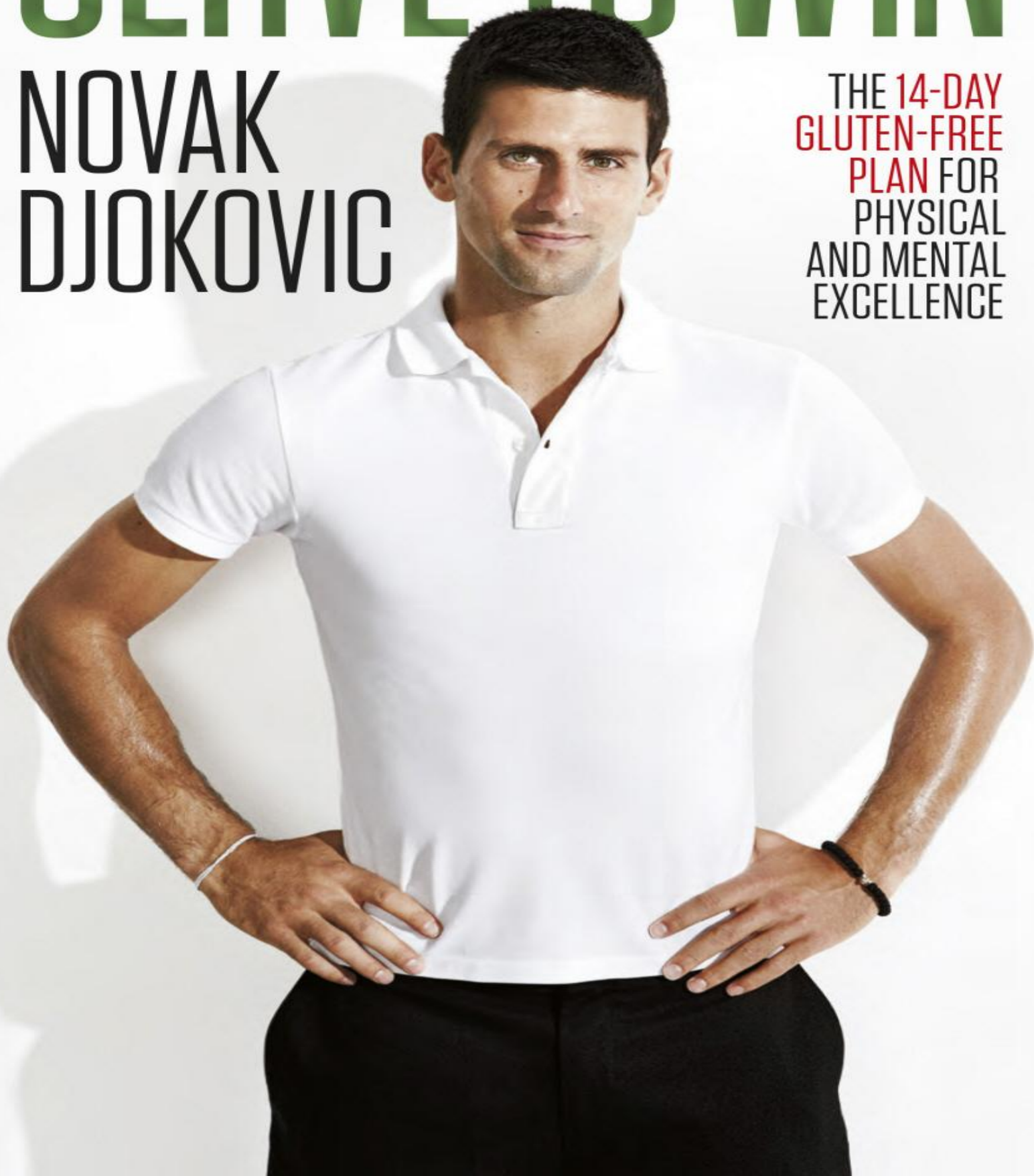


# SERVE TO WIN

NOVAK  
DJOKOVIC

THE 14-DAY  
GLUTEN-FREE  
PLAN FOR  
PHYSICAL  
AND MENTAL  
EXCELLENCE



## About the Book

In 2011, Novak Djokovic won a breathtaking ten titles, three Grand Slams and forty-three consecutive matches.

Remarkably, less than two years earlier, this champion could barely complete a tournament. How did a player once plagued by aches, breathing difficulties and injuries on the court suddenly become the number-one-ranked tennis player in the world? The answer is astonishing: he changed what he ate.

