his Uralic language about an alleged Polish-Hungarian brotherhood. It has mainly political connotations, but I see it makes sense in tennis although it's been never used in this context. I mean both Hungarians and Poles waited a very long time (almost forty years) for a main-level title in men's tennis. In Polish tennis nobody won such a title between 1982 (Wojtek Fibak) and 2019 (Hubert Hurkacz) while in Hungarian tennis nobody between 1982 (Balazs Taroczy) and 2018 (Fucsovics). *"When I was young, it seemed so easy to play tennis, to travel, to win the matches,"* said Fucsovics, recalling his youth. *"It was easy. I wasn't hesitating at all. I was successful in tennis, I love to play tennis. It was a quick decision."* The young Fucsovics moved to Germany seeking better opportunities to develop than the native country could offer, and became the best junior in the world, winning a Wimbledon '10 title among others. The transition from the Challenger tour to the main-one wasn't easy though, he spent a few years before obtaining transitional results at the age of 25. At the end of 2017, when he was approaching the Top 100, he lost a three-hour thriller to [4] Marin Cilic 6-7, 7-5, 6-7 in Basel, and it improved his self-esteem. He began the following season reaching the fourth round at Australian Open where he was eliminated by Roger Federer, who'd helped him a year before, inviting to train together in Switzerland. Fucsovics' been a regular Tour player ever since, he's very reserved in showing emotions, unimpeachable in terms of physical preparation and technical skills. Since the beginning of 2020, he has defeated seeded players in all majors he took part in: Denis Shapovalov (Australia), Grigor Dimitrov (USA), Daniil Medvedev (France) and Stan Wawrinka (Australia) after the match of his life, 11/9 in the fifth set tie-break; it lasted four hours, the Hungarian saved a triple match point.

Career record: 86-83 [76 events]
Career titles: 1
Highest ranking: No. 31 (March 2019)
Best GS result: Australian Open (fourth round 2018, 20)
Roland Garros (fourth round 2020)

Nikoloz Basilashvili (Georgia)

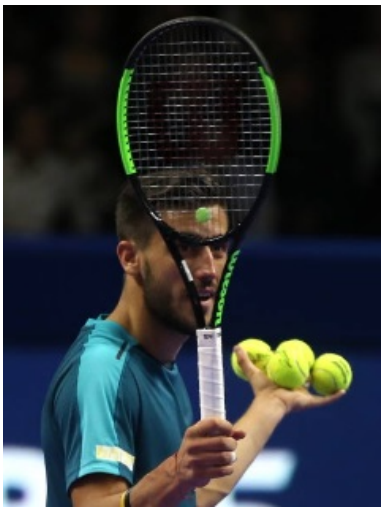
Born: February 23, 1992 in Tibilisi
Height: 1.85 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

The son of a ballet dancer. Before Basilashvili's appearance, there were two successful players born in the Gerogian capital (**Alexander Metreveli** - Wimbledon '73 runner-up) and **Teymuraz Gabashvili** (French Open fourth round twice), but they both represented the Soviet Union and Russia respectively. So in some ways it's legitimate to say that he's the first "real" Georgian inside the tennis saloons. As a 15-year-old boy he moved with his family to the United States (Sacramento) where he spent four years. Basilashvili, similarly to the older compatriot Gabashvili, considered playing under the Russian flag, but ultimately decided to represent Georgia. Very serious guy, never smiles on the court; he gives an impression he respects no-one. The years 2018-19 were very good for him, he claimed three titles, and what's more intriguing, all three at the ATP 500 level (twice in Hamburg). *"What a match today. I'm extremely tired, I played seven matches. I literally gave, in every match, my heart,"* Basilashvili said on court after the victory over Leonardo Mayer when conquered Hamburg for the first time. *"I'm pretty sure every player worked so hard for this, but it's an unbelievable moment for me."* Later that year he proved to be a good harcourt player too, stunning Juan M. Del Potro in the Beijing final and advancing to the last 16 of US Open where he stole a set from Rafael Nadal. When he played two dramatic matches against Alexander Zverev in 2019 (first won in Hamburg, then lost in Montreal) I was thinking he would advance to a major semifinal once with his poker face and uncompromising ball-bashing off both wings. He hasn't responded well to the pandemic, actually he's been in a big slump since its inception, after the six-month break due to Covid-19, he came back to the circuit losing nine successive matches (seven of them against lower ranked opponents). He began the new season with a quarterfinal in Antalya, but the field was Challenger-like, thus it's tough to say whether the crisis is averted or not.

Career record: 100-114 [112 events]
Career titles: 3
Highest ranking: 16 (May 2019)
Best GS result: US Open (fourth round 2018)

Damir Džumhur (Bosnia & Herzegovina)

Born: May 20, 1992 in Sarajevo
Height: 1.74 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

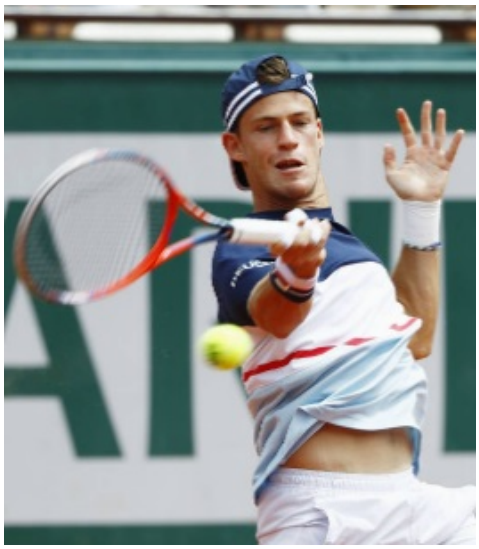


The first champion the same year of two biggest Russian events (St. Petersburg & Moscow) which have been annually played indoors in the past few decades in different time configurations after the US Open. Impressive feat given the fact even the top three Russians (Yevgeny Kafelnikov, Marat Safin & Nikolay Davydenko) never did it. Dzumhur conquered Russia in 2017 during an amazing period of his career. I have to admit that in his first years on the tour, he didn't impress me at all. Admittedly he defeated Rafael Nadal in Miami '16, but the Spaniard retired in the third set trailing 6-2, 4-6, 0-3. More than a year after that lucky victory, Dzumhur was still one of those Top 100 players who didn't hurt anyone much higher ranked, so you could expect that sooner or later he would disappear from the Top 100. Everything changed for him in July '17. Since the event in Los Cabos he jumped from no. 87 to 30 within a few months winning 24 of 30 matches. In the meantime he played a final in Winston-Salem as the first man from Bosnia & Herzegovina, then he captured those two Russian titles in Autumn. Nothing special in his game: very good physical preparation (obviously required with his height), good mixing of top-spin backhands with slices, excellent touch at forehand dropshots and prowess, that's all helped him to achieve something that seemed beyond his grasp. *"I really don't know, but there is something special here in Russia. Maybe the crowd, I don't know,"* said Dzumhur after the match vs **Ricardas Berankis** (b. 1990, the best Lithuanian player in history; two ATP finals). Before Dzumhur, there was another player born in Bosnia (**Amer Delic**, b. 1982), but he moved to the United States as a teenager and received citizenship. Delic was playing at majors in the years 2003-2009 representing the USA. At the end of his career he represented Bosnia in Davis Cup, and even became the team captain. Dzumhur's success on the tour inspired his friend **Mirza Basic** (b. 1991), who triumphed, out of nowhere, in Sofia 2018, as a qualifier. By the way, in a Davis Cup tie against Tunisia (2017), Basic defeated 5-7, 4-6, 7-6(6), 7-6(16), 6-3 **Malek Jaziri** (b. 1984) after four hours. It was Group II of Davis Cup, so I wouldn't call it an official record, but I don't know any other professional match with escaping the 4th set before winning the match after such a long tie-break.

Career record:	116-127 [121 events]	**Career titles:**	3
Highest ranking:	23 (July 2018)	**Best GS result:**	third round (five times)

Diego Schwartzman (Argentina)

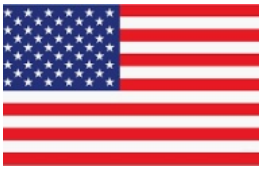
Born: August 16, 1992 in Buenos Aires
Height: 1.68 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)



I have to admit that I highly underrated Schwartzman. I saw him for the first time in his 15th main-level event as he was facing Jerzy Janowicz in the Indian Wells first round. A year before, in 2014, he had an opportunity to play against Roger Federer (Roland Garros) and Novak Djokovic (US Open) in his first two majors, but I didn't bother to watch, assuming he had no chance, and indeed, the great players ousted him easily. The defeating of Janowicz meant Schwartzman's biggest win then, and I thought "ok, tie-break in the 3rd set, the moody, mentally unreliable Janowicz, he may beat in tight matches superior players, losing to inferior, that's his characteristics... there's no more space for short players, a taller Ferrer was the last short player who could play at the highest level". Schwartzman proved me wrong, already one month later he advanced to the Istanbul semifinal where lost to Federer after a tight encounter. The following year Schwartzman came back to Turkey, claimed his maiden title in the largest city of Europe after a dramatic final against Grigor Dimitrov, concluded in bizarre circumstances. At the end of 2016 Schwartzman advanced to a final indoors, in Antwerp, signalling he would get good results also outside clay-courts. In the past three years he's been drifting between approaching the Top 10 and confirming his position in the Top 30, so in the last three years he entered many majors as a seeded player and you can bet on him pondering about potential players in the fourth round. Deprived of the beneficial height, he has put enormous effort to keep his body fit. He runs like a crazy all over the place for three-four hours. He had a 0-9 record against Rafael Nadal, but pushed the Spaniard to the limits in at least one set of their four major meetings. At Roland Garros '18 he was the only one who had taken a set away from Nadal before the 'king of clay' raised his trophy for the 11th time in Paris. They played 3 hours 42 minutes, just nine minutes shorter than in their Australian Open fourth round the same year. Last year he finally defeated the Spaniard in Rome (QF) and it was such a confidence booster that in Paris he outlast Dominic Thiem in a 5-set quarterfinal epic, booking his place at 'Masters'. His peak?

Career record: 172-146 [138 events]
Career titles: 3
Highest ranking: 8 (October 2020)
Best GS results: French Open (semifinalist 2020; quarterfinalist 2018)
US Open (quarterfinalist 2017 & 2019)

Jack Sock (USA)



Born: September 24, 1992 in Lincoln, Nebraska
Height: 1.91 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

It seems that in retrospect, Sock (extreme western forehand grip and became the only one to surpass Rafael Nadal in the amount of speed he can generate with his FH) will be remembered as the best American player born in the 90s which is a huge blow for US tennis. There was a stagnation in the American tennis as far as the players born in the 60s are concerned, but still there were guys like Brad Gilbert, Aaron Krickstein & David Wheaton - each of them achieved in singles more than Sock. In 2011, along with Melanie Oudin he won the US Open title in mixed-doubles and it was a prognostic of his doubles potential which was confirmed at Wimbledon 2014 when he triumphed (partnering Vasek Pospisil in doubles at Wimbledon). In the meantime he was steadily improving in singles, and he shocked the tennis world triumphing in Paris-Bercy '17 - that title allowed him to participate in 'Masters' (the first American to do this since Mardy Fish in 2011) where he advanced to the semifinal and took the first set away from the eventual champion Grigor Dimitrov. The end of the season clearly confirmed that the best players were exhausted (Stan Wawrinka, Andy Murray & Novak Djokovic finished their seasons at Wimbledon that year), nonetheless looking back the champion is much more important than players who didn't participate in the tournament he claimed. Sock astonishing finish of the season was like a miracle. He came to Paris with a 3-7 record in the past three months and barely escaped another defeat - in the second round match he saved a mini-match point at 3:4 in the 2nd set vs Kyle Edmund, and another mini-match point at 0:4 in the 3rd set! Even though he was trailing *1:5, in four consecutive games he wasn't closer than three points away from defeat. *"There have been a lot of firsts,"* Sock said during the trophy ceremony. *"It started at the French Open with my first fourth round of a Slam, now I've won my first Masters 1000 in Paris, this will be my first time in the Top 10 and this will be the first time making the year-end Finals. So there's a lot going on right now emotionally and I can't wait to enjoy it all with my team."* Since 2018 he's been struggling with injuries and within three seasons didn't even collect a half of his '17 victories.

Career record: 166-134 [132 events]
Career titles: 4
Highest ranking: No. 8 (November 2017)
Best GS result: fourth round (French Open '15 & US Open '16)

Marco Cecchinato (Italy)

Born: September 30, 1992 in Palermo (Sicily)
Height: 1.85 m
Plays: Right-handed

He's active, but already 28-year-old, so he seems to be a man of one tournament - Roland Garros '18. For several years he had been a Challenger player, someone who actually could be happy participating in a major as a qualifier, and all of a sudden, two months of 2018 rewrote his tennis life. First in Budapest he won a title as a 'lucky loser', then (one month later) he reached the French Open semifinal after a sensational win over Novak Djokovic! *"I lost Sunday and now I won the tournament. It's amazing for me,"* Cecchinato said after claiming the title in the Hungarian capital. *"Maybe it's a dream, I don't know."* Cecchinato was damn lucky not to have lost the opening round in Paris: he was serving to avoid a straight set loss to **Marius Copil** (b. 1990), then in the 5th set he served four times more to stay in the contest (two points away from defeat at 4:5). *"Maybe I'm sleeping. It's amazing, it's unbelievable for me. I'm very happy because it's unbelievable to beat Novak in a quarter-final at Roland Garros,"* the Sicilian said about the victory of his life. During the fortnight the Italian displayed an entertaining tennis, underlined with overusing dropshots of all sorts. Apart from that event, he had lost all other major appearances in the first round (four before French Open '18, eight afterwards) when he finally tasted a victory at major (French Open '20). It's really remarkable that a player like him, who loses main-level matches much more often than winning them, has claimed three titltes, found his way to the Top 20, and was among the four best players of one of Grand Slam tournaments (where he was going toe-to-toe with Dominic Thiem through two opening sets, by the way). If he adds other valuable results, it'll happen on clay; on other surfaces he's a player outside the Top 100 quality. Trivia: he took part in one of eight matches with the record 20/18 tie-break: he lost it, but won the match against Leonardo Mayer 7-6(6), 6-7(18), 7-6(2)... Auckland '20, he wasted 5 MPs in TB, then saved a double MP at *4:5 in the decider.

Career record: 48-87 [90 events]
Career titles: 3
Highest ranking: 16 (February 2019)
Best GS result: Roland Garros (semifinal 2018)

Bernard Tomic (Australia)

Born: October 21, 1992 in Stuttgart (Germany)
Height: 1.95 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

When 18-year-old Bernard Tomić (the son of Yugoslav emigrants) reached the Wimbledon quarterfinals in 2011 playing a competitive four-setter against Novak Djokovic, who was in tremendous form at the time, it seemed "the big 4" would face a strong rival in the near future. However, Tomic was profoundly disappointed in 2012, losing several times at early stages and dropping ten places within the calendar year. He worked hard during the off season in December '12, added more spin to his very flat forehand, improved footwork, which helped to reinforce the serve inter alia, and after winning all three matches at Hopman Cup (including impressive straight sets win over Djokovic), he triumphed in Sydney holding 39 service games in a row in the end. He said he would be the best player ever, it sounded like a ridiculous exaggeration, nonetheless his fans could have perhaps wondered that he'd be making a huge progress placing himself among the contenders to the biggest titles. It wasn't the case though. In the Australian Open '13 third round he was rapidly outplayed by Roger Federer (for the second consecutive year), lost his career-best 10-match winning streak counting the unofficial event in Perth, and basically hasn't improved since then. His ego must have been seriously mauled, in four straight editions of Australian Open he was defeated by either Rafael Nadal or Federer, he didn't win a set in those meetings, and probably understood that he didn't belong to the elite. The past few years he's been fading as a player of great expectations; there was finally advancement to the Top 20, some good matches, but often ended in dramatic defeats - in 2015 for instance, he experienced a period of seven 'hard-clay' tournaments losing six matches being relatively close to victory (1, 3, 1, 6, 3 and 1 point away, respectively). If you play well and you think about breaking through to the Top 10, you cannot lose this type of matches with such consistency. At Wimbledon '17, during a press conference he admitted that he lost his motivation and dedication to the sport, *"I'm bored of tennis... losing in the first round of fourth round of a Slam it's the same for me"*, giving an impression that if he cannot win a major, he doesn't really care about the rest. He's still young (29), but recently dropped outside the Top 200. After losing his opening match of the 2019 Wimbledon to Jo-Wilfried Tsonga in 58 minutes, Tomic was fined his full prize money of 45,000 for not meeting the "required professional standard"

according to the match referee. It was not the first time he acted like this, in the first round of Miami '14 he lost to Jarkko Nieminen 0-6, 1-6 in 28 minutes - the shortest ATP match excluding retirements. With this attitude it's unlikely the Australian of the Yugoslavian origin is going to be a Top 100 player again.

Career record: 186-182 [185 events]
Career titles: 3
Highest ranking: No. 17 (January 2016)
Best GS result: Wimbledon (quarterfinal 2011)

Jiří Veselý (Czechia)

Born: July 10, 1993 in Příbram
Height: 1.98 m
Plays: Left-handed (two-handed backhand)

There are two players born in the 90s whose heavy styles seem very similar to me: Vesely and Federico Delbonis. Quite often left-handers have some flair in their strokes, not these two though, always when I watch them I have an impression that they needed to work hard to improve every shot, establishing themselves as regular ATP players capable of defeating much better players from time to time (at majors for instance, Vesely has collected wins over Gael Monfils, Dominic Thiem and Alexander Zverev - all at Wimbledon in different editions of the event). Vesely & Delbonis have played four times against each other, the Czech won twice at Challengers while the Argentinian prevailed twice at the main-level, and three of four matches concluded with a match point were dramatic (Vesely retired when they played their last match). There's a three-year difference between them, but they have a very similar ratio of matches won/lost (both negative), each of them earned more than four million dollars, each has claimed two main-level titles and approached the Top 30. Vesely is the best Czech player born in the 90s, so he's a successor of great traditions of the Czecho(Slovakian) tennis; among thirteen countries where people speak Slavic languages, Czechs are second best (behind Russia), but it's tough to expect Vesely would inspire the future generations; he will be rather remembered as the Czech who turned off the light. Trivia: last year in Pune, in his route to the title, Vesely won two very dramatic matches (saved two MPs in an 11/9 decisive tie-break vs **Ilya Ivashka** and four MPs in SF vs Ricardas Berankis).

Career record: 126-140 [134 events]
Career titles: 2
Highest ranking: 35 (April 2015)
Best GS result: Wimbledon (fourth round 2016 & 18)

Dominic Thiem (Austria)

Born: September 3, 1993 in Wiener Neustadt
Height: 1.85 m
Plays: Right-handed

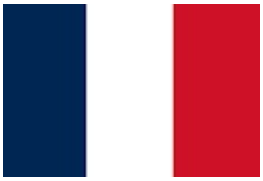
Currently the best player in the world beside Rafael Nadal & Novak Djokovic. The Austrian is the only man born in the 90s who has defeated them many times as well as Roger Federer. Thiem has defeated both Nadal & Djokovic in dramatic "best of three" and "best of five" matches which is very significant in perspective of pondering his chances of winning another Slam(s) in 2021. He hasn't defeated Federer yet in the 'best of five' meeting, yet given the Swiss will turn 40 soon, I can easily imagine Thiem defeating him even in Federer's favorite Wimbledon. The first major for the Austrian came at the US Open '20 in empty stands due to coronavirus, in the first final concluded with a deciding tie-break at 6-all in the 5th set (8/6 over Alexander Zverev). Perhaps it helped him as well as the fact he didn't face any of legends en route to the title because in his three previous finals (two in Paris, one in Melbourne) the legend meant his final station. *"Yeah it took away a lot of pressure off myself as I really wanted the title so much,"* Thiem said on-court after the match, *"I lost three finals and it was tough, two against [Nadal] but I finally got it. It was my biggest wish I ever had in my tennis career, so I made that. But I also hope that there are great things waiting for me in the future."* Thiem has developed as an all-court player over the years. Prior to 2019 he had been known as a clay-court specialist, "clay court prince" (he lost three consecutive matches to Nadal in Paris, a semifinal, then two finals), Thiem has been more successful on hardcourts since he began a cooperation with the double gold medalist Nicolas Massu. Indian Wells '19 was Thiem's first big title. He was a bit lucky because after three short matches, Gael Monfils gave him a walkover in the quarterfinals (third walkover in their mutual history, Thiem received two of them), so the Austrian had plenty of energy before his last two matches. That result didn't surprise me though, I had noticed before Thiem's great second serve which may be such a powerful weapon on hardcourts. There was no major champion among players born between 1989 and 1992. It seems that Thiem is lucky that he's distinctively younger than Nadal & Djokovic whilst a

few years older than the best players born at the end of the 20th Century. I mean he had more opportunities to play against the legends, also when they were at the peaks of their careers, which gave him great experience, yet he's still relatively young - it allows me to imagine he will be still competing at the highest level when Nadal & Djokovic are finally done, outside the Top 10, not being able to conquer Slams. I assume Thiem may advance to No. 1 (winning another majors) in the next two-three years, not sure about his Wimbledon chances. He doesn't like to play serve-and-volley, he hits the ball the hardest after higher bounces when he has time to make big swings, thus certainly his game doesn't naturally suit grass, however, he has won one grass-court title, and defeated Federer then, so who knows...

Career record: 304-159 [165 events]
Career titles: 17
Highest ranking: 3 (March 2020)
Best GS results:
Australian Open (runner-up 2020;
Roland Garros (runner-up 2018-19; semifinalist 2016-17; quarterfinalist 2020)
US Open (champion 2020; quarterfinalist 2018)

Two-time 'Masters' runner-up (2019-20)

Lucas Pouille (France)



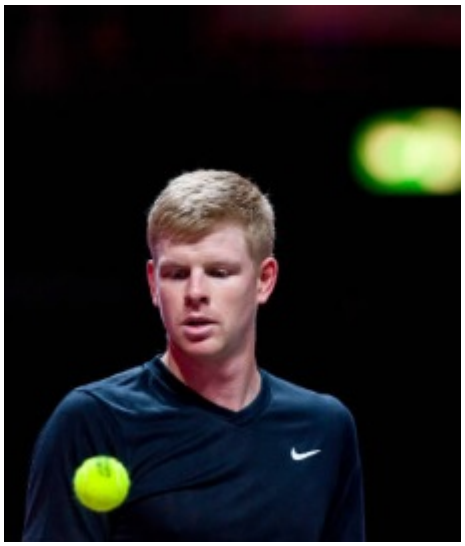
Born: February 23, 1994 in Grande-Synthe
Height: 1.85 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

Pouille can sleep peacefully. No matter what will happen in his career, he remains a Davis Cup champion, winning a decisive rubber. Even better for him that it was the fifth rubber of the 2018 final when France defeated Belgium 3-2, so the pressure was bigger and he responded very well. There were very good French players in the 80s, 90s and 00s, but in the 10s only Pouille appeared as a new French face capable of doing some real damage. The developing ATP years 2016-17 were very interesting for him. I noticed that Pouille had an impressive ratio in tight situations, besides he was winning titles on all surfaces, reaching Masters 1K semifinals and Grand Slam quarterfinals at different venues, and I expected he'd turn into a Top 10 player in the not too distant future. I think everything changed for him in the second round of Wimbledon '17 when he lost to Jerzy Janowicz in four sets, with two tie-breaks. Beginning with that match, Pouille notched a streak of 12 tie-breaks lost in a row! How to explain that sudden change from someone who seemed to be a tie-break specialist? My hypothesis is that when you are new on the tour, others need some time to figure out how to play against you, what's your strengths and weaknesses. I assume Pouille deceived the rest of the tour a bit with his two-handed backhand. It became quite obvious in the 21st Century that all successful players who operate with this backhand, can keep the ball in play for a long time during steady baseline rallies. It's not Pouille's case. I would say that I haven't seen a player of this calibre with such a weak two-handed backhand since Younes El Aynaoui, who was a respectable force in men's tennis at the turn of the 90s and 00s. To be more precise, Pouille's backhand is ok, only when he hits the ball returning it from a comfortable position or having plenty of time to be prepared for that shot (which is rare due to running around). Pouille's footwork is great, he uses it to run the backhand around a lot, especially on serve, but when forced to play a few backhands in a row, he fails. Pouille being pushed to run from corner to corner, catches defensive mode and uses only a backhand slice, when he wants to hit backhand on the run, usually it's an error. I didn't see all the crucial moments of those matches when he was regularly losing tie-breaks, but I suppose that he was already deciphered at the time. There are valuable things in his game allowing to expect he will be dangerous once he backs to his normal self from one-year injury break (right elbow): very good serve down the T on ad-court, very good volley skills and self-control. If his first serve works at vital moments, he will win tight matches against very good players on faster surfaces.

Career record: 131-109 [110 events] Davis Cup champion 2017 (won clincher)
Career titles: 5
Highest ranking: 10 (March 2018)
Best GS results: Wimbledon (quarterfinalist 2016) US Open (quarterfinalist 2016)

Kyle Edmund (Great Britain)

Born: January 8, 1995 in Johannesburg (South Africa)
Height: 1.88 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)



The British tennis was deprived of the second good player beside Andy Murray for a long time as Greg Rusedski & Tim Henman finished their careers (in the years 2006 & 2007 respectively). It lasted almost ten years until 2015 when Edmund and Daniel Evans made their breakthroughs improving their rankings significantly. It's coincidental with Murray's best period in his tennis career. Admittedly both Evans & Edmund didn't help Murray in a formal sense winning some Davis Cup rubbers, but perhaps they wore down the guys whom Murray defeated in the matches that gave Great Britain valuable wins (against Australia in the semifinal and Belgium in the final). Edmund had just two main-level wins when at the age of 20 he enjoyed playing in the Davis Cup final. He surprised everyone in the first rubber taking the first two sets off David Goffin easily, but another three he lost being chanceless. Then I thought he was very lucky experiencing career-highlight in those circumstances, but in the aftermath Edmund improved a lot. In 2016 he became a regular ATP player, and in 2018 achieved his (as I assume) career-best result reaching the Australian Open semifinal defeating two seeded guys (Kevin Anderson & Igor Dimitrov). Solid ball-basher, reminds me of Jim Courier a bit with his very aggressive forehands and blond hair usually covered under a white baseball cap. Trivia: en route to the Aussie Open semifinal, he ousted Nikolaz Basilashvili 7-6, 3-6, 4-6, 6-0, 7-5 in the third round; the "bagel" set is the longest I know of this type, it lasted 39 minutes (40-25 in points, there were 14 deuces in the 2nd game of that set). Edmund's future is uncertain, after the six-month Covid break, he poorly played winning just one match out of seven. He hasn't played in 2021 yet, due to persistent knee injury.

Career record: 117-115 [113 events]
Career titles: 2
Highest ranking: 14 (October 2018)
Best GS result: Australian Open (semifinal 2018)

Davis Cup champion 2015

Nick Kyrgios (Australia)

Born: April 27, 1995 in Canberra
Height: 1.93 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

Νίκος Κύργιος

The son of Greek father & Malay mother. He seemed like someone who was made to do great things. His first major (French Open 2013) and a win in three tie-breaks over a very experienced Radek Stepanek. Another two main level events meant majors too, and meetings on big arenas with good players. Kyrgios got self-confidence and won three Challengers in Spring '14, Andy Murray praised him & called the next big thing. Then came Wimbledon '14 and Kyrgios shocked the tennis world twice - first in the second round as he saved nine match points in four different games (equalling the major record) against the former semifinalist Richard Gasquet, then in the fourth round, when he eliminated the former champion Rafael Nadal. Kyrgios ran out of gas in the quarterfinal, anyway he evoked memories of great champions of the event (John McEnroe, Boris Becker), who also as teenagers made their names in London (semifinal '77, champion '85 respectively). I have to admit I jumped to Kyrgios' bandwagon as well, I perceived him as someone of the potential of Goran Ivanisevic (if the things won't go as well as expected) or Pete Sampras (in an optimistic scenario). The upcoming months verified those expectations - it appeared that Kyrgios didn't belong to the tytans of physical work in the gym, besides that the Wimbledon success perhaps spoiled him. A gigolo moustache in Sydney '15 was the first symptom of Kyrgios' willingness to be in the center of attention... different earrings, different haircuts, bizarre on/off court behaviour, tattoos... instead of turning into a tennis superstar known for amazing achievements, Kyrgios was more and more associated with controversial scenes and just sporadic acts of on court brilliance. In the past few years he's been the most fearsome unseeded player, when he is focused he may deliver a Top 5 performance on any given day, yet when he wakes up on the wrong side of bed, he may lose on purpose. He lives in his own world, with specific etiquete of justice suggesting that he's always right while all others (especially umpires) want to hurt him. Great talent, the serve is the main weapon, but he can play all shots perfectly; if he finds the right balance between trickery, focus and luck in playing tie-breaks, he's going to triumph at Wimbledon.

Career record: 165-97 [96 events]
Career titles: 6
Highest ranking: 13 (October 2016)
Best GS results: Australian Open (quarterfinalist 2015); Wimbledon (quarterfinalist 2014)

Laslo Đere (Serbia)

Born: June 2, 1995 in Senta
Height: 1.89 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

Ласло Ђере

Just like Nikolaz Basilashvili, Djere always shows a very serious face, never smiling, never joking on the court. It must be underlined that in his case it's quite understandable - he lost his mother when he was 17, at the age of 23 he lost his father, both parents died due to colon cancer. They were Hungarians, Djere's original name is Györe László. He was born in Vojvodina, the same region from which Monica Seles comes, until the end of World War I, the region was populated mainly by Hungarians. Djere made his breakthrough tournament in Hungary, in Budapest where he reached the semifinal as a qualifier. He advanced to another two semifinals, but hadn't defeated any top player until Rio de Janeiro '19. In the first round he stunned the clay-court prince - Dominic Thiem. *"My coach was disappointed because he felt I was playing so good in the practises and then I got the top seed in the first round. But I felt that I should look at it in a positive way and that maybe this was a good moment to play the top seed,"* Djere said after he claimed the title. That victory over Thiem must have been a tremendous boost of confidence. Two years later, Djere has a status of a clay-court specialist, he has a very poor record on three other surfaces. He reminds me a bit of Magnus Norman with his gamestyle, but hits the forehand with more spin and is more glued to the baseline. His abysmal record in doubles tells something about his skills at the net. Because he is actually dangerous only on clay, I don't expect him to be a Top 20 player, but French Open quarterfinal or semifinal of a Masters 1K event on clay are within his grasp as well as another ATP 500 title, especially if he stays around until Novak Djokovic and Rafael Nadal decline.

Career record: 52-59 [59 events]
Career titles: 2
Highest ranking: 27 (June 2019)
Best GS result: French Open (third round 2019)

Daniil Medvedev (Russia)

Born: February 11, 1996 in Moscow
Height: 1.97 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

Даниил Медве́дев

I considered him as a potential no. 1 at some point in the decade of the '20s after I watched him defeating Novak Djokovic in the Cincinnati '19 semifinal when in the 3rd set he was constantly hitting second serves with the speed of his standard 1st serve. "This guy has balls other youngsters have not", I thought... Actually the Russian didn't make a particular impression on me until the period Summer/Autumn of '19. Then, all of a sudden, he won 29 out of his 32 matches, and two of those three defeats he experienced against the best player of the season - Rafael Nadal (including a fascinating US Open final). Admittedly Medvedev was a Top 10 player, but after Wimbledon '19, it'd be easier to predict his dropping in the ranking than his advancement because quite at the time he had lost five straight matches. And then, starting from Washington (lost the final to Nick Kyrgios in two tie-breaks), something changed in his mind - he became an unemotional winning machine. Already at the beginning of the 2019 year he showed improvement as a server, but that's all, so his amazing streak can be explained in this simplistic sentence "all the pieces of the puzzle fit together": he found his way to play better at the vital moments of sets & matches, while his awkward game was basically the same. By this I mean his shots are far away from fluidity as well as he movement all over the court. He's very fast though, and even if he hits the ball uncleanly, it somehow finds its way to drop inside the side of the opponent. I think his main strength it's his arrhythmic style, he's a "two-faced player" considering his service and return games. He likes to play in fast pace, risking his second serve a lot which makes sense with his height, so at times he holds in a nick of time like the best servers, and then as a receiver he turns into a player ~20 cm shorter working hard on the baseline like a gigantic ant, retrieving many balls when he seems to be finished. *"He's super solid. He doesn't miss. It's like playing against a wall,"* David Goffin characterized Medvedev's style after losing to him the Cincinnati '19 final. *"Just playing cross, cross, wait for the ball. His pace is not too fast, not too slow. It's quite a special pace to play against him. And then you receive bombs coming from his serve, and then he doesn't miss."* Colorful personality, outspoken, he's open to try different things being aware that the end justifies the means. Given his defensive skills and good mentality at tight moments

it's strange that he still hasn't won a match at Roland Garros (in four appearances) and had a 0-6 five-set record before defeating Filip Krajinovic 6-0 in the 5th recently in Melbourne. My insight into Medvedev's strategy is that he wants to impose the leading position from the beginning. Analyzing his scorelines, I'd argue that he's well prepared mentally & physically to deliver his best tennis only for ~three hours. It seems not sufficient to perceive him as a champion of majors and the future no. 1. He not only never came back from a 0-2 deficit, he has also never won a match when dropped the first set being a break down in the latter stages of the second set, and we're talking about the player who already turned 25 (even on the assumption today's "25" doesn't mean "25" from the previous decades in terms of expectations how long a player may keep the highest level of his tennis). At the turn of the years 2020-21 Medvedev emulated his top performance of the Summer/Autumn '19; he was defeating many players in a row, including Top 10ers, there were twenty matches won in a row, and then came the Australian Open final against Novak Djokovic. Medvedev trailed only 5-7, 1:3* when he showed signs of frustration and discouragement. He may stay in the Top 5 for a while, but if he doesn't start winning Slam matches being in predicament soon, he may end his career as a two-time Slam runner-up, joining the extensive list of players.

Career record:	169-87 [89 events]
Career titles:	9
Highest ranking:	2 (March 2021)
Best GS results:	Australian Open (runner-up 2021) US Open (runner-up 2019; semifinal 2020)

Masters champion 2020
ATP Cup champion 2021 (4-0 record)

Matteo Berrettini (Italy)

Born: April 12, 1996 in Rome
Height: 1.95 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

I saw Berrettini for the first time during Roland Garros '18 (his ninth main-level event) when he was playing third round vs Dominic Thiem - the favorite to be in the final. He drew my attention when unexpectedly won the second set in a tie-break. I saw somewhere the info introducing Berrettini as an Italian version of Milos Raonic. I didn't agree (apart from the same height & athletic posture) because I noticed that the serve of the Italian wasn't exceptionally impressive while his backhand (natural slice) and volley techniques were much better than Raonic's. Soon afterwards Berrettini triumphed in Gstaad defeating three seeded players and it initiated an amazing period in his career when within more than a year from someone who should have been happy entering the Top 100, he became an elite player in broader sense, participating in the season-ending event in London, sharing the court with the legends of the game. He was quite brutally verified there. In the pandemic '20 season he kept his respected position only because he didn't lose the points for the year 2019. I'd call him (and Karen Khachanov) the best 'second league" players; by this I mean their firm position around Top 20 in the next few years. They're tall, powerful, can easily hold serve with one-two punch combinations, Khachanov has better backhand, Berrettini has better touch (he likes to play dropshots off both wings). I guess they both have already peaked (Khachanov triumphing in a Masters 1K event, Berrettini placing himself in the best four of a Slam). They will have good moments against the best players, but their weaknesses (Khachanov's monotony, Berrettini's backhand) must be exposed, especially in the 'best of five' format. Since teenage times, Berrettini has been coached by **Vincenzo Santopadre** (b. 1971), who won just 17 main-level matches, but two of them big (Gustavo Kuerten, Magnus Norman); Santopadre is the son-in-law of Zbigniew Boniek, arguably the most important figure in the history of Polish football.

Career record: 79-53 [53 events]
Career titles: 3
Highest ranking: 8 (November 2019)
Best GS result: US Open (semifinalist 2019)

Hyeon Chung (South Korea)

Born: May 19, 1996 in Suwon
Height: 1.88 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

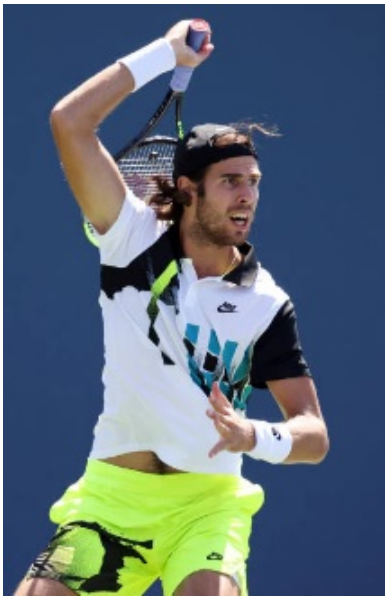
He won the first edition of a renewed event for the best players under-21, in Milan 2017. He wasn't among favorites to win the title, but with a very experimental system (sets to 4 games won, no advantage, no linesmen, no netcords) everything was possible. A few months later he confirmed it wasn't a fluke - at the Australian Open he sensationally eliminated the multiple champion of the event - Novak Djokovic 7-6, 7-5, 7-6 in the fourth round. Impressive victory even though the Serbian was returning to the tour after several months of rest (elbow injury). Former best players of the world praised the Korean:
"This is the heralding of a new star, someone who's going to explode on the scene," John McEnroe... *"One of the new generation has clearly arrived,"* Lleyton Hewitt... *"I cannot believe how good this kid is,"* Jim Courier...
Chung was forced to retire in the semifinal, but that result built high expectations... Now, three years later it's still the only result worth mentioning in Chung's main-level context. For many months in 2018 he was struggling with foot injury, another year brought another physical problem (back) which sidelined him in Spring & Summer; within two years from a Top 10 contender he turned into a Top 150 player.... Very flexible Asian with peculiar backhand technique, emulating the Djokovic style in defense. If stays healthy, should be dangerous again, in the "corona season" he didn't play any major, at French Open lost already in the qualifying round, it may worry... **Soonwoo Kwon** (b. 1997) is another Korean player who has lately (2019) advanced to the Top 100 and regularly plays at majors, without good results though.

Career record: 86-69 [67 events]
Career titles: 0
Highest ranking: 19 (April 2018)
Best GS result: Australian Open (semifinal 2018)

Karen Khachanov (Russia)

Born: May 21, 1996 in Moscow
Height: 1.98 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

Каре́н Хача́нов



When the tall Russian of Armenian origin, as a 17-year-old boy, unranked in the ATP system, reached the second round in St. Petersburg, and a couple of weeks later improved it, advancing to the quarterfinal in Moscow (having defeated three regular ATP players), I thought "a new star is born". He was very calm, actually unemotional and that impressed me a lot; not only me, Yevgeny Kafelnikov described him as a "full package". I saw Khachanov in my fantasy as a future number 1. He needed another two years of getting experience in Challengers to become a Top 100 player (**Galo Blanco**, b. 1976, helped him; Milos Raonic's initial tutor). In the meantime his personality changed, he shows emotions, he has plenty of sheer power, but I have no doubts that he's not a material to be even a stable Top 10 player - his results brutally verify him, with powerful serve and big shots off both wings he is of course prone to play tight matches quite often, and he doesn't deal with them well. Enough said, he had lost six consecutive matches entering the deciding third set tie-break when snapped the streak saving two match points against John Isner in Paris-Bercy '18 - it was like a blessing for him, he celebrated that third round win on his back, and took advantage of the demanding season, outplaying three much better opponents quite easily in his another matches to raise the trophy. *"It means the world to me. I couldn't be happier to finish the season like this. One thing that with Novak you cannot just go to the net because he has unbelievable passing shots,"* Khachanov said after the final against Djokovic (he had a cold). Was it the first and last title of this calibre in his career (resemblance to Tomas Berdych of 2005)? I think so. But the Czech established himself as a Top 10 player for several years, I cannot imagine Khachanov doing the same. He should be (along with another muscleman Matteo Berrettini, to whom has lost all four matches so far) a solid Top 20 player, overwhelming many inferior guys; his style is one-dimensional, deprived of element of surprise at vital moments, so he's supposed to lose tight matches often facing players of similar level, and will be rather firmly beaten by the elite.

Career record: 144-114 [108 events]
Career titles: 4
Highest ranking: 8 (July 2019)
Best GS result: Roland Garros (quarterfinal 2019)

Cristian Garín (Chile)

Born: May 30, 1996 in Santiago
Height: 1.85 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

Marcelo Rios in the 90s, Fernando Gonzalez and Nicolas Massu in the 00s, gave plenty of joy to the Chilean fans. The first years of the 10s were poor for the Chilean tennis though, and finally at the end of the decade two young guys from Santiago, Garin & **Nicolas Jarry** (b. 1995, one title, record: 51-56), entered the main scene of men's tennis. After very laborious season at the Challenger level in 2018 (16-match win streak with titles at Campinas, Santo Domingo and Lima), Garin made his ATP mark on clay-courts between February & April of 2019; having just played nine main-level events, he reached the Sao Paulo final, then triumphed in Houston, reached the quarterfinal in Barcelona and captured another title - in Munich; en route to his two first titles he withstood several match points (five against Jeremy Chardy in Houston, two vs Alexander Zverev in Munich). *"It was a really intense match today. I think what I did well was to keep playing my game throughout the match,"* said Garin after winning the Houston final over Casper Ruud. *"Of course, now I want more, so I have to keep working hard and improving every day."* The Chilean also defeated Chardy in Paris '19 after saving match points again (three that time); what's interesting, six years earlier Chardy was the first man to beat Garin at the main-level after the match in which an almost 17-year-old Santiago boy [920] had stunned Dusan Lajovic in round one, becoming the fifth player aged 16-under to win an ATP match since 2000. Garin is a good fighter, moves very well, his persistent shots off both wings are equally difficult to cope with, but I don't see flashes of brilliance, so I cannot expect that he would achieve something comparable to his three great predecesors of the longest country in the world.

Career record: 60-53 [42 events]
Career titles: 4
Highest ranking: 18 (February 2020)
Best GS result: Roland Garros (third round 2020)

Borna Ćorić (Croatia)

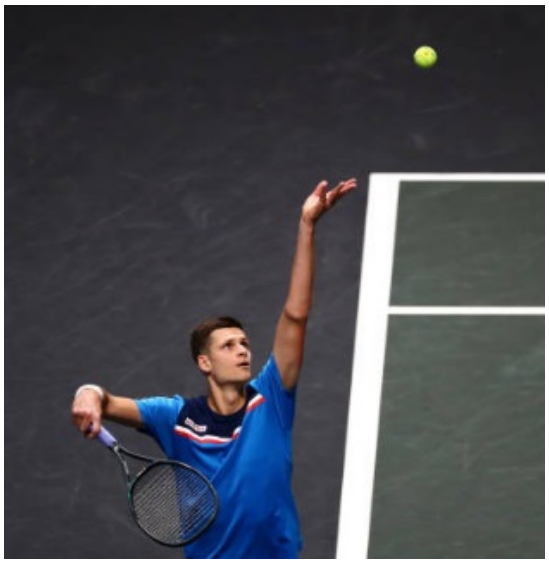
Born: November 14, 1996 in Zagreb
Height: 1.85 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

In the first years on the tour, Coric was sometimes compared to Novak Djokovic & Andy Murray. With one thing I can agree: similarly to the two great players born in 1987, Coric knows how to win difficult matches. His potential from mental point of view is excellent by now: 16-4 in deciding 3rd set tie-breaks (80%) at the main-level or even 17-4 if we count his win over Marcos Baghdatis in Dubai '15 (the Cypriot retired at 4-all in the tie-break, having previously led 4:1 in the set, and 4:1 in that tie-break). I have seen his several matches concluded 7-5 or 7-6 in the decider, and I know it's not a coincidence. He's able to be more focused at crucial moments, keep the ball longer in play, and he's aware that when the opponent plays shorter ball, you should finish him with more risky shot; moreover he likes to attack the net when the finishing line is near, generally playing from the back of the court, so he has all those ingredients allowing him to win tight matches more often than lose them. But if you want to make great things, you need to win many matches easily, to save the energy for the semifinals and finals. Here's an example of Coric's limitations: Dubai '19, the Croat wins the first three matches of the tournament 7-6 in the 3rd set, and in the semifinal he seems to be deflated, and takes only four games away from Roger Federer. Later that year an event in St. Petersburg, Coric wins again three straight matches in three-setters (that time it gives him the final), being within points of losing them in two sets as opposed to Dubai, but in his last match, he is trashed by Daniil Medvedev, by the way, the Russian was in his top form then. So pondering about Coric's future, I see him in the final stages of reputable events, but he'll be too tired to win them having played a few four- or five-setters before; alternatively, in Masters 1K, his 7-5/7-6 wins in the 3rd set will take its toll. I can imagine him in Top 10 but time is running out and Coric has to reinvent himself, he cannot lose four-set matches at majors to inferior players like he has lately done (**Norbert Gombos** in Paris, **Mackenzie McDonald** in Melbourne).

