

Sports

A big event like the Open should've ended better

Tennis finals at Grand Slam events are usually dramatic and the culmination of two weeks of fighting through tough competition.

The U.S. Open men's final was a meeting between the No. 1 seed — Ivan Lendl — and Mats Wilander, who had been breathing down Lendl's neck for the top spot for the past year.

They are the top two players in the world.

The final was to be a fight between the best of the best.

It was — but that doesn't mean it was an exciting match with nothing but breathtaking shots.

In fact, the exalted men's final at this year's Open was an anticlimax to what had happened in the competition's past two weeks of play.

Granted, the final did have its high points. Wilander became the first Swede to win the U.S. Open — yes, Bjorn Borg failed to win this trophy.

He took over Lendl's top ranking in the world, and the match lasted a record time of just under five hours. Lendl was also halted at three consecutive U.S. championships — one shy of Bill Tilden's record of four.

These were fantastic accomplishments, but they do not a thrilling match make.

Thanks to these feats there was at least something interesting to say about the final match.

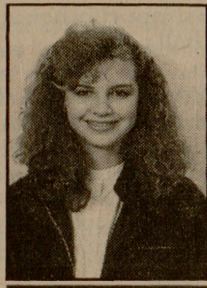
The sheer length and monotony of the match was part of its downfall. It reminded me of a soap opera that I hadn't seen in three months but in which nothing new had happened to miss. It was an endless display of the same shots.

I must apologize and say that I'm not trying to take anything away from the enormous skills of either player. Lendl and Wilander are very talented, but in a match together they are a ticket to day-dreaming or yawns.

Apart from their skill, neither one has that certain something that grips the unwavering attention of the spectators.

Let's face it: Tennis has become a sport of showmanship. Just being a competent player is no longer sufficient. A player must be a spectacle as well. That helps to prevent the match from coming out like a soggy towel as did this year's final.

In the early rounds and up until the semifinal matches, the Open final showed potential of being quite intriguing.



Cray Pixley
Sports viewpoint

Seeds dropped out like flies, and unknown players came out of the woodwork to dispatch the big names. All seemed to be going well.

The Australian contingent showed up, and one of them — Darren Cahill — even defeated an injured Boris Becker.

This year was the first time so many Aussies had survived the early rounds since the early 1970s, and Pat Cash didn't even make the trip!

And finally, the American men are showing potential.

The youthful Michael Chang and Andre Agassi have broken through to give the United States some hope. Now Jimmy Connors doesn't have to carry the weight of America's hopes on his no-longer-spring-chicken shoulders.

The one bad thing about the American men at the Open was that Chang and Agassi had to play each other in the fourth round. It's pretty bad when one of our few guys has to eliminate another one early on.

Agassi moved past Chang and then faced Connors in the quarterfinals. Was there to be no respite? Agassi at the price of Connors?

Very depressing.

Connors and Agassi have showmanship.

Agassi was victorious and moved on to iron-faced Lendl in the semis. It was sad to see Jimbo go, but we all probably realized that Agassi's young legs were a better match for Lendl.

Now the excitement. Could Agassi make it past Lendl?

The match was great even though Agassi failed to bring Lendl down. The young American is the hope of American tennis. He is a spectacle and a crowd-pleaser.

He was not very pleasing to Lendl, who frequently whined to the umpire about Agassi's grunting during points.

I would have given anything for some Agassi grunting in the championship match.

Instead it was to be the stony-faced Wilander and Lendl bombarding each other from the baseline. Wilander did come to the net occasionally and served wonderfully, but it was not gripping tennis. Lendl did not seem on top of his game.

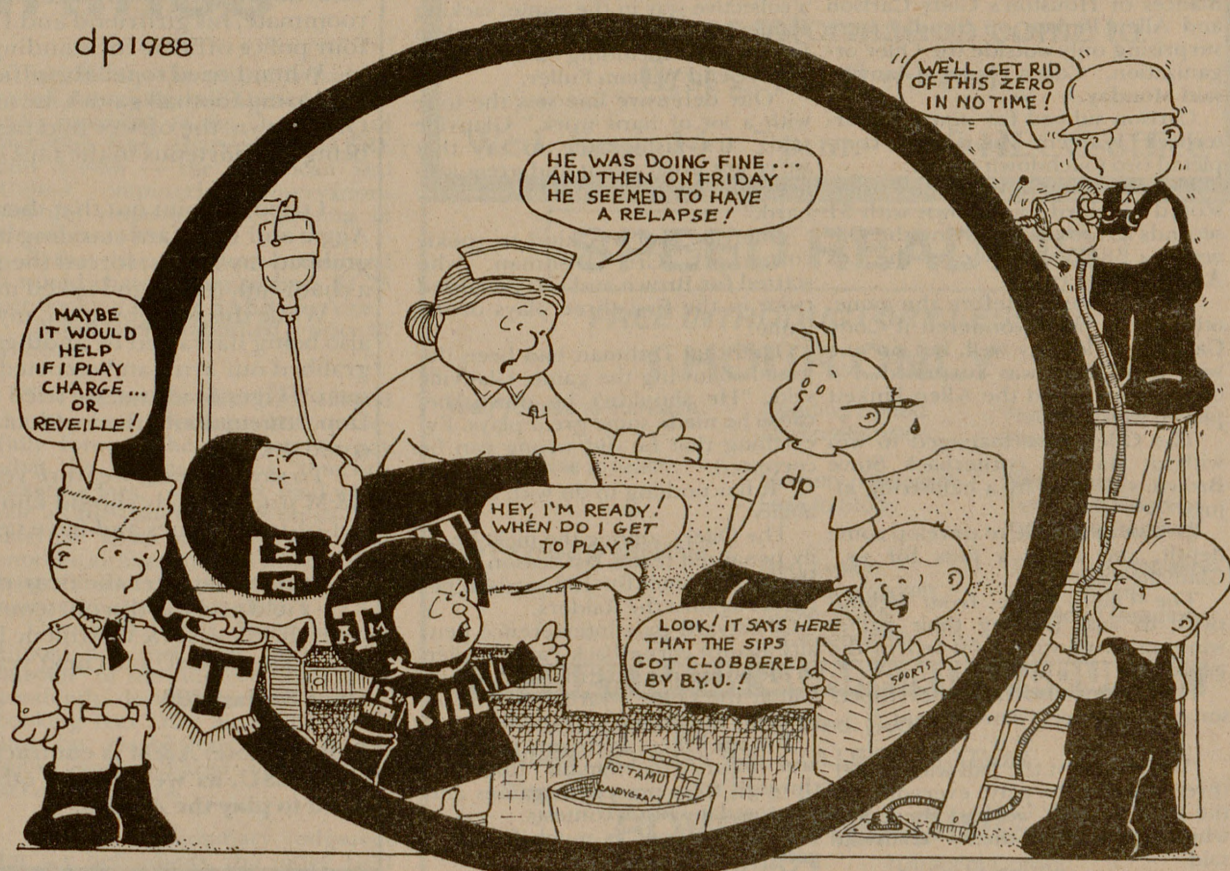
The match stumbled through five sets of quiet play interrupted only by crowd abuse or the occasional clenched fists after a winner.