In *Serve to Win*, Djokovic recounts how he survived the bombing of Belgrade, rising from a war-torn childhood to the top tier of his sport. He reveals how changing his diet transformed both his health and his game – eliminating gluten made him feel instantly lighter, clearer and quicker.

Now Djokovic has created a blueprint for remaking your body and your life in just fourteen days. With weekly menus and delicious, easy-to-prepare recipes, he'll help you on your way to shedding extra weight and finding your way to a better you.

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# SERVE TO WIN

The 14-Day Gluten-Free Plan  
for Physical and Mental Excellence

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NOVAK DJOKOVIC

*Foreword by William Davis, M.D.*

*To my family and friends,  
my coaches and teammates,  
who have worked so long and so hard  
to make my dream a reality.*

*To Jelena Ristic, who means everything to me.*

*And to the people of Serbia.*

We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by  
what we give.

—Winston Churchill

## CONVERSION CHART

### Oven temperatures

130°C = 250°F = Gas mark 1/2

150°C = 300°F = Gas mark 2

180°C = 350°F = Gas mark 4

190°C = 375°F = Gas mark 5

200°C = 400°F = Gas mark 6

220°C = 425°F = Gas mark 7

230°C = 450°F = Gas mark 8

### American solid measures

1 cup rice US = 225g

1 cup flour US = 115g

1 cup butter US = 225g

1 stick butter US = 115g

1 cup dried fruit US = 225g

1 cup brown sugar US = 180g

1 cup granulated sugar US = 225g

### Spoon measures

1 level tablespoon flour = 15g

1 heaped tablespoon flour = 28g

1 level tablespoon sugar = 28g

1 level tablespoon butter = 15g

### Liquid measures

1 cup US = 275ml

1 pint US = 550ml

1 quart US = 800ml



## FOREWORD

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PEAK HUMAN PERFORMANCE: That is what Novak Djokovic has accomplished in the world of tennis. Only a select few achieve this level in any field, and it takes a culmination of talent, courage, and determination—plus the removal of all impediments—to do so.

It's the aim of all human endeavors, from quantum physics to computer programming to tennis. For most of us, peak performance proves elusive, given the physical and emotional barriers placed in our way that impede achieving the true height of human body-and-mind potential.

Novak Djokovic has overcome overwhelming odds to achieve his exalted place in tennis history. He managed to obtain training experience in Serbia, a country in which tennis was virtually unknown. He maintained his demanding training discipline while his home city of Belgrade was under siege during the War of Kosovo, his family finding refuge in a bomb shelter for months on end. And yet, despite the hurdles he had to conquer, one thing nearly felled this champion. That thing was modern wheat.

Watching him in his 2010 Australian Open quarterfinal match against Jo-Wilfried Tsonga, you couldn't help but sense that something was impeding Djokovic's ability to stay at the top of his game: a mishit here, a millisecond of mistiming there, a wince with a tough return, and a medical timeout in the fourth set during which he appeared to be in visible abdominal discomfort. The result was defeat after several hours of struggle. His 2012 Australian Open final match against Rafael Nadal was an entirely different story: Djokovic was smooth, confident, and in control of the game

—in a word, brilliant. How was this transformation possible? Simple. Djokovic removed the barriers to peak mental and physical performance by doing precisely the opposite of what conventional nutritional advice repeatedly tells us: He removed “healthy whole grains” from his diet.

As a result, he won three Grand Slam tournaments in 2011 (the Australian Open, Wimbledon, and the US Open), won an astonishing 50 out of 51 tournaments over 12 months, and earned the number one ranking for men’s tennis in the world. His performance that year even astounded other top players, moving Rafael Nadal to declare that Djokovic’s playing represented “the highest level of tennis that I ever saw.”

How can removing a ubiquitous component of the human diet—wheat is found in virtually all processed foods—catapult an athlete’s performance to new heights, allowing him to express his full mental and physical potential? That is precisely the question that I have devoted the last several years of my career to understanding: Why does modern wheat, the product of genetic manipulations by geneticists and agribusiness, potentially impair mental and physical performance, regardless of talent, ability, or drive?

I’ve seen it do so to staggering degrees. Modern wheat is capable of ruining digestive health, causing conditions ranging from acid reflux to ulcerative colitis and other forms of abdominal distress. It can trigger inflammation (common joint stiffness and pain) and autoimmune conditions (rheumatoid arthritis and Hashimoto’s thyroiditis). It can unmask or worsen psychiatric conