



Who is the Greatest?

With at least 10 grand slam titles each, they are the five greatest tennis players of all time. But who is the greatest?

It is now year 2035, but the quest to answer this question dates back to year 2012. Fortunately, they were all alive then. The contracting company had strict rules in the signed contract. Take skin cells from all five Greats by tape stripping, reprogram them in a test tube to become pluripotent and then implant them into the prepared uterus of a single woman. Yes, quintuplets, but this way, there would be no surrogate mother bias.

The delivery was uneventful and produced what was expected. Five healthy baby boys, who suckled the same milk; raised in the same neighborhood in Florida, shared house and food, attended the same tennis academy and had the same coach. They played with the same racquets and strings and hit the same brand of balls. All the same. No bias. The rules of tennis playing were also clear. Eight hours of tennis instruction per day, five days a week, until they become 23. Until then, no competitive games between them were allowed, to avoid mental buildups and biases. They would only play against each other at the designated, and right, time.

At the peak age of 23, in this year of 2035, they were brought together to play the four grand slam tournaments of the year. They would start with the Australian Open hard courts in January. The tournament would be a five player qualifier round (10 games in total) with the top two scoring players meeting in the final. Same at the French Open on red clay in June, and on grass at Wimbledon in July. Finish it up at Flushing Meadows, New York for the US Open in September.

Television was there with their best Commentators, asking the question o the Century. Who is the best of all time? The organizing company had their eyes on the same questions for other sports, if this exercise was successful. Take boxing; swimming; weightlifting; and other individual sports; then move to team sports and create the dream teams of basketball, baseball, hockey; you name it. There would be lots of money involved from television coverage and sponsorships.

Consider the Great Lefty from Australia (Rod Laver; 11 grand slams),the Cold Swede (Bjorn Borg;11 grand slams), Pistol Pete from USA (Pete Sampras; 14 grand slams) ,the Swiss Master (Roger Federer; 16 grand slams and counting) and the Spanish Matator (Rafael Nadal; 10 grand slams and counting).

Now, let the game begin!

As expected, the competition was fierce and of the highest level. Serves were flying like bullets , with tons of aces, and rallies were going forever. No match finished in straight sets; all went to the distance; five sets with tiebreakers.

The Australian went to Laver who played Federer in the final and had the Australian crowd with him. The Wimbledon went to Borg who beat Federer in the final. French was captured by Nadal after a clash with Federer; and US Open went to Sampras who outlasted Federer in front of a fanatic American crowd.

When all was done and dealt with, 10 International TV Commentators, chaired by the venerable John McEnroe, got together on television to declare "The Greatest". It was a heated debate. None of the players had won two Slams and one played in all four finals but did not win one. In the face of an impasse, the Judging Committee brought in the statisticians of the National Academy of Sciences .Careful analysis revealed that the Swiss Master, despite not winning a tournament, had the best record in number of matches won, beating all other greats in the preliminary rounds. Additional analysis reveled that he had won the largest number of games and the largest number of points played, by a narrow margin, but with a p value of <0.001.

When the official statistics were announced by the Price-Waterhouse Representative, the experts were stunned and confused. Who is the best of all time? And how could they pick one tournament winner over another? And how could they ignore the statistics?

Twenty-three years later, and after a carefully designed and expensive study, the question still remains. Who is the best of all time? Who would ever know? More studies seem to be necessary.