

Return of the Mac

The Grand Slam of Asia/Pacific always delivers something special. With the game enjoying a golden era, the *Australian Open 2012* could be the best yet.

This time last year, tennis fans were revelling in the sublime. Rafael Nadal's teeth marks on the last three grand slams meant he was being hailed as the new tennis superpower, and several pundits were tipping him to overtake Roger Federer as the 'greatest ever' come the end of their careers. What was undisputed was that for both players, their level of tennis was like no one had ever seen before. Then, along came the ridiculous.

As the 2012 season gets underway at this month's Australian Open, fans and pundits alike are still drawing breath after an astonishing 2011. FOX SPORTS's announcement that outspoken tennis legend, and seven-time grand slam winner, John McEnroe will join the commentary team to deliver extensively live and interactive coverage has only heightened anticipation. "I'm very excited that I'm going to have the opportunity to work with the FOX SPORTS team and get out to Australia again," says McEnroe.

"It's been a while since I've called the event."

And, much like his volleys of old, his timing is perfect. Current world number one Novak Djokovic's ruthless 6-4, 6-2, 6-3 dismantling of fancied Scot Andy Murray back in late January 2011 proved the catalyst for arguably the greatest season of tennis ever played.

Winning all grand slams except the



Our Pick

French, it was as unexpected as it was brutal. If pundits were still under any illusions, his humbling of 2010 star Nadal in all six meetings, including the Wimbledon and US Open finals, was the equivalent of Nadal's coach Uncle Toni walking into the media room and asking for tips for his nephew. Needless to say 'who's the greatest' conversations were put on hold and heads were scratched.

And this is where McEnroe, whose 1984 comparable season saw only three losses, will provide much needed enlightenment. While many pundits play it safe, McEnroe's honest and well-informed assessments are to be expected from a man who battled legends such as Bjorn Borg, Jimmy Connors and Ivan Lendl. Disqualified from the Australian Open in 1990, admittedly not before time, as a foulmouthed player you either loved his passion or frowned on the 'superbrat'. Either way, his candid approach to commentary, where his post-match interviews are often as captivating as the matches themselves, truly means we as fans are the spoiled ones.

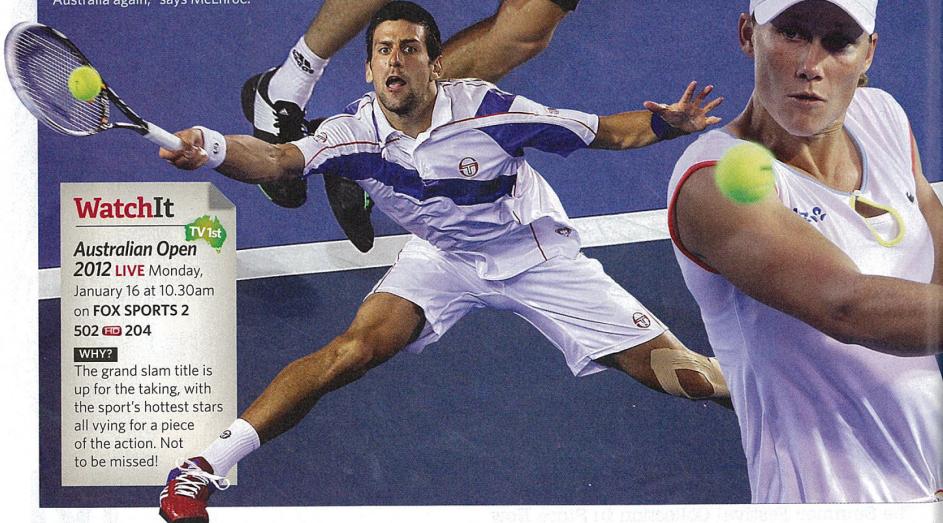
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If the 'favourite' situation has heightened intrigue, of similar interest to fans is the continued absence of any Americans lifting Australian Open's trophies – or even Australians for that matter. Following decades of success, most recently in the nineties and early noughties, the successors to messieurs Sampras, Agassi, Hewitt and Rafter have gone, well, walkabout. However, if Serbia's Djokovic has taught us anything, it's that gauntlets are laid down to be picked up. Young gun Donald Young could be America's knight in shining armour this year, and as for rising home-grown stars, Bernard Tomic slayed all in his path to reach last year's Wimbledon quarter finals, while Sam Stosur took the women's singles title at the 2011 US Open. Melbourne Park represents the perfect platform for these young pretenders to stake their claim.

With attendances growing year on year, and the level of tennis reaching new heights, the Australian Open is the stand-out event on the summer sports calendar. "To get back to Melbourne is going to be awesome. Hopefully people will turn to FOX SPORTS and listen to Johnny Mac and the rest of the boys and girls," says the great man. Don't miss it. *

Iain Boyd



Watch It

Australian Open 2012 LIVE Monday, January 16 at 10.30am on FOX SPORTS 2 502 **HD 204**

WHY?

The grand slam title is up for the taking, with the sport's hottest stars all vying for a piece of the action. Not to be missed!

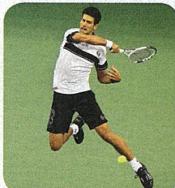
Classic Moment

1988 final
Mats Wilander defeated Pat Cash
6-3, 6-7, 3-6, 6-1, 8-6



Andy Murray's, Novak Djokovic's and Sam Stosur's slicing and dicing will have you glued to your seat.

Australia's search for the first champ since 1976 continues. However, Pat Cash went painfully close in the first final at Flinders Park (later renamed Melbourne Park). Wilander's strategic genius eventually triumphed over Cash's attacking serve and volley.



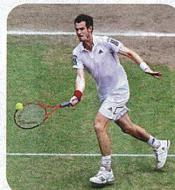
Novak Djokovic
If Serbia's Novak Djokovic is at peak fitness and on top of his game, this one-to-watch could be the smart bet for taking the title – especially after last year's crushing performance against Scot Andy Murray.



Andy Murray
Finalist the last two years, the very talented Andy Murray's not a man happy as the 'bridesmaid'. A strong end to 2011 indicates he's mentally ready to 'do a Djokovic' and make 2012 his year.



Roger Federer
Four-time champion Roger Federer, having not won a major since Australia 2010, is wrongly being written off. With his level of skill and past record, could this be his chance to add to his 16 majors?



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