

Martina Navratilova

Novak might not be Mr Perfect but he's got his mojo back and is a true champ



IT MAY seem a strange thing to say but, for me, Kyle Edmund holds the key to Novak Djokovic's Wimbledon success.

Before playing the British No1, Novak was playing from memory, but in the fourth round sets against Kyle he rediscovered his mojo, which had been missing for a long time.

He got himself fired up and he needed to bring his A-game to beat Kyle. In that match, he effectively said, 'Okay, I'm back' and then came that semi-final against Rafa Nadal, in which his level of tennis was off the charts. He didn't need to replicate that in the final but, from that match against Kyle onwards, he was playing in the here and now.

With Novak, it only seemed like it needed one moment to light him back up again. There were glimpses of the Novak of old at the French Open but you could still sense he wasn't feeling it.

Here, the intensity in his eyes and body language were back. Confidence is a very fragile thing, but the doubts were erased and he fully believes in himself again.

Novak is a truly great champion. He gets a hard time sometimes from the crowd because he's not like the two Mr Perfects in Roger Federer and Rafa but what he does on court, it's nothing really. He was brought up to be brutally honest, as I was, and it turns out a lot of people don't necessarily like that but, to me, that's a breath of fresh air.

If you could define Novak in one shot, a shot that highlights when he's on form, it's that outside foot on the backhand where he slides across.

For everyone else in the men's game, that results in a slice, but Novak gets

Look out world... Serena will return even stronger

MY ADVICE for the WTA Tour players with regards to Serena Williams is: watch out world.

Okay, there wasn't a fairytale ending in Saturday's final but, if anything, that defeat will make her even more determined in the weeks and months ahead. Serena rarely fails and, if she does (I wouldn't call getting to a Wimbledon final 10 months after her daughter's birth a failure), it doesn't last long. She will be fired up for the US Open and I'd say it's her against the

rest of the world right now.

Serena arrived at Wimbledon with very few matches under her belt; by Flushing Meadows there will be a lot more. If I were choosing her schedule, I'd get her playing two tournaments before New York and it doesn't matter how she does. She showed here she doesn't need a great build-up to do well.

She's won the US Open six times and, as good as Angelique Kerber's playing, you'd have to say Serena will be the clear favourite.



One step too far: Serena Williams in regards to Saturday's defeat by Angelique Kerber

himself in position to be able to get back a two-handed backhand with purpose. It's the single shot in his repertoire that makes him stand out above everyone else and, when he plays it, his balance is such that he can immediately shift his weight and get back to the middle of the court for the next ball.

When you're playing him — and I'm sure Kevin Anderson will agree — he's just a wall. Everything you hit at him, it comes back at you even harder. You saw it in the final: Kevin just didn't have an

opportunity, the ball just kept on coming back.

This might be the moment for another great Novak run. You can't say he has a bad surface so, with his health, game and confidence back, what's to stop him anywhere now? Okay, on clay he's probably second favourite behind Rafa, but not many would bet against him at the US Open.

There's a big part of me bothered by the 'what if' with the final: what if Anderson had been properly fit and

rested after that marathon match against John Isner? You could see he was hurting from the outset. The odd thing about a match like that is that the next day you often feel okay; it's the following day that you stiffen up. In the final, you saw his legs didn't loosen until the third set and, had he converted one of the set points, things might have been different. He turned things around against Roger Federer, didn't he?

I've been saying for a long time there should be a fifth-set tiebreak. The US

Open introduced it and I remember being on the receiving end of some tiebreak defeats, but it's the way to go.

A lot of people say a marathon fifth set creates so much drama, but I don't agree: the players become more conservative with their energy so, actually, the games become more predictable.

The International Tennis Federation has to address it. With that change, we might have had a different final. But it's great to have Novak back at the top of the game. The sport's missed him.

Djokovic's grand plan as he ends long wait

Matt Majendie

NOVAK DJOKOVIC has set himself the aim of catching the Grand Slam haul of Roger Federer and Rafa Nadal.

The Serb's fourth Wimbledon triumph moved him to 13 Grand Slam career wins, four behind Nadal and seven off Federer's record of 20.

It was the former world No1's first Grand Slam success in more than two years and he is warning the world's top two players that more titles are around the corner.

"Lucky No13," said Djokovic, after his 6-2, 6-2, 7-6 win over Kevin Anderson. "I'm hoping I won't stay on 13 as long as I stayed on 12."

"I do think this Wimbledon victory will mean a lot to me confidence-wise, will serve as a springboard for what's coming up this season, but also for the rest of my career."

"As long as I'm motivated and love this sport and I'm healthy, I have a good chance to go on and win a few more [Grand Slams]."

Just a few weeks ago, at the French Open, Djokovic warned he might miss the entire grasscourt season in the wake of a tight quarter-final defeat at Roland Garros.

His coach, Marian Vajda, with whom he was reunited not long before the French Open, persuaded him to enter Queen's, where he reached the final, but admitted winning Wimbledon was beyond the realms of expectation.

"This is the biggest surprise in all the years I've worked with him," said Vajda, who had been axed last year by Djokovic, along with his entire team.

"After that terrible interview [at the French Open] in which he decided not to play grasscourts, I always doubted. He wasn't ready for Wimbledon, I still

13 Grand Slam wins for Djokovic — only Federer (20), Nadal (17) and Sampras (14) have more

3 titles since 2017 — he won 18 between 2015-16 before injuries struck

10 the Serb's new world ranking



cannot understand why it happened. But it's like a violin, if you stop for six months with the violin you can't play any songs but, with routine, it comes back."

As for what is possible at next month's US Open — a tournament Djokovic has won twice before — Vajda, 52, said: "I cannot tell you how he's going to be at the US Open. I'm not predicting anything."

Djokovic's victory moved him back into the world's top 10 today, something he admitted he did not think would be possible after months of playing in pain, followed by elbow surgery earlier in the year.

But a back-to-basics approach with his

coach appears to have brought a return of the Djokovic of old, who previously boasted the World No1 spot for 223 weeks and could yet find himself back there if the results continue.

"This is going to be a huge confidence boost for the rest of the season," he said ahead of the US Open and the American hardcourt season.

"There was always part of me that believed I could come back to this level, to again be one of the best players in the world."

"I would have said Wimbledon was a bit too early but whenever I come to a tournament — and especially to a Grand Slam — I have a good opportunity to fight for the trophy."

Prize guy: Novak Djokovic enjoys the moment after his straight sets victory over Kevin Anderson in yesterday's final

Draper eyeing big time after narrow final defeat

Matt Majendie

JACK DRAPER insists he can make the grade in the senior ranks after his narrow defeat in the boys' singles final.

The 16-year-old was bidding to become the first British winner since Stanley Matthews — son of the late footballing great Sir Stanley — achieved the feat in 1962.

"It gives me immense confidence," said Draper, following a 6-1, 6-7, 6-4 defeat. "It feels surreal and I'm still taking it in."

"It's been an unbelievable week. It's going to give me a lot of inspiration and motivation. I'm very happy."

Draper has the right credentials to succeed. Like his idol, Andy Murray, his mother is a tennis coach. In addition, his father, Roger,

was the one-time chief executive of the Lawn Tennis Association.

Draper admitted he has yet to fill out properly into his frame but, with a big serve, hefty groundstrokes and an impressive fighting spirit, he has all the credentials to be a future British No1. And he is eager to get there.

"I'm going to go more into the senior game," he said. "I'm not really sure, looking ahead, at how many juniors I'm going to play. I'm definitely going to try and transition into the men's game."

And he is relishing the opportunity to shine again on such a big stage.

Of his match on No1 Court, he added: "The adrenaline from the crowd was unbelievable. Having that many people watching was really great for me."

Murray aims to play on with Azarenka despite final blow

Matt Majendie

JAMIE MURRAY wants to retain his partnership with Victoria Azarenka next year at Wimbledon, despite their defeat in the mixed doubles final.

The pair lost 7-6, 6-3 against Alexander Peya and Nicole Melichar in a pairing which could be repeated at the next Grand Slam, the US Open.

It was the third time Murray had teamed up with a former women's world No1, having tasted success previously in the mixed doubles at SW19 with Jelena Jankovic and Martina Hingis.

Asked about the potential for a repeat, Azarenka said: "We haven't really talked about it. I don't know what schedule Jamie is playing. It's a little too soon to talk but I would love to play with him. The last two weeks was really fun."

Murray's progress to the mixed final was a surprise, given he had said he was focusing solely on the men's doubles.

But he opted to pair up with Azarenka, who lost in the third round of the women's singles.

Murray said: "I hope for Vika she gets her form back in singles, so she can get back to playing the latter stages of the biggest tournaments."

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