

THE UNOFFICIAL STORY OF BRITAIN'S OLYMPIC CHAMPION
BY JOHN MURRAY



ANDY MURRAY

TENNIS ACE



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About the Book

Have you ever wondered what it takes to become a tennis star?

This is the story of Andy Murray - from the first time he picked up a tennis racket to his Grand Slam win at the US Open.

Did you know that Andy was approached by a major football club? Or that he used to play doubles with Novak Djokovic? Follow Andy's rise to stardom in this brand-new biography of Britain's tennis ace.

ANDY MURRAY

TENNIS ACE



JOHN MURRAY

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Andy Murray sat in his chair. He had a lot of time to think, and a lot to think about. He was one game away from winning the US Open. Just four points required to make history. Four big serves, then game, set and match. It all seemed so simple.

But nothing was simple when you were playing a match that had lasted almost five hours, at the end of a gruelling two-week tournament, in front of a feverish New York crowd of more than 23,000 (not to mention all the millions of people watching at home), especially when your opponent on the other side of the net was the great Novak Djokovic and you had 76 years of British history breathing down your neck.

Tennis rules dictate that players are allowed a 90-second breather when they swap ends between games. They use this time to sit down, have a drink and occasionally something to eat. But on this occasion Djokovic required a medical time-out to receive physio treatment for cramp. That meant an extended break. For Andy, that meant more time - and more thinking.

He wasn't prepared to wait around. He got up out of his chair and walked back onto the court. He stretched his legs, jogged on the spot, bounced the ball off the wall at the

back of the court. Anything to take his mind off what lay ahead.

Some people might wonder why Andy had anything to worry about. Here was a young man who seemed to have it all. He had been destined for tennis stardom ever since he won the Junior US Open aged 17. He had gone on to win tournaments all over the world, earning enough money to buy whatever he wanted - and still have plenty of spare change. He wasn't just the best Scottish player or the best British player; he was one of the biggest sporting stars on the planet. Plus he had something that everyone wanted in the summer of 2012 - an Olympic gold medal. All this, and he was only 25.

But there was one crucial thing missing: a Grand Slam title.

A Grand Slam tournament is what anyone who picks up a racket dreams of winning. Four events on the professional tennis calendar make up the Grand Slam - the Australian Open, the French Open, Wimbledon and the US Open. They are the biggest competitions, with the most prize money, contested by the world's best male and female players. Win all four in the same year, and you have completed the Grand Slam.

The term was first used in 1933 in reference to the Australian player Jack Crawford, who had already won in Australia, France and England that year, and was hoping to complete the set in America. As if to prove just how difficult a feat it was, he fell short - coming mighty close, though, as he led two sets to one in the final before wilting in the heat.

Not that Crawford had anything to be ashamed about. Only five players in the history of tennis have achieved the Grand Slam - Don Budge, Rod Laver, Maureen Connolly, Margaret Court and Steffi Graf. Laver was so good he did it twice.

However, as any British sports fan would tell you, winning just one Grand Slam title was hard enough. No Brit

had won a Grand Slam tournament since 1977. No British man had won one since 1936. And no one born in Scotland had won one since 1896 – so long ago that the aeroplane hadn't even been invented, telephones had only been in use for 20 years, and a text message wouldn't be sent for almost another hundred years.

The fact that modern tennis was invented by an Englishman made the wait for a British male Grand Slam champion even more painful.

The question the whole country wanted answered was: who would follow in Fred Perry's shoes? An eight-time Grand Slam title winner, Stockport-born Perry had been so handy with a racket that he also won the World Table Tennis Championship in 1929. In the years since Perry celebrated his third and final Wimbledon crown, there had been several near-misses for the Brits.

In 1970 Roger Taylor reached the semi-finals of both Wimbledon and the Australian Open. Seven years later, John Lloyd went one step further, losing in the final of the Australian Open. Sadly, the closest he came to success after that was when he married the American 18-time Grand Slam tournament winner, Chris Evert!

Greg Rusedski, a Canadian-turned-Brit, reached the US Open final in 1997. Even though the left-hander with a booming serve had only recently taken up British citizenship, the public were so hungry for a trophy they didn't care, cheering him on wildly but without success as he fell to Australia's Pat Rafter.

Tim Henman, a gentleman as English as cream tea and scones, was the darling of Wimbledon as the 20th century came to an end. Four times he battled through to the semi-finals at the All England Club, as 'Henmania' took hold of the fanatical home crowd. He also reached the last four at the French Open and US Open. Each time he lost.

