

How to get the best autograph without standing in line.

Eleftherios P. Diamandis

Getting an autograph from a big shot is always a tough business. And in most cases, the big shot scribbles something on a piece of paper, a picture, a tennis ball or a hat, which, if you do not tell people who he/she is, they will never guess.

I love the game of tennis and I go to Grand Slam tournaments often. You will be lucky if you have a glimpse of the superstars of the game, such as Roger Federer, Rafael Nadal and Novak Djokovic, from a rather close distance. To speak to them, is virtually impossible. How then I was able to get a personalized autograph from tennis great Rafael Nadal with his handwriting “para Elefterios Diamandis cou afecto Rafa Nadal 2013”? (see attached picture).

In early 2013, I received a request for a short post-doctoral fellowship from Dr. Josep Miguel Bauca, from Spain. I agreed to host Josep for 6 months and when he came, I realized that he was from the Island of Majorca. Naturally, I asked him if he has ever seen Rafael Nadal, who is a native of this island. I was surprised to hear that Josep knows his girlfriend, Francesca Maria Perello, very well. When he mentioned that he goes out with her and other friends for occasional dinners, I was rather skeptical and asked him if Rafa was joining on any occasion. He said that he rarely goes with them since he is very busy with the pro-tennis tour. Josep surprised me when he came back from a trip to Majorca with a postcard-size autograph of Rafa Nadal. I accepted his gift with great pleasure.

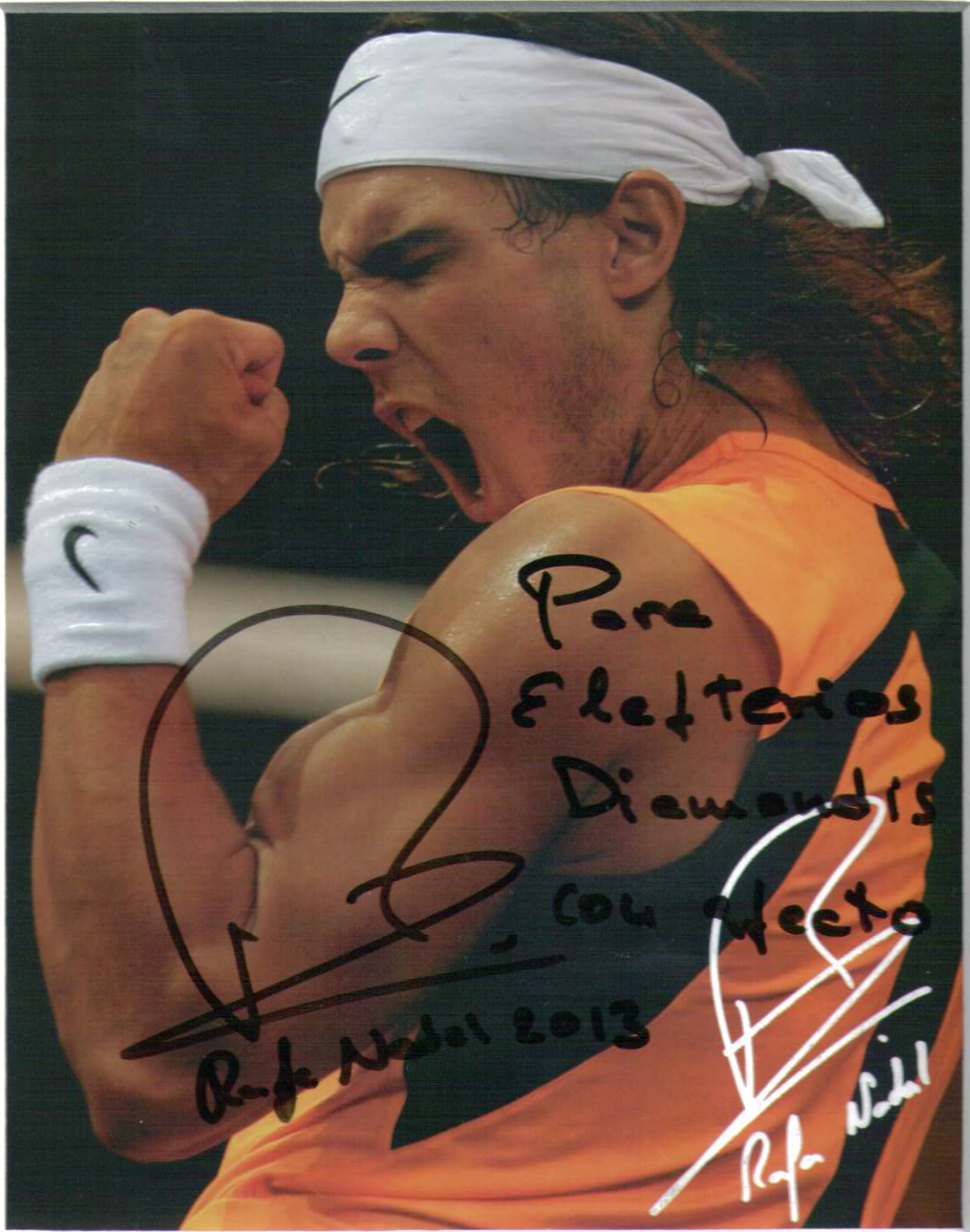
When Josep was going back to Majorca, we agreed that I will take a tour of the island and fortunately see Rafa's village, house etc. My greatest surprise came around Christmas 2013 when I received a package from Majorca. When I opened it I found an authentic autograph of the tennis Great with my name on it (see attached figure). I contacted Josep immediately and asked him how he was able to achieve such a difficult task. He explained to me that it was....easy; when he went out for dinner with Rafa's girlfriend, he asked her to ask Rafa to prepare an autograph for his Professor in Canada who loves tennis, and him as a player. Rafa generously agreed to provide the autograph which he then passed to Francesca, and she passed it to Josep. The autograph is now framed and shines in my office at Mount Sinai Hospital in Toronto.

I subsequently traveled to Majorca with my wife and met Josep, who gave us a fantastic tour of Rafa's village, the tennis club where he learned how to play tennis, and his neighborhood. Unfortunately, although Josep had called his grandmother for a visit, and she agreed, Rafa was playing in a tournament in Florida and we could not see him.

My criteria for selecting post-docs and other members of my lab are based on academic achievements, but I have now modified the criteria to include relationships with famous personalities who can provide autographs for my collection.

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