This wasn't enough to stick in my memory.

When I think of the 1988 U.S. Open it won't be of the championship match. I'll probably be wondering what it would have been like to see another Borg and John McEnroe meeting.

Now that would have been a thrilling match.

dp1988



Graf, Wilander make history

NEW YORK (AP) — It was a grand U.S. Open.

Steffi Graf won the first Grand Slam in 18 years. Then Mats Wilander became the first man in 14 years to win three Grand Slam events in one year.

Ivan Lendl could have made history, too. But Wilander stopped Lendl's bid for a record fourth straight U.S. Open title and took over his No. 1 ranking in the longest final in Open history.

In 1987, their final lasted 4 hours, 47 minutes. This year, it went seven minutes longer. If they play again next year, fans should be advised to bring sleeping bags.

Some may have nodded off during Sunday's final, which stretched

from day to night and featured ping-pongish rallies that lasted up to 52 strokes. Those awake at the end saw Wilander seize the top spot in men's tennis when Lendl sent a service return into the net.

"It's the best victory I've ever had," he said. "It's even better than my first Paris title."

Wilander was referring to the 1982 French Open championship he won when he was 17. It was the first trophy in his Grand Slam collection, which now includes one U.S., three French and three Australian titles.

That's one more Grand Slam title than Lendl has, the same number John McEnroe has, and one fewer than Jimmy Connors has.

So why hasn't Wilander gotten the

respect or public recognition that those players have?

Part of it is due to his low-key personality, which some people mistake for a lack of ambition. Another factor is that he's Swedish, and when Americans think of Swedish tennis they still think of Bjorn Borg.

And, finally, there is his counterpunching style on the court, which is effective but often boring.

Unlike Wilander, Graf had no need to alter her strategy.

The West German, 19, breezed to the final against Gabriela Sabatini without losing a set.

Graf split the first two sets against her fellow teen, but, as often happens in their matches, Sabatini tired down the stretch.

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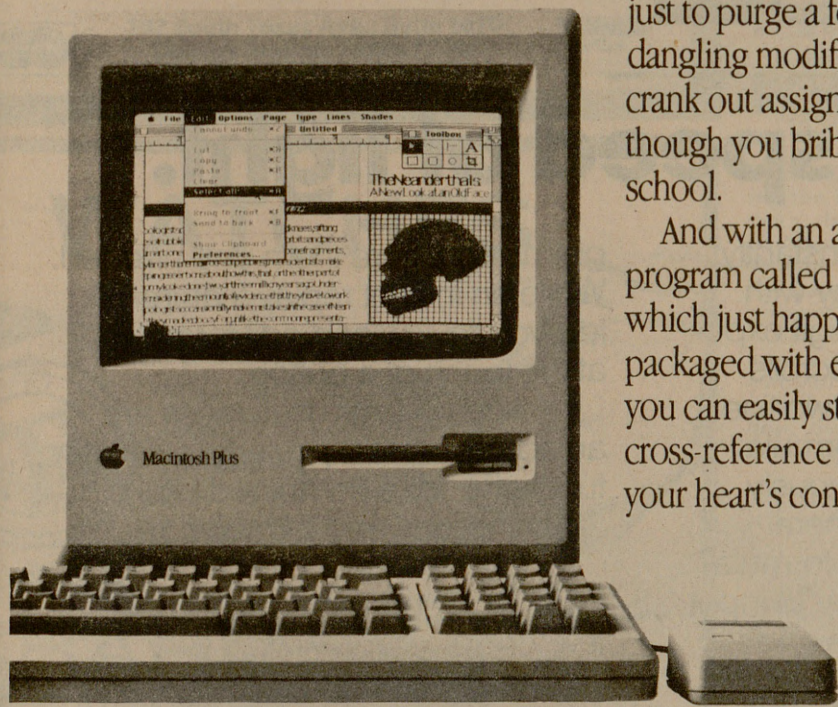
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