Then there was Andy himself, who had come closer than any other Brit to making the breakthrough. When, at only

21 years of age, he lost the 2008 US Open final to the greatest player of all, Roger Federer, most people thought that it would merely be a matter of time before he tasted Grand Slam glory. In 2010 he was up against the Swiss legend again in the Australian Open final. Another defeat. One year on, Andy was back in the title decider in Melbourne, this time against Djokovic. Different opponent, same result.

His fourth chance came in 2012. It was in his own back yard – on the glorious, green grass courts of Wimbledon. Standing in his way once again was his Swiss nemesis. The one problem was that Federer was as comfortable on grass as a flock of sheep and had won no fewer than six Wimbledon titles. Amazingly, Andy captured the first set in front of thousands of Union Jack-waving fans, who transformed Centre Court into a scene from a garden party on the Queen’s Jubilee Weekend.

But three sets later, after another defeat, the flags had been folded away. When he wiped away the tears in his post-match interview, the nation wept with him. Would he ever win a Grand Slam title?

The history of near-misses, his previous results in Grand Slam finals and the public’s desperation for victory must have made Andy feel he had the weight of 60 million Brits standing on his shoulders as he waited for Djokovic to finish his time-out in the Arthur Ashe Stadium.

His journey to the final had had plenty of ups and downs, thrills and spills.

Each Grand Slam tournament has 128 men and 128 women in the main draw. To be crowned champion, a player must win seven matches, played over the course of a fortnight. Crucially for Andy’s chances, the 128 male entrants did not include Rafael Nadal, the 2010 US Open winner and one of the main contenders, who was missing through injury.

It started easily enough, with straight-set wins over Russia's Alex Bogomolov Jr and Croatian Ivan Dodig for the combined loss of just 13 games. It was much tougher against Spaniard Feliciano Lopez in the third round, as Andy squeezed through in four sets after getting the better of three tight tiebreaks. In the fourth round, he took on 15th seed Milos Raonic, a young Canadian with a serve so ferocious that it threatened to rip a hole in the net. Unfortunately for Raonic - and for the net - that's where too many of his balls ended up, as Andy cruised through.

Things always start to heat up in the Grand Slam quarter-finals. Andy faced a stern test against tall Croatian Marin Cilic, who had knocked him out of this same tournament back in 2009. If Andy wasn't nervous, the rest of Britain certainly was as Cilic blasted his way through the first set before building a 5-1 lead in the second. But then the Scot showed the strength, skill and stroke-play that have made him one of the world's deadliest players, recovering to take the set, edging ahead in the third, before crushing the Croatian 6-0 in the fourth.

British butterflies were soon fluttering again in the semi-finals, when Andy played hard-hitting Czech Tomas Berdych. Torrential rain delayed the start of the match, and when the weather relented, a brutal encounter followed. At one point, conditions were so bad that two chairs blew onto the court during a rally! Like Cilic in the previous round, Berdych claimed the first set, but Andy coped better with the wind and gradually took control, winning in four sets.

That victory meant there was one final hurdle to clear - and this one was the biggest obstacle of the lot.

The careers of Murray and Djokovic have followed similar paths ever since their childhood days. Born within a week of each other, they first met as skinny teenagers in a junior tennis competition. They played each other regularly, and quickly developed a strong friendship, teaming up to

compete in doubles events. Both were stars of the junior tennis circuit, and it soon became clear that they would dominate the senior tour too as they picked up plenty of ATP (Association of Tennis Professionals) titles between them and moved into the world's top 10.

But then something changed. In Melbourne in 2008, Djokovic won his first Grand Slam title. Now he had joined an elite group, and Andy wasn't a member. Within four years, the Serbian had increased his number of Grand Slam victories to five, three of them coming in a superb 2011, when he established himself as the game's top player. All Andy had to show for his efforts was four losing finals. Now was the chance to get one back on his old mate.

One key advantage Andy held over his opponent was an extra day's rest. The poor weather that had disrupted his semi-final on the Saturday against Berdych had refused to go away; it meant that Djokovic's match against David Ferrer was postponed to the Sunday. When Monday arrived, Andy was rested and raring to go.

His first challenge? Winning a set. In his previous Grand Slam final against Djokovic, he had been overwhelmed in three sets. Up against a player who had an almost unbelievable record in Grand Slams on hard courts (i.e. the Australian and US Opens), winning his last 27 matches, he needed to grab the early advantage.

Both players showed nerves. Andy broke Djokovic's serve, then couldn't hold his own. He broke again, then Djokovic broke back. And so it went on, every point a struggle, every game a titanic tussle. One rally alone lasted 55 shots.

With the scoreboard unable to separate them at six games all, they moved into a tie-break. The first player to reach seven points would win, assuming he led by two clear points. Following the pattern of the set so far, it was no surprise that it was a tightly fought battle. Eventually, on his sixth set point, Andy sealed the set 12-10 when

Djokovic hit his return long. At 24 minutes, it was the longest tie-break in the history of the US Open. The first set had lasted 87 minutes, only three less than an entire football match.

Andy roared through the start of the second, aggressively winning the first four games. But once again, Djokovic refused to give in and clawed his way back into contention. Before too long it was 5-5. Surely the defending champion would now level the match at one set all?

Clearly, Andy had not read the script. Displaying great courage, he held serve to move 6-5 ahead, then claimed the spoils in a breathtaking 30-shot rally to earn two set points. A Djokovic forehand sailed wide, and Andy was one set away from achieving his dream.

After all the pain Britain had endured in its wait for a Grand Slam champion, it would have been far too simple if Andy had cruised to a straight-sets win. And so it was that Djokovic showed the spirit of a true champion to turn the match on its head. He raced into an early lead in the third set and closed it out 6-2. As Andy tried to work out what had hit him, the Serbian steamroller flattened him in the fourth set too. Fifty-one minutes later, Djokovic had taken it 6-3. The final was heading into a deciding fifth set.

To borrow a phrase from the Manchester United manager, Sir Alex Ferguson, now it was 'squeaky-bum time' for Andy's army of fans as they nervously squirmed in their seats. All the momentum was with five-time Grand Slam champion Djokovic; his opponent had never even reached the fifth set in a Slam final, let alone won one.

This time, though, it was Andy's turn to upset the formbook. He produced his best tennis of the match, hitting the ball with a fearsome ferocity from the back of the court, and surged into a 3-0 lead. The Serbian fought back to 3-2, but the Djokovic machine was finally showing signs of wear and tear: 3-2 became 4-2, and 4-2 became 5-2 as fatigue started to catch up with him.

All Andy needed was one more game.

After such a long hard slog, with so many twists and turns, the end - when it finally came - was surprisingly quick. A backhand smash, an ace and a wayward Djokovic forehand gave Andy three match points. The moment had arrived.

Sitting courtside in his box were the most important people in Andy's life: his girlfriend Kim Sears clapping her encouragement, his mum Judy urging him on with a clenched fist, and all his support staff, including his iron-faced coach Ivan Lendl, who wore an expression as impassive as the Statue of Liberty!

As the New York crowd roared its enthusiasm, the reigning champion briefly turned party pooper, driving a forehand winner to keep his slim hopes alive.

This time, though, Andy would not be denied. In the next rally Djokovic sent a wild forehand beyond the baseline, and the Scot had triumphed 7-6, 7-5, 2-6, 3-6, 6-2 over an energy-draining four hours and 54 minutes.

Finally, 237 grand slam tournaments after Perry's last triumph, Britain had a new champion.



FAMILY, FIGHTS AND A LOST FINGERNAIL

Ask the world's top sport stars to recall their early childhood memories, and many will reply with a similar answer: running races with their brothers and sisters, playing catch in the back yard, kicking a rolled-up sock around their parents' feet in the kitchen. The precise details may be different, but the theme is often the same - an instant love of sport.

Not so with Andy. The first specific recollection of Britain's greatest modern tennis player has nothing to do with activity, but instead is related to . . . coffee!

He admits in his autobiography, *Coming of Age*: 'I can remember a babysitter giving me a little sip of her coffee and I spat it out. I've never touched coffee since.'¹

Having quickly established that the latte and cappuccino lifestyle was not for him, the young Andy soon started showing signs of the talent and character that are so familiar today.

Born on 15 May 1987, Andrew Barron Murray is the son of Will and Judy, and younger brother to Jamie. The family lived in Dunblane, a small Scottish cathedral town about an hour's drive from Edinburgh - also the hometown of professional footballer brothers Gary and Steven Caldwell.

The family home was a stone's throw from the town's tennis courts, which would play a major part in the lives of

Andy and Jamie, while grandparents Roy and Shirley Erskine lived nearby.

One of the first things Andy's grandmother remembers is his fighting spirit - or, more specifically, his tantrums.

'When [Andy and Jamie] played board games the board would go on the floor if Andy wasn't winning,' Shirley said. 'It was a problem at the time but now you look back and recognize the temperament and the desire you need to always win.'²

In addition to board games, the brothers quickly developed an interest in various sports and activities, and their mum soon decided that the tennis court could be a good place for Andy to take out any aggression.

Tennis was a natural choice for Judy. As a player, she had won a cabinet full of trophies and now worked as a tennis coach. Or, more accurately, a very successful tennis coach - these days, as the country's Fed Cup captain, she mentors Britain's best female players such as Laura Robson and Heather Watson.

While Jamie was immediately at ease with a racket in his hand, Andy struggled at first, and had to get used to losing to his brother. Fifteen months older, Jamie was too big, too strong and too smart, and would always come out on top when they played head-to-head. In an early indication of his fighting spirit, those losses made Andy work harder as he slowly closed the gap on his brother.

Whether battling on the tennis court or scrapping at home, the two brothers could always be found playing together. In particular, they liked to act out their favourite scenes from the World Wrestling Federation (WWF), as it was then known. Sometimes a little too keenly.

'We used to wrestle. We'd take our mattresses off the bed and jump from the top bunk on to them or smash something,' Andy said.

Judy recalled: 'The best WWF bout I remember was hearing a real crash and going upstairs to find two duvets on the floor and a ladder in the corner. Andy was wrestling a pillow and would then run up the ladder to ring a bell, but he didn't have a bell so he would reach up and hit the lightshade instead. Occasionally, a window went in but you could always get it fixed.'³

Luckily for their parents, Andy and Jamie started to spend less time smashing lightshades and more time smashing tennis balls. By the age of six, Andy was showing some genuine talent, coordination and skill, and his mum decided it was time to test his game against other competitors.

In one of many long road trips to all parts of the United Kingdom, Judy - who happily sacrificed her weekends over the years for the benefit of her sons' tennis careers - drove Andy down to Wrexham in Wales for his first tournament outside Scotland. He didn't win, but one incident had a huge influence on the player he would become.

After losing his first two matches (played over one set) to older boys, Andy's final clash went to a tie-break. He was winning 6-2 and his drop-shot bounced three times on his opponent's side. Assuming that he had won, Andy went over to shake hands. However, there was no umpire present on the court.

'His opponent ran forward, smashed the ball back into the court and claimed the point. Nobody came to help resolve the situation and Andy did not win another point. He was distraught afterwards, but he learned to stick up for himself after that,'⁴ Judy remembered.

Newly determined, Andy started to enjoy significant success at the tournaments he entered, even though he was often several years younger than his opponents. There was one competition in particular where Andy thrived. Just as these days Roger Federer is the wizard of Wimbledon and Rafael Nadal is the king of clay at Roland Garros (the

French Open), Andy became the young superstar of Solihull.

From the age of eight, he was the Solihull champion five years in a row and, in the process, got hooked on winning. The tournament holds special memories for another reason: a couple of years later, this was where he beat his brother for the first time.

Will Murray vividly remembers his younger son's enormous determination to win that day: 'It didn't matter that he was playing his older brother. Andy didn't just want to win; he wanted to crush Jamie. He was so little the racket was as big as him.'⁵

Unfortunately, Andy couldn't contain his excitement in the minibus on the way home and kept teasing Jamie about the defeat. As a result, he paid a serious price - with the loss of a fingernail!

Andy said: 'After about 15 minutes of [goaded] he'd had enough . . . He shouted at me and his fist came down on my hand. I got this huge whack on my finger which went black and blue and I had to go to the doctor's for a tetanus injection the next day. It [the fingernail] never did grow back properly.'⁶

At that point, Judy - who was driving the minibus - could never have imagined that, years later, her two sons would happily unite on the same team to play side by side in the Olympic Games.

While his tennis went from strength to strength, Andy was less keen to sit in a classroom. He didn't enjoy many subjects at school - and he longed for the chance to get outside and run around with his mates. He showed promise at several sports, especially football.

It was hardly surprising that Andy was talented with a ball at his feet; football was in his blood. His grandfather Roy began his career with top Scottish side Hibernian in