

If it's summer, it's Wimbledon

A strict dress code, strawberries and cream, a ladies' event as opposed to a women's tournament and royal patronage -- Wimbledon is synonymous with idyllic British snobbery. Yet it is perhaps the most prized event in the tennis calendar. In 1877 the All England Croquet and Lawn Tennis Club began its first lawn tennis tournament here. It decided on many of the rules that exist today. Also, Wimbledon is the only Grand Slam played on grass today, so its connection with history and the resultant prestige remain intact. A fair bit of Roger Federer's aura revolves around the fact that he has won five consecutive Wimbledon titles between 2003 and 2007 and holds the record of highest titles won at Wimbledon with Pete Sampras -- seven. Martina Navratilova holds the record for the Lady's event -- which started in 1884 -- at nine. This year will be slightly dimmed with the absence of former champions Rafael Nadal and Maria Sharapova, but Wimbledon is the place stars are made and we may see new ones over the next fortnight.



NOVAK DJOKOVIC (1)

Having finally rid himself of his French Open curse, Novak Djokovic is chasing a third successive Wimbledon title to move one step closer to the first calendar Grand Slam in 47 years.

The 29-year-old world number one, champion at Wimbledon in 2011, 2014 and 2015, has become the unstoppable Slam machine. His victory over Andy Murray in Paris gave him a 12th major, taking him to within two of Rafael Nadal's mark and five behind the record 17 of Roger Federer.

Djokovic is the first man since Rod Laver in 1969 to hold all four majors and aims to become the first man since Laver, also in 1969, to complete the calendar Grand Slam, a feat only achieved three times in the sport's history.

"I don't want to sound arrogant, but I really think everything is achievable in life," said Djokovic, who will start his title defence Monday against Britain's world number 177, James Ward.



ANDY MURRAY (2)

Andy Murray, seeded second for only the second time at his home Slam, will be looking for his third major after the 2012 US Open and 2013 Wimbledon trophies.

The Briton, just a week older than Djokovic, has performed better and better against the Serbian machine, defeating him in Rome and pushing Djokovic during their gruelling French Open final.

Yet the Serb can still lord his power over Murray, pointing to his 24-10 advantage over their career meetings. The Scot has lost 13 of their last 15 meetings, which includes an all-loss record against Djokovic in majors over the last three years.

The 29-year-old is desperate to finally tip the balance in his favour and so persuaded his former coach Ivan Lendl to resume their partnership after a two-year hiatus. Lendl was Murray's coach when he won Wimbledon, the US Open and the 2012 Olympics -- titles that included a win over Djokovic in each event.



ROGER FEDERER (3)

For the first time in 15 years, Roger Federer arrives at the All England Club with few pundits expecting the number-three seed to leave with the trophy after one of the most troubled seasons of his glittering career.

17-time Grand Slam champion Federer, tied with Pete Sampras on seven Wimbledon men's singles titles, is preparing to make his 18th successive appearance at the grass-court Grand Slam, but there is now a genuine sense of vulnerability about the 34-year-old as the ravages of time take their toll on his body.

A knee surgery in February was swiftly followed by back problems that kept him out of the French Open, halting his record run of consecutive Grand Slam appearances at 65.

He enters The Championships without a title in the year for the first time since 2000, but he will hope that the environment in his favourite hunting ground, where he has reached the final the last two years, will be a turnaround.



SERENA WILLIAMS (1)

Serena Williams finds herself under siege from revitalised rivals and an army of doubters as the defending champion starts her bid for a seventh Wimbledon title and a record-equalling 22nd Grand Slam crown.

Since she walked off Wimbledon's Centre Court cradling the Venus Rosewater Dish awarded to the women's champion nearly 12 months ago, Williams has found herself engaged in a losing battle with the history books.

Her bid for a Calendar Grand Slam in 2015 was brought to a screeching halt by 300-1 outsider Roberta Vinci in the US Open final. In the aftermath of that chastening day in New York, Williams has appeared a more vulnerable figure.

This year she has won only one of five tournaments, in Rome in May, while enduring shock defeats in the Australian and French Open finals. The oldest woman, at 34, to be ranked number one, off-court interests have critics claiming Serena is no longer so focused on her tennis in the twilight of her glittering career.



GARBINE MUGURUZA (2)

Garbine Muguruza is happy to steal the spotlight from fellow Spaniard Rafael Nadal as the French Open champion sets her sights on a return to the Wimbledon final.

Muguruza's French Open final victory over world number one Serena Williams brought her a first Grand Slam crown at the venue where Nadal won nine times.

The 30-year-old's decline has coincided with the rise of Muguruza and the 22-year-old, whose engaging personality seems ready-made for celebrity, appears to be relishing the limelight.

Muguruza's Wimbledon preparations have been less than ideal as she was beaten in the first round of her only warm-up tournament at last week's Mallorca Open by Kirsten Flipkens.

Even taking last year's run to the final into consideration, she still finds grass a tricky surface to master. However, Muguruza will have to overcome her troubles with grass and stake her claim to a throne which at the moment is occupied by a very shaky Serena.

Germany saunter into last eight

AFP, Lille



Jerome Boateng scored his first international goal to set Germany on their way to a 3-0 win against Slovakia at Euro 2016 on Sunday as the world champions cruised into the quarter-finals.

Boateng opened his account eight minutes into his 63rd international appearance and Joachim Loew's side never looked back against outclassed opponents.

Mesut Ozil had a penalty saved soon after but Julian Draxler set up Mario Gomez to double the lead two minutes before half-time and the impressive Draxler then completed the scoring just after the hour mark.

There was never any threat of a repeat of Slovakia's 3-1 win when the teams met in a friendly just four



Germany defender Jerome Boateng scores from a full-blooded volley against Slovakia during their Euro 2016 Round of 16 match yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

weeks ago and Germany move on to a last-eight tie against either reigning champions Spain or old rivals Italy next weekend.

Slovakia have a recent history of

pulling off surprise results, from their defeat of Spain in qualifying to the recent friendly victory in Germany and the goalless draw with England that saw them progress

from the group stage.

But their hopes of another day to remember were rapidly nipped in the bud by the world champions, who underlined their credentials and sent a clear message to their Euro rivals.

Toni Kroos' delivery from a corner left was headed out but the ball fell for Boateng on the edge of the box and the Bayern Munich stopper met it on the volley, finding the bottom-left corner with the aid of a small deflection off the unfortunate Skriniar.

Germany went on to increase their lead two minutes before the break as Draxler combined with Jonas Hector down the left before heading for the byline and cutting the ball back for Gomez to finish at the near post.

And, if there were any doubts about the outcome, Germany put the game to bed on 63 minutes, as Draxler volleyed in at the back post.

Spain face old foes Italy

AFP, Paris



Seeking to win an unprecedented third consecutive European Championship, Vicente del Bosque's Spain will once again have to see off old foes Italy to retain their crown.

Before winning back-to-back Euros and a maiden World Cup in 2010, Spain suffered an inferiority complex with Italy, having never beaten them in five tries at major finals.

A quarterfinal clash between the two in Vienna in 2008 changed that. Spain went through in a shootout before going on to win the tournament.

"That is the most important day in the history of the Spanish national team," said captain Iker Casillas.

After winning the World Cup, Spain had to face Italy twice more in retaining the Euros four years ago. A 1-1 draw in the opening match was forgotten as del Bosque's men thrashed Italy 4-0 in the final. La Roja then also won another shootout between the two in the Confederations Cup semifinals in 2013. Indeed, the European champions have lost just one of their last 11 meetings with Italy - a 2-1 friendly defeat in 2011.

Chelsea midfielder Cesc Fabregas has been a constant menace to the Azzurri. He scored the winning penalty in 2008, Spain's equaliser in the 2012 opening game and set up David Silva's opener in the final.

Fabregas will also be coming up against his future manager as Antonio Conte will take over at Stamford Bridge next season.

"The way they play will demand the absolute most of us," Fabregas told Spanish sports daily Marca. "We need to get back to playing our best football because they will not stop running and fight for every ball," added Fabregas. "They have a very strong defence and they know how to take their chances."

Conte's men have been unfortunate to find themselves on the tougher side of the draw despite beating topping Group E.

"There is a crazy imbalance in the draw for the second round, but those are the rules and we have to respect them," said Conte.

Juventus stalwart Giorgio Chiellini will return and is hopeful Italy can reverse their recent run against Spain.

"In a way, they're our bogey team," he said. "But let's keep things in perspective. The Ireland match didn't really count for us. And if we play to our potential and give it everything, I think we can create something special."

Better team lost: Cacic

AFP, Lens



Ricardo Quaresma headed Portugal into the Euro 2016 quarter-finals three minutes before the end of extra-time to break Croatian hearts after dominating the game.

Cristiano Ronaldo was denied matching Michel Platini's record of nine goals in European championship finals by a fine save from Danijel Subasic, but the ball fell to Quaresma to head into an empty net.

"We knew the difficulties we were going to encounter, the stress, the anxiety that comes with the game, but I think we should congratulate ourselves because we believed until the end," said Quaresma.

Portugal will face Poland in the quarter-finals in Marseille on Thursday after the Poles beat Switzerland 5-4 on penalties after a 1-1 draw earlier on Saturday.

Ronaldo was kept extremely quiet for most of a dull encounter which became the first match in European Championship history where neither team managed a shot on target during the regulation 90 minutes.

Croatian boss Ante Cacic was left to bemoan his side's inability to turn possession into goals.

"We cannot say football is fair, we had many chances, we dominated for the whole match, so it was not a psychological problem," said Cacic.

"The best team doesn't always win and that happened tonight."

Portugal were the only side to progress to the last 16 despite not winning any of their three group games and coach Fernando Santos took an extremely cautious approach.

Star midfielder Luka Modric returned from injury, but both he and Barcelona's Ivan Rakitic struggled to sparkle as they had earlier in the tournament.

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