



Here's What I'm Thinking...

I've come to a realization: I don't really like watching pro tennis as much anymore. It's like watching two rock-em sock-em robots punching back and forth. Even **Jimmy Connors** says the men's game has become "one-dimensional." No serve-and-volley, nothing overly clever—just bam bam bam.

Don't get me wrong, I wish I had 1% of their skill, but I just don't relate to it as much anymore.

■ I like all four of the big players right now, but none of them captivate me like **Bjorn Borg**, or more recently **Andre Agassi**.

Borg was soooo cool. He looked like a rock star, and acted like he was above it all. He was hitting an open-stance forehand long before I heard of it.

No one had the career arc of Agassi. He burst on the scene in the late 80s in tie-dyed shorts, a head-band and an arrogant charisma we haven't seen before or since. But nobody grew up before our eyes as painfully obvious as him. He retired as a sage-like ambassador of the game. I can still recall hearing him answer a question in the press room at Key Biscayne a few years ago. A reporter asked him how difficult it would be to get back to the top of his game again after suffering an injury. He said—and I swear I almost needed a calculator to figure out this answer— "It's as difficult as it's important to me." (How many athletes are that cerebral?)

■ I don't miss **Andy Roddick**. I wanted to like him, but he seemed to come off like a wise-guy who wasn't quite as cool as he



Ray Collins and Bjorn Borg in Naples in 1995

thought. You want cool? Think AA and BB. (Agassi and Borg and **Roger Federer**.)

- When I go to pro tournaments, I enjoy watching the practice sessions even more than the matches. You really can get inspired watching that. The players also show more of their personality—even though it's usually a well-trained sulk.
- How about a shout-out for **Jimmy Arias**? Every time you see a player leave his feet to whack a forehand and come down pointing in the other direction, realize that swing was invented in the basement of Jimmy's suburban Buffalo house by his engineer-father who had his oldest son swinging a broomstick and studying the speed that could be developed.
- Does anybody else see through **Serena Williams**? I know she's a great player and has battled back from some serious illnesses, but I don't buy her cutesy personality she displays in some interviews. I guess I still can't forget her spontaneous offer to jam a ball down a line judge's esophagus.
- I want to give **Maria Sharapova** truth-serum and find out why she fired Jimmy Connors as her coach after one match. Intriguing.
- I love love love the technology that allows players to challenge line calls. I used to feel bad when players were on the short end of bad calls. This challenge system is the greatest thing since sun-block. Imagine how the replays would have stolen **John McEnroe's** schtick! He built his whole persona around that boring 'victim' act, where all the officials were either incompetent or out to get him. He probably wouldn't have played as well if he couldn't have found energy from that worn-out routine of his.
- I certainly hope **Nick Bollettieri** gets voted in the Hall of Fame this time. It's one of the worst injustices in sports that so many others have gone before him. Some say he ruffled too many feathers on the way up and now he's paying for it. Okay, message sent. Now let's do what's right and reward the guy who helped so many #1 players and drew countless others into tennis with his tennis academy approach, not to mention his "engaging" personality.
- Does anyone else think 3 out of 5 sets is too long?
- I'm all for supporting tennis players no matter where they come from, but I'm disappointed that American college tennis teams are often made up of non-American players. I realize everyone wants to put the best players possible on the court, but I wonder if that's related to the lack of good players at the top of tennis now. Or does it come down to work ethic?



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