Career record: 165-142 [134 events]
Career titles: 2
Highest ranking: 12 (November 2018)
Best GS result: US Open (quarterfinalist 2020)

Hubert Hurkacz (Poland)

Born: February 11, 1997 in Wrocław
Height: 1.95 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)



The 22-year-old Hurkacz [41] became the 14th first-time champion on the tour in the year 2019 (Winston-Salem) and the first Polish player to win a tour-level tournament since 1982, when Wojtek Fibak triumphed in Chicago (in the meantime two Poles, Lukasz Kubot & Jerzy Janowicz, played five ATP finals). A very long time considering the big Polish population (around forty million) and pre-War tradition. Hurkacz evokes a bit Andy Murray's style with his preparation for returns, very good touch at the net (perfect short BH cross-court volley) and inclination to think a lot how to play against a particular opponent. For a tall guy, Hurkacz's serve is rather questionable, also his attitude is quite phlegmatic (he is often pushed to big defense on his own serve), so it's difficult to expect from him achieving great things. His breakthrough came on hardcourts in February-March '19. Up to that moment he'd just been a Challenger youngster who aspired to regularly play at the main-level. Two wins over Kei Nishikori (Dubai, Indian Wells) helped Hurkacz to build self-confidence. He also defeated Dominic Thiem (Miami) one week after the Austrian triumphed at Indian Wells. It's almost two years later, and I haven't seen improvement in his game-style despite two titles collected in the meantime (the second one at the beginning of this year with a draw adequate to the Challenger level). Partly thanks to the "corona season" and the frozen ranking, he hasn't lost his status of a seeded player at Slams (last year he didn't lose any points for March '19), but it should happen this year. At this moment, looking at his scorelines and on-court behaviour, I see him closer to go outside the Top 50 then attacking the Top 20, which I thought would be within his grasp after the hardcourts results of 2019. Hurkacz's fellow Pole, **Kamil Majchrzak** (b. 1996) tries to be a Top 100 player; over the years Poles couldn't realistically think about the World Group of Davis Cup, with these two fellas it would be finally possible, but the DC system has been modified since the year of Hurkacz's transition.

Career record: 54-58 [49 events]
Career titles: 2
Highest ranking: 28 (February 2020)
Best GS result: Wimbledon (third round 2019)

Alexander Zverev (Germany)

Born: April 20, 1997 in Hamburg
Height: 1.97 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

Алекса́ндр (Са́ша) Зве́рев

The son of Russian parents, in contrast to his older brother, he was born in Germany... After great 90s for the German tennis, when Boris Becker & Michael Stich were top players, and at the end of the 90s appeared the very gifted Nicolas Kiefer & Tommy Haas, after them for many years there was a drought. The best player born in the 80s - Philipp Kohlschreiber - didn't even reach the level of the third best German born in the 70s - Rainer Schuettler. And there's finally a German born youngster of the Russan origin Alexander "Sascha" Zverev. Already in his third main-level event, he [285, wild card] reached the semifinal of a big event (yet not as big as in the 90s & 00s) in his hometown - Hamburg. That was a prognostic that the 17 year-old boy was gifted, and despite being much taller than his older brother, preferring a different, defensive style. In the following two seasons, Zverev needed to work hard on his serve, almost two-meter man should gain plenty of points with his serve, and Zverev managed to improve the most important shot in tennis. In 2017 he manifested as someone who would overcome the Big 3 claiming two big titles: in Rome (Novak Djokovic in the final) and Montreal (Roger Federer in the final). I was really impressed watching his final vs Federer. He wasn't broken, and committed just one double fault, risking his 2nd serve a lot (at a very good percentage of the 1st serve though - 69%). En toute to the Canadian Open final, Zverev had ousted Richard Gasquet in the second round with a 6-3, 4-6, 7-6 victory withstanding three match points. Zverev led *5:4 (40/0) in the 3rd set vs Gasquet, then saved three match points at 5:6, including a 49-stroke rally on the second one, finishing it with a forehand winner! He entered the US Open '17 as one of the favorites to the title, a new star of men's tennis, long awaited savior, who would spoil the "never-ending" dominance of the Big 3. His striking clothing choice recalled memories of Bjorn Borg, who ruled tennis at the turn of 70s/80s in similar attire. I expected him to win the title drawing similarity to the 20-year-old Marat Safin who triumphed in New York 2000: big serve, powerful strokes off both wings, the will to win. Borna Coric tamed Zverev's hopes as early as in the second round. Three years

later Zverev has no major title under his belt, his status of a potential new big champion was questioned by several defeats against theoretically inferior players in 2019. Zverev hired two fitness trainers: Jez Green, who previously worked with Andy Murray, and physio Hugo Gravil, who was helping plenty of others as an ATP physiotherapist. There was a "romance" with former best players in the world, Ivan Lendl & Juan Carlos Ferrero, but all efforts still don't help the young German in playing his best tennis when it matters the most - in Grand Slam events. Zverev needed 12 major appearances to reach his first major quarterfinal, another seven to reach the first semifinal. Certainly he has the potential of a Grand Slam champion, but has to find a way to win major matches 3-0 in the first week, to save the energy for the last three matches against potentially more demanding opponents. I noticed some similarities between his career and career of other tall guy with East European surname - Andrei Medvedev; the Ukrainian was perceived by many as a future No. 1 and multiple Grand Slam champion, but finished his career with just one final in which he led two-sets-to-love (like Zverev in the US Open '20 final), paradoxically in the tournament when no-one expected him to go so far. Zverev has still plenty of time to achieve much more than the best man from Ukraine.

Career record:	256-128 [127 events]
Career titles:	13
Highest ranking:	3 (November 2017)
Best GS results:	Australian Open (semifinalist 2020; quarterfinal 2021) Roland Garros (quarterfinalist 2018-19) US Open (runner-up 2020)

Masters champion 2018

Reilly Opelka (USA)

Born: August 28, 1997 in St. Joseph, Michigan
Height: 2.11 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

The tallest player on the tour. Allegedly he is the same height as Ivo Karlovic, but the Croat is 18 years older, so very likely Opelka will be playing many years after Kralovic's retirement. I haven't seen him too many times, but I suppose he may enjoy a more successful career than the third giant, fellow American - twelve years older John Isner. Opelka seems to me a better mover, and his backhand is considerably better than Isner's; the young American also should play a few years when the Big 3 will be either in retreat or on retirement. So far Opelka has won one ATP title (New York '19), surviving many difficult moments (close to being defeated in four out of five matches in that tournament) which is a good prognostic for the future as well as defeating Stan Wawrinka 8-6 in the 5th set the same year at Wimbledon because a tie-break wasn't required in any of three sets the American won). With Opelka's game-style it's obvious he will be involved, time and time again, in matches when two or three points may separate him (and his opponent) from the loss or win and he will be serving more than 40 aces quite often at major matches. Grass is not his favourite surface, which might come as a surprise given that he was a junior Wimbledon champion in 2015: *"Juniors is different because it's everyone's first time playing on grass. No one really knows what to expect. I just find it harder to move on grass and the ball doesn't bounce so high. Don't get me wrong, I definitely enjoy it, but I think my best surfaces are hard and clay."* En route to the title, Opelka won the opening round 13-11 in the 3rd set against Alex de Minaur, who is Opelka's toughest opponent on the tour (four matches and the Australian won them all). Trivia: Opelka has defeated Isner in their last three matches; 3-1, 2-1, 2-1 in sets respectively, and all those ten sets were concluded in tie-breaks (40-47, 43-38, 31-33 in aces).

Career record: 49-48 [48 events]
Career titles: 2
Highest ranking: 31 (October 2019)
Best GS result: Wimbledon (third round 2019)

Andrey Rublev (Russia)

Born: October 20, 1997 in Moscow
Height: 1.88 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

The most aggressive baseliner of the new generation. He ferociously hits almost every forehand reminding me of Fernando Gonzalez, but in contrast to "El Bombardero" he plays two-handed backhand which allows him to dictate the pace also from his left wing. Just like in Andre Agassi's case, Rublev's father was a boxer, and if I had to choose one player born in the 70s whose game was the most similar to Rublev's, I'd pick Agassi, however, looking realistically at the Russian, I assume he may enjoy similar career to Gonzalez, Agassi's career is beyond reach. He's very efficient when imposes his style, but when the things don't go his way, he often loses his interest due to lack of a plan B. He has already lost four major quarterfinals, and it's possible that this trend will be maintained in the next few years. Watching him at the US Open '17 (defeated i.a. two seeded guys: David Goffin & Grigor Dimitrov after identical scorelines: 7-5, 7-6, 6-3) and Aussie Open '18, I expected his participation in Masters '18, but with his very physical style, there's a bigger chance of getting injuries, and it happened to him in Spring of 2018 (lower back). He missed three months and when came back he was out of form. Instead of climbing in the ranking, attacking the Top 20, he dropped outside the Top 100 in March '19. A problematic season was repeated. Just like a year before, he lost a dramatic match in Monte Carlo (Dominic Thiem '18, Fabio Fognini '19) which was followed by an injury - that time his wrist. If he was superstitious, the Covid-19 would be a blessing. The event in Monte Carlo wasn't held in 2020, Rublev didn't need to bother whether to go there or not, being in very good form, risking that something bad could happen to him again. He began the year winning 15 matches in a row (counting the end of the 2019 season), and collected two titles in January. The virus didn't stop his momentum. The last months of the year were even better than the first ones. He got two titles again, but bigger ones (Hamburg & St. Petersburg) and achieved what I had been expecting from him already two years before - secured a berth in 'Masters'. Trivia: Rublev had played his last match before the pandemic break against Dan Evans (Dubai), and against the same player his first match when the break was finished (Cincinnati), losing on both occasions.

Андре́й Рублёв

Career record: 140-90 [88 events]
Career titles: 7 ATP Cup '21 champion (4-0 singles)
Highest ranking: 8 (October 2020)
Best GS result: Australian Open (quarterfinalist 2021); Roland Garros (quarterfinalist 2020)
US Open (quarterfinalist 2017 & 2020)

Taylor Fritz (USA)

Born: October 28, 1997 in Rancho Santa Fe, California
Height: 1.93 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

He debuted as Harry-Fritz, and under this surname he made a huge progress in 2015 playing in Challengers (won back-to-back events in the USA), and reached his first ATP final in February 2016 (Memphis), in his just third main-level event. He played there thanks to 'wild card' [145] and took advantage of a very weak draw. That Tennessee tournament had great tradition, the best players of the world participated in it through three decades (the 70s, 80s & 90s), but in the 21st Century the venue wasn't renovated, there was worse and worse with the big names, and ultimately before moving that event to New York, it looked to me like an upgraded Challenger. In those last poor years Kei Nishikori triumphed four times in a row, and Fritz was his least expected final opponent. En route to the final, Fritz defeated just one Top 100 player. The teenage American displayed very good serve and solid strokes off both wings as well as limited movement that required a lot of work in the following seasons. He turned to be a regular ATP player, became a father as a teenager, and showed good mentality a couple of times (great record in deciding tie-breaks, 13-2, counting Challengers/qualies too), but still remains without any huge win or a result that a casual tennis fan may remember. He hasn't played yet in the fourth round at Slams or quarterfinal at Masters 1K, but should do this in the next few years. He's slowly approaching Top 20, I think overcoming it, will mean facing the wall of his possibilities this decade. Of course he has to believe in himself: *"The next short-term goal is to be top 20 and hopefully be the number one American soon. Then from there, I want to keep progressing to the top 15, top 10. I really feel like I've made big strides in my fitness on my game... I've been having three-hour practices and then some days go and do tennis again or go and do gym."* Fritz reminds me of Mardy Fish, as opposed to "American school" of players with baseball caps who base their game-styles on serve and forehand, Fritz just like Fish, posseses very quick serve, but tries to build a complex all-court game.

Career record: 100-103 [98 events]
Career titles: 1
Highest ranking: 24 (March 2020)
Best GS result: third round everywhere except Wimbledon

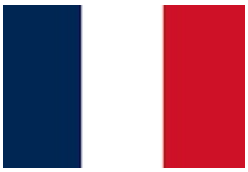
Frances Tiafoe (USA)

Born: January 20, 1998 in Hyattsville, Maryland
Height: 1.88 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

The son of parents who emigrated to the United States from Sierra Leone in 1996, which in terms of tennis geography places him the closest to Yahiya Doumbia, the ephemeral player of the 80s and 90s. Tiafoe is an entertaining player to watch, great mover using heavy top-spin off the forehand, but I don't absolutely see in him a saviour of the American tennis. The first few years indicated that he was badly dealing with tight situations. He lost his first six matches concluded in deciding tie-breaks (including a five-setter against John Isner at the US Open '16). At Delray Beach '18 he seemed to mentally improve - won his maiden title having defeated Juan Martin del Potro (7-6, 4-6, 7-5) in the second round after a dramatic contest. In the 1st set Del Potro led 4:1* (40/0), then squandered four set points and a mini match point at 4-all in the 3rd set. *"Now I'm in a position not only to help myself, but help fund my family,"* Tiafoe said after the final against **Peter Gojowczyk** (b. 1989, also Marton Fucsovics won his maiden title against him). *"It's an unbelievable place to be in and it's bigger than tennis."* Tiafoe has been a regular ATP player since then, but I don't see a huge improvement in his game. He reached the Australian Open '19 quarterfinal, and I suppose he may wait quite a long time to repeat that achievement. He's a good material to put him on the main arenas in the biggest tournaments though, he may please the crowd with some spectacular shots, but powerful brain-processing isn't his asset to put it mildly, therefore his on-fire points will be intertwined with silly errors, and defeating the best players in the world in the "best of five" should be too tough for him.

Career record: 72-98 [91 events]
Career titles: 1
Highest ranking: 29 (February 2019)
Best GS result: Australian Open (quarterfinal 2019)

Ugo Humbert (France)



Born: June 26, 1998 in Metz
Height: 1.88 m
Plays: Left-handed (two-handed backhand)

Humbert was unknown for wider audience until 2019, so he wasn't perceived in France as someone special and didn't receive a 'wild card' in any of two biggest Parisian events as a teenager. He needed to work hard in Futures and Challengers to reach the Top 100; in 2018 he won many titles at lower levels that gave him an entry to his first major (Australian Open) without playing qualifying rounds. His first "best of five" match already brought him a thriller, Humbert lost 6/10 in the deciding 5th set tie-break to Jeremy Chardy after four hours (the first super tie-break played in Australia). At *4:5 the youngster saved a triple match point, and led 6:4 in the tie-break before losing the last six points. The skinny left-hander shortly afterwards played two good Challengers and confirmed his status of a Top 100 player. At Wimbledon the same year, he reached the fourth round, stunning in straight sets Felix Auger, perceived as a future super-star already at the time. The beginning of 2020 looked promising for Humbert, he captured his maiden title in Auckland, then reached a semifinal in Delray Beach, and something that seemed like a way to become a high-profile player was stopped in March by the coronavirus. After the six-month break Humbert confirmed his big potential in Hamburg, beating Daniil Medvedev in round one. I expect him to be clearly the best among three French left-handed players who are going to potentially play at the main-level this decade on a regular basis. The other two are: **Corentin Moutet** (b. 1999) and **Hugo Gaston** (b. 2000), who made a buzz around himself, advancing to the fourth round in the last French Open, and forcing Dominic Thiem to run all over the place with the help of overusing dropshots. Humbert is cool and collected, possesses great serve on ad-court, he can mix up fast serves down the line with slice serves creating very tight angles at ~160 kph; it gives him plenty of cheap points especially against right-handed opponents who don't like hitting backhands. His shots off both wings are flat and he knows how to distribute them close to the sidelines hence I assume he may be a Top 10 player, and one of the most accomplished players indoors in the years to come.

Career record: 46-41 [41 events]
Career titles: 2
Highest ranking: 30 (November 2020)
Best GS result: Wimbledon (fourth round 2019)

Stefanos Tsitsipas (Greece)

Born: August 12, 1998 in Athens
Height: 1.93 m
Plays: Right-handed

Στέφανος Τσιτσιπάς

It was probably July 2016 when I was playing with my Greek friend (Giorgos) in Crete and he told me that after so many years, Greece had finally a good prospect - an 18 year-old Tsitsipas. There was a Greek player who participated in a few Grand Slam events in the 00s (**Konstantinos Economidis**, b. 1977), but his highest ranking was just no. 112, so it was nothing for a 10 million nation with such a long history of Gods, philosophers and other interesting personas. My friend Giorgos told me, Tsitsipas would be a Top 100 player easily. He must have been something like 330 at the time. Cool. I watched Tsitsipas the following year when he lost the first round in Rotterdam to Jo-Wilfried Tsonga (February '17). The Greek was trying to break into the Top 200 then. Another time I saw him when he defeated Richard Gasquet in the second round of Doha in January 2018 which meant his career-best result then. I noticed his good movement, but certainly he didn't impress me. I thought something like "with this soft topspin backhand he wouldn't achieve anything special". I was wrong. Just a few months later, as someone still not being fully adopted as an ATP player, he reached the final in Barcelona and did it defeating four higher ranked players, including an impressive 6-3, 6-2 over one of the biggest young clay-court specialists - Dominic Thiem. In Summer that year, Tsitsipas reached another final (losing to Rafael Nadal again) - Toronto; en route to the final he defeated i.a. Thiem (again!), Novak Djokovic and Alexander Zverev (being very close to losing sets 2 & 3). Two wins in 2019, over Roger Federer at Australian Open and Nadal in Madrid, caused me to perceive him as one of the most gifted players born in the 90s. *"Roger is a legend of our sport, so much respect for him. He showed such good tennis over the years. I've been idolising him since the age of six, and it was a dream come true for me just being on Rod Laver Arena facing him. Winning at the end, I cannot describe it."* Tsitsipas said after the Federer victory. "*It means the world. I'm really happy that I proved myself today. I played one of my best games this year. I'm really happy that I'm fighting, I'm in the zone. I'm enjoying tennis at its fullest potential. It's really nice to be able to play this way. Today's victory is just an unbelievable feeling."* - about the Nadal victory... He confirmed his aspiration to overthrow the greatest players triumphing in a season-ending championship in London (just a year before he had won Masters under-21). So his

progress (576-210-91-15-6) in the ATP ranking was praiseworthy in the years 2015-19: Ascending like this could have allowed him to expect to attack no. 1 in the following year. Nothing like that happened in the peculiar 2020 season. Tsitsipas' ranking wasn't threatened, but at majors he just equalled his best performance reaching the semifinal in Paris, the same happened in the first Slam of this year in Melbourne. Andrey Rublev looks to me as someone whose abilities are limited to major quarterfinals, meanwhile Tsitsipas may be struggling to get the major final. He plays and thinks about the game similarly to Federer, but all his strokes are slightly worse than those performed by the Swiss when he was younger. Tsitsipas' career also depends on how long Djokovic and Nadal stay around. He positively surprised me with an outstanding five-set win over Nadal at this year's Aussie Open, but that match and his second round victory over Thanasi Kokkinakis took its toll; the Greek was deflated in his semifinal against Daniil Medvedev, who seems to be his toughest opponent for now with great retrieving skills. Tsitsipas' serve is very good, but he cannot rely on this shot entirely at difficult moments like Federer did; he works hard on his groundstrokes, but they seem to me still not sharp enough to save him when the serve doesn't function ideally. I really like only Tsitsipas' forehand down the line (also inside-out) when he hits the ball on the rise, it's his most reliable shot, if he cannot apply it time and time again, his baseline game turns to be vulnerable.

Career record:	140-77 [78 events]
Career titles:	5
Highest ranking:	5 (August 2019)
Best GS result:	Australian Open (semifinalist 2019 & 21) Roland Garros (semifinalist 2020)

Masters champion 2019

Alex de Minaur (Australia)

Born: February 17, 1999 in Sydney
Height: 1.83 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

Álex de Miñaur

The son of an Uruguayan father and Spanish mother. De Minaur relished a great beginning of the year 2018. As an almost 19-year-old boy, thanks to 'wild cards' [208] he reached the semifinal in Brisbane and the final in Sydney which he lost by a two-game margin to Daniil Medevdev. The Australian fans hoped that he would be "another Lleyton Hewitt", but the rest of the season dispelled doubts, De Minaur finished the season with a 24-22 record (the 19-year-old Hewitt had a 61-19 record). De Minaur, just like the young Hewitt, has the game based on fantastic movement & great defensive skills, maybe he was born twenty years too late to achieve something big though... *"Hewitt has always been an idol,"* said De Minaur. *"I always looked up to him growing up. For him to now be in my corner and helping me out as a mentor, really getting me to believe I belong here where I am and that I have got the level, is just incredible."* He has already won four titles, all of them in the "250 Series". I think that at best he may enjoy a career similar to Gilles Simon, so he may win a dozen secondary events. It's tough to imagine him as a Grand Slam semifinalist, maybe he's going to reach one Masters 1K final in North America (Cincinnati, Canadian Open) when some of the best players won't be playing and the draw will be beneficial for the skinny Australian. He's solid, he tries to stay positive, but he's nowhere near to Hewitt in terms of fighting spirit. Besides that, without cheap points on serve, De Minaur must count on bad days of superior players to defeat them from time to time. Diego Schwartzman, who is significantly shorter than De Minaur, advanced to the Top 10 last year, but he managed to do that mainly thanks to clay-courts; it's not a natural environment for the Australian, his clay-court record is terrible for now (2-11). **Thanasi Kokkinakis** (b. 1996) has a bigger potential than De Minaur, yet he's been struggling with injuries for the past two years. If Kokkinakis stays healthy, he, **Alexei Popyrin** (b. 1999, got his maiden title in the last week of me writing the book) and De Minaur may help Nick Kyrgios in winning something big in team competitions (ATP Cup or Davis Cup).

Career record: 91-61 [56 events]
Career titles: 4
Highest ranking: 18 (October 2019)
Best GS result: US Open (quarterfinalist 2020)

Denis Shapovalov (Canada)

Денис Шаповалов

Born: April 15, 1999 in Tel Aviv (Israel)
Height: 1.84 m
Plays: Left-handed

It may sound slightly controversial, but I think Shapovalov has technically bigger potential than Stan Wawrinka (three-time Grand Slam champion) and Dominic Thiem (fresh Grand Slam champion). It's not coincidental that I juxtapose the young Canadian with these two Europeans. He's left-handed, they are right-handers, but they have in common the same height (more or less) and they are able to generate a lof of power hitting backhands. Shapovalov's backhand is particularly interesting because he hits it from time to time jumping, for many years it seemed that a jumping backhand was reserved just for two-handers. Shapovalov created attention (negatively & positively) already as an ~18-year-old boy. He became the youngest defaulted player at the main-level as he hit (not intentionally) an umpire during his Davis Cup deciding rubber against Kyle Edmund. Shapovalov trailed two-sets-to-love when wanted to send a ball into the crowd in fury, unfortunately he did it in the worst possible way hitting the umpire in the face. *"Luckily he was OK but obviously it's unacceptable behaviour from me,"* Shapovalov explained, *"I just feel awful for letting my team down, for letting my country down, for acting in a way that I would never want to act."* The following year he became the hottest teenager on the tour as he stunned Rafael Nadal at Canadian Open and advanced to the fourth round at US Open before losing an all-tie-break three-setter to Pablo Carreno. Working with the former Top 10er Mikhail Youzhny, Shapovalov reached the Top 10 last year, playing very well especially after the sixth-month "corona break". I have noticed alarming signals in Shapovalov's composure though. He tends to hit returns too aggressively and loses plenty of points as a receiver quickly, under pressure he's very impatient, keen to risk, which is not bad on the assumption the concentration is increased, I don't see it in Shapovalov's game. I imagine two potential paths for him: he finds some solutions soon and becomes one of the best players of this decade (with Grand Slam titles included) or keeps his current demeanour to be just one of the most entertaining players to watch who are inconsistent and cannot be perceived as favorites to the biggest titles.

Career record: 106-89 [78 events]
Career titles: 1
Highest ranking: 10 (September 2020)
Best GS result: US Open (quarterfinalist 2020)

Felix Auger (Canada)

Born: August 8, 2000 in Montreal
Height: 1.91 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

The full name Félix Auger-Aliassime, "Auger" after French speaking mother, "Aliassime" after father (from Togo). One of two youngest players introduced to this book thanks to his sensational 2019 season. Of course, from the perspective of results in the 80s of teenagers like Mats Wilander, Boris Becker, Andre Agassi & Michael Chang, Auger didn't achieve anything special, but in the 10s teenagers actually didn't exist on the main-tour thus Auger got attention. First as a 'wild card' [104] he reached the final in Rio de Janeiro (his main-level event no. 13), then a quarterfinal in Sao Paulo (in both clay-court events lost to Laslo Djere); another big harcourts events in America brought him the third round (Indian Wells) and semifinal (Miami) where he went through qualifying rounds and was optically better than John Isner, yet the US veteran outsmarted him in two tie-breaks. Those results gave him an advancement to the Top 30, later on during the season he reached another two finals, also in his first grass-court event (Stuttgart). At Wimbledon he was perceived as a potential quarterfinalist, but surprisingly lost in the third round (in straights) to another youngster - Ugo Humbert. That match slowed down Auger's quick development, he was struggling to regain the form to the end of the season, but the first two months of 2020 before the Covid-19 attack, signaled his return to the form of the first half of 2019 (two indoor finals in back-to-back tournaments)... Great mover, very flexible and reserved in showing emotions. Certainly a man to watch in the upcoming seasons, potential Grand Slam champion this decade. He needs to finally win his maiden title to unblock himself, he has played seven ATP final thus far, losing them all not winning a set (0-14 in sets, had set points only in one of those sets). At the end of the previous season claimed his first title in doubles (Paris-Bercy along with Hubert Hurkacz). The Canadian should be a Top 10er for several years at least.

Career record: 69-54 [49 events]
Career titles: 0
Highest ranking: 17 (October 2019)
Best GS result: Australian Open (fourth round 2021)
US Open (fourth round 2020)

Jannik Sinner (Italy)

Born: August 16, 2001 in Innichen
Height: 1.91 m
Plays: Right-handed (two-handed backhand)

The last (and the youngest) player included in this e-book, because of his quarterfinal in the French Open '20... probably I wouldn't have done it if he had lost his fourth round meeting with "Sascha" Zverev, but maybe I'd decide to add him anyway because he finished the year 2020 claiming his maiden title (Sofia) and began another year with a title as well, before succumbing a competititve five-setter at Australian Open '21 to Denis Shapovalov, losing his ten-match winning streak. Sinner's resume is very modest, but he has already defeated guys like Zverev, Stefanos Tsitsipas, David Goffin (twice), Gael Monfils and Karek Khachanov. It seems a great future lies ahead of him. He was the only guy during the last major of 2020, who was able to threaten Rafael Nadal in two different sets. Sinner lost it 6-7, 4-6, 1-6, but for two hours he looked like a player who had it in his hands which is quite astonishing given Nadal's unimaginable dominance on the Parisian courts. Sinner was two points away from winning the opening set and led 4:3 in the 2nd set before the Spaniard took control of the final outcome. Sinner gathered some attention one year before, in his just sixth main-level event, he faced the three-time major champion - Stan Wawrinka - and despite playing the first "the best of five" match of his career, for almost three hours he was playing in terms of equality. Later that year he reached his first semifinal (Antwerp) and advanced to the Top 100. He received 'wild card' in the Next Generation event for the best under-21 players, claiming the title in a dominant fashion, being the lowest ranked player in the draw.... Just like 17 years older compatriot Andreas Seppi, Sinner was born South Tyrol, in northern Italy, a region of German speaking people. [There was a decent German player in the 90s sharing the same surname, **Martin Sinner** (b. 1968), winner of two ATP titles in 1995, reached no. 42 afterwards] Between 8 and 12 years of age, he skied competitively, and won a national age group championship in slalom in 2008. Sinner left his family when he was 13 years-old to move to Italian acknowledged coach Riccardo Piatti. The first three years on the professional circuit are impressive. His ATP ranking in the end of years 2018-20 it's 551 - 78 - 37... He still grows, in the next few years he should gain some muscles which will permit him to get more cheap points behind

the serve. For the time being his groundstrokes are excellent, quite effortlessly he is able to spread the ball in different directions, he's not afraid of attacking the net. There is little data to predict how he will be behaving in complex four-setters, five-setters and matches that go to 4-all, 5-all in the deciding sets, but he is cool, calm & collected, it rather allows to expect he will be winning in tight situations more often than losing. After the French Open '20, I wrote on Twitter, I saw him somewhere between the careers of Tomas Berdych & Novak Djokovic. Only time will tell I was right or wrong... times)

Career record: 35-23 [24 events]
Career titles: 2
Highest ranking: 32 (February 2021)
Best GS result: Roland Garros (quarterfinalist 2020)

Apart from Felix Auger and Sinner, there are four other players born in the 21st Century who have created hopes of doing some damage this decade:
Thiago Seyboth Wild of Brazil
(b. 2000; one title, but still hasn't reached the Top 100)
Juan Manuel Cerundolo of Argentina
(b. 2001; the player involved in the last match I watched before closing the book out as he claimed his maiden title in Cordoba, in his main-level debut; before him only four men had done it... thanks to the title the left-hander jumped from no. 335 to 181)
Lorenzo Musetti of Italy
(b. 2002; last year in Rome defeated Stan Wawrinka & Kei Nishikori in back-to-back matches, he should be in the Top 100 soon)
Carlos Alcaraz of Spain
(b. 2003; at the beginning of 2021 he stunned David Goffin in Melbourne-1, approaches the Top 100 thanks to three Challenger titles in the post covid-break

...the Others...

Below a few words about active players who aren't introduced to the e-book, but they could have been because they have achieved similar results or they are in the initial stages of their careers, so I expect they may be similary successful to those who have been introduced...

Denis Istomin (b. 1986, Uzbekistan) *2 titles, record: 229-261*... There was a moment of hesitation who should have been introduced, Istomin or Mikhail Kukushkin. I decided to write more about Kukushkin because Kazakhstan, mainly thanks to Kukushkin, made some impact on Davis Cup while other player born in Russia, who represents a Central Asian country, Istomin, wasn't supported by any other Uzbek player on the tour, hence Kazakhstan's southern neighbour is much worse in terms of tennis force. Istomin had his moment of glory at Australian Open '17 when having lost all five previous matches to Novak Djokovic, he stunned the multiple champion of the event 7-6, 5-7, 2-6, 7-6, 6-4 in the second round after an almost 5-hour contest, one of the biggest upsets of the Open Era! Atypical player because of wearing eyeglasses, very stiff at hitting balls which I assume is a consequence of his car accident in 2001 when he was kept away from tennis for two years. Currently rather close to retirement being close to drop outside the Top 200.

Adrian Mannarino (b. 1988, France) *1 title, record: 207-240*... For the first few years of his career I was wondering why he was using a permanent hairstyle, it damages hair, I expected to see him bald towards the end of his career, and this is what happened - since 2018 he's been bald. In a perverse way he's been playing his best tennis since then, actually nothing significant changed in his gamestyle, simply he found the right formula to keep a good ratio of wins and defeats. Since he turned 30, he played six finals (before just four), capturing his maiden title with a 0-6 record in finals, in Rosmalen '19. It's quite interesting that he's managed to win over 200 matches with his very short forehand swing; he was never someone the best guys could be afraid of, but he knows how to deal with those deprived of serious weaponry.

Aljaž Bedene (b. 1989, Slovenia/Great Britain) *0 titles (4 finals), record: 124-138*... It was the year 2012 when unexpectedly, as many as three Slovenians appeared in the Top 100 at the same time. Bedene joined a few years older compatriots: **Blaž Kavčič** and **Grega Žemlja**. No-one has won a title, no-one has gone beyond the third round of Grand Slam. Bedene will be remembered as the best player of that generation, the only one who surpassed 100 career wins. Zemlja is inactive, Kavcic still plays (Top 300).

John Millman (b. 1989, Australia) *1 title, record: 88-105*... In the first few years of his career, Millman, as an ATP player, was associated with Brisbane. He could be one of those players who come and go, and no-one remembers them a few years after their retirement. Millman, playing fourth straight year in Brisbane, stole a set from Andy Murray, and perhaps it elevated his career. Two years later, at the age of 26, he finally advanced to the Top 100 and remains there with a one year exception (2017). Millman's career has been highlighted by two matches against Roger Federer. The Australian shocked the Swiss in

four sets in the fourth round of US Open '18, and almost defeated him again in five sets at Australian Open '20 (led 8:4 in super tie-break before losing six consecutive points). Later that year, he claimed his maiden title (Nur-Sultan) having defeated **Tommy Paul** (b. 1997) in the quarterfinal 6-7, 6-4, 7-6 trailing *0:5 in the deciding tie-break, Millman had saved two points serving at 4:5).

Radu Albot (b. 1989, Moldavia) *1 title, 85-107*... The best Moldavian in history, he captured his potentially lone ATP title at Delray Beach fending off three match points against Daniel Evans in the final two years ago. He's no threat for the best players, but was relatively close to get a win of his life in Miami '19 - seven points away from defeating Roger Federer in 2R. The Swiss prevailed 4-6, 7-5, 6-3 and easily went to the title afterwards.

Vasek Pospisil (b. 1990, Canada) *0 titles (3 finals), record: 121-153*... At the beginning of the 10s, I expected more from the Canadian born to Czech parents (Pospíšil). In 2011 he had played a tight four-setter vs Feliciano Lopez at US Open, then helped Canada to advance to the first round of the World Group winning two singles (and doubles) against Israel. Canadian Open '13 seemed like his breakthrough event, he reached the semifinal winning two matches in deciding tie-breaks against Top 20 players which seemingly indicated good mentality. Since then he has rested on the laures, just three ATP finals (two of them last year), but there was a Wimbledon quarterfinal in 2015, and he defeated the best player in the world (Andy Murray at Indian Wells '17), something many ATP titleists can only dream about. A Wimbledon champion in doubles (2014, p/Jack Sock). An all-court player, one of a few who can win games constantly attacking the net behind the serve.

Daniel Evans (b. 1990, Great Britain) *1 title, record: 78-83*... He [64] held a match point in the third round of US Open '16 before losing to Stan Wawrinka, the eventual champion. It indicated a potential of the Brit, who suffered setbacks the following season when he was tested positive for cocaine. He came back after a one-year ban, not being ranked, but needed only one year to be a Top 100 player again. Actually since the "corona virus" he's been playing his best tennis, last year he defeated one of the best players of the season twice (Andrey Rublev) and this year claimed his maiden title. Useless on clay, plays backhand slice a lot.

Jan-Lennard Struff (b. 1990, Germany) *0 titles, record: 141-165*... He's a good candidate for the best player without an ATP final. He has lost all his seven semifinals of the years 2014-19 never being close to go one round further. It's strange because he's one of the most dangerous players for those who established themselves as seeded players during majors. He has a quite complete game, his serve is big, he may get cheap points attacking the net behind the serve and from the back of the court, also with his two-handed backhand. In the past two seasons he has defeated: Milos Raonic (twice), Alexander Zverev, Stefanos Tsitsipas (twice), Marin Cilic, Borna Coric (on clay in a thriller!), Karen Khachanov, Diego Schwartzman, Roberto Bautista, Denis Shapovalov & David Goffin (twice), when they all were Top 20 players or better. Normally, from a pro who defeats players of this calibre you can expect a few ATP titles at least, but somehow he works like a hero of folk myths, taking from the rich and giving to the poor ;) During the last Aussie Open he lost to Christopher O'Connell, who had won just two main-level matches prior to the event.

Aslan Karatsev (b. 1993, Russia) *0 titles, record: 8-11*... The sensation of Australian Open '21. The 27-year-old Karatsev [114] was drifting between Futures and Challengers for a few years, only occasionally playing in the main-level events (didn't play any in the years 2017-19). He had too low ranking to even try to advance to the majors through qualies. In the "covid season" he finally began to keep a good form at the Challenger level (two titles in four finals) and moved in the ranking from no. 293 to 112. He advanced to the Australian Open main-level thanks to a qualifying event held in Doha (January '21), and one month later became the first Grand Slam semifinalist in his major debut, levelling his seven-year career prize money within two weeks! The age of veterans shifted from 30 to 35, so I cannot exclude that Karatsev has ten years of playing on the main-level ahead. Very solid player from the back of the court with monstruos calves, I rather don't see him in the Top 20.

Cameron Norrie (b. 1995, Great Britain) *0 titles (1 final), record: 56-63*... The left-hander born in South Africa to Scottish father and Welsh mother. He reminds me of Adrian Mannarino with his style, actually I would think they are brothers just looking how they look and how they play. They're both one level (at least) below Ugo Humbert with their pushing two-handed backhands, hit with very compact swing. He's titless, but something should come sooner or later as well as Top 30 allowing him to be seeded at majors, only go give decent matches against higher ranked players in the third rounds. He has won two unexpected five-setters against higher ranked opponents (Roberto Bautista, Diego Schwartzman), it gives a hope he may reach a major quarterfinal one day.

Lorenzo Sonego (b. 1995, Italy) *1 title, record: 40-47*... It's the best time for the Italian tennis in the Open Era, there are as many as eight Italian players in the Top 100. No player from Italy has won a major since Adriano Panatta in 1976. Jannik Sinner has already shown a big potential, he may achieve more than Panatta, but it's too early to predict it with conviction. Sonego looks to me as a Top 20 player maximum with one major quarterfinal. I like his attitude in tighter moments, he goes for his shots, and is able to mix up flat strokes with dropshots. Last year he won the longest tie-break on clay as he defeated Taylor Fritz 7-6(5), 6-3, 7-6(17) in Paris, saving nine set points in the 3rd set. A few weeks later he stunned Novak Djokovic 6-2, 6-1 in Vienna, one of the greatest players of all-time had never lost a match winning just three games!

Alexander Bublik (b. 1997, Kazakhstan) *0 titles (4 finals), record: 44-44*... "Euro-Asian Kyrgios", but nicer on the court than the Australian. Another solid player born in Russia who represents a Central Asian country. He likes to seek unconventional solutions (under arm serves, attacking the net with poor approach-shots, hitting 2nd serves faster than 1st serves). He may enjoy a similar career to Lorenzo Sonego, so I can imagine him in the Top 20 at some point of his career and playing in the Grand Slam quarterfinal (Wimbledon seems the most plausible in his case). I've introduced to the e-book a biography of Hubert Hurkacz; if I see, analyzing data, in 2030 let's say, that Sonego & Bublik have better careers than the Pole, I won't be surprised.

Miomir Kecmanović (b. 1999, Serbia) *1 title, record: 44-40*... In his second event after the six-month Covid-19 break (Kitzbuhel) he captured his maiden title, just after the US Open, so the circumstances were special when players moved from hardcourts to clay. He has a positive record as the only player in "the Others" but I don't see a bright future ahead of him. I don't expect that he's going to enjoy a more successful career than compatriots Dusan Lajovic & Filip Krajinovic, similarly to them he is too reserved in showing emotions, thus I cannot imagine him defeating the best players at Slams. David Nalbandian has just begun helping him...

Alejandro Davidovich Fokina (b. 1999, Spain) *0 titles, record: 18-21*... The Son of Russian mother and Swedish father. He made his breakthrough after the Covid-19 break with a bunch of good results (4R at US Open, SF & QF in back-to-back Cologne events, 3R Paris-Bercy). These four results changed him from Top 100 into Top 50 player. Like in the case of Kecmanovic, the basic shots (forehand & backhand) are reliable, but it's not enough to do serious damage in the tennis elite. His mentality is suspicious (prone to lose matches being close to victory) as well as his inclination for overusing dropshots.

...an Oracle...

~ the past intertwined with the future ~

...the 70s belonged to players born in the 50s
the 80s belonged to players born in the 60s
the 90s belonged to players born in the 70s
the 00s belonged to players born in the 80s...

...the 10s should have belonged to players born in the 90s, but it didn't happen: the pattern has been interrupted. For the first time in the Open Era, players who turned 30 (born in the 80s), didn't fade away, well, some of them even played their best tennis turning 30. It couldn't be anticipated, let's look at multiple Slam champions, when they reached their physical/mental limits: two great "defensive" Swedes (Bjorn Borg, Mats Wilander) played their last professional matches in their 30s, but their last major triumphs come from the times they turned 24-25; their "offensive" compatriot, Stefan Edberg finished career at the age of 30, his great rival Boris Becker at age 32, but they both felt "the best of five" format was too demanding before they turned 30, the same with two Russian best players (Marat Safin, Yevgeny Kafelnikov) as well as with Jim Courier, who peaked at the age of 22 having won four Slams and didn't add another for eight years. Lleyton Hewitt, who similarly to Courier, played his best tennis at the age of 22, finished career at age of 35, but in the last ten years of it, he was unable to play a major semifinal at least. Similar story to some degree with Guillermo Vilas - in the last seven years of his career (after he turned 30) he wasn't a threat at majors at all; the second best South American player of the Open Era, Gustavo Kuerten was physically spent before turning 30. Michael Chang, who shares with Wilander and Becker major titles as a 17-year-old boy,

played his last good Slam event at the age of 25 - in the last six years of his career he was usually losing first rounds at majors. Ivan Lendl, who was known as super professional player in the 80s, who put emphasis on every detail to extend his career, was 30 years-old when played the last major final; his arch-rival John McEnroe was 25 when felt exhausted, and the last seven years of his career, McEnroe spent outside the Top 10 (with an exception when turned 30). Pete Sampras, the best player of the 90s, seemed like someone who would win ten Wimbledons at least when he triumphed for the seventh time in 2000... he was 29 then, and also physically spent soon afterwards, but somehow found his second wind capturing the last, 14th major at age 31 - didn't play a match in the aftermath. Among those best players of modern tennis, there were only two exceptions as far as successful career turning 30 is concerned: Jimmy Connors & Andre Agassi. Admittedly, Connors won his last major at age 31, but for the following eight years, he played multiple major semifinals, and at age 36 he was still a Top 10 player, something he had already achieved as a 20-year-old player, so we can say that he was in the elite for 16 years. The same with Agassi who was a Top 10 player in a span of 18 years with two exceptional years (when he was 23 - injury and 27 - lack of motivation to play)... Currently we have three titans of the game who occupy the Top 5: Federer (40 y.o. this year), Nadal (35 y.o.), Djokovic (34 y.o.). Federer was able to win a major at age 36, is it an indicator that Nadal and Djokovic will be winning Slams for the next two years at least? Given the style in which Nadal triumphed at French Open '20, it's difficult to expect that he won't add another title in Paris; Djokovic had his troubles during this year's Australian Open, but in the last two matches of the event, he was fresh like a daisy, playing at his level of 2011 when he was 24 and became the best in the world for the first time. Where are the limits of the Big 3? Federer's long awaited comeback is approaching (Doha), I don't believe that he would be a title contender at Slams again, but he hasn't played for the past twelve months, so maybe he magically regrouped, and he rethought strategy against Djokovic (lost to him all the most important matches since Wimbledon '12). In five main chapters of this e-book, I introduced pictures displaying the four best players for each decade given the decade players were born. In chapter no. 5 there are: Dominic Thiem (27), Alexander Zverev (23), Stefanos Tsitsipas (22) & Daniil Medvedev (25) - they have collected one Slam title altogether, to put the things in perspective: Courier had won four major titles when he was at Zverev's age. At least for now, it seems that these four guys may realistically wish to be as successful as the fourth best players of some previous decades (Vilas, Chang, Andy Murray). It's really tough for me to imagine that one of them may win four majors at least to be historically compared to Courier. Thiem has a shot, he is the oldest, the most experienced in terms of playing tough matches in the most important events against Djokovic and Nadal, and he's clearly the best on clay among the younger, well established players; so if we ponder who may stop Nadal in Paris, Thiem seems to be the most plausible answer. Today, I think that Zverev has better shot at winning his major titles than Tsitsipas & Medvedev. He's very inconsistent, but has already played many five-setters, and his serve is huge...

with a good draw he should sense the trophy once he plays the second week of a major, maybe except French Open. Medvedev, who in contrast to Tsitsipas, has already played two major finals, looks to me as someone who has already reached the peak of his career, and his inability to win matches after losing the first sets, isn't optimistic. Bizarrely, he hasn't won a match in Paris yet, while with his style, the triumph at Wimbledon seems absurd, thus I think this year's US Open and next Aussie Open should be the last events when he will be considered as a title contender at majors... My insight is that the age 23 for tennis players is very telling; if a player doesn't win anything big before he turns 23, it's very difficult to expect it may change in the future. I mean the Masters 1K titles; Tsitsipas won 'Masters', but in terms of conquering majors, a Masters 1K title is more promising because it is physically more demanding. The Greek needs to go one step further (he has played two Masters 1K finals so far) - if he wins a Masters 1K title this year, it will allow me to believe that he may be a Grand Slam champion. Pondering about this decade, one huge uncertainty is: how will develop the youngest players who have already shown big potential? I see four players who may be regular 'Masters' participants this decade: Ugo Humbert (22), Denis Shapovalov (21), Felix Auger (20) and Jannik Sinner (19). Humbert and Shapovalov don't have time, if they want to be remembered as members of the best players born in the 90s, they need to finish this season in the Top 10, and in my opinion they both possess skills to do that (in Humbert's case I also take into account that he's the most promising player from the great country tennis-wise, so he may count on special treating during all French events - seven this year (Monte Carlo included). Both Auger & Sinner, have still time to turn into Top 10ers next year, but the young Canadian certainly needs to get his maiden title this year to get the monkey off his back. Among four youngsters, who currently occupy places around no. 20 (to average it), I see the biggest potential in Sinner, but I need to see many more of his matches this year, I have to analyze how he reacts to difficult situations against very good players to know more about him. We cannot exclude that the 20s will belong to a player born in the 00s who is still unknown as a potential tennis hero, but I have my doubts that today's teenager will take the tennis scene by the storm. I think that once Djokovic & Nadal are finished, let's say, I don't believe now that one of them would win his last major after 2024, the history may repeat itself from the years 2000-2003 when the hegemony of Sampras and Agassi came to an end which created chances for several players to win major titles (it was a period when no-one was able to win two different majors within a season and five different players of two different generations claimed their lone Slams (Goran Ivanisevic, Thomas Johansson, Albert Costa... Juan C. Ferrero, Andy Roddick). I wish that because I dislike hegemony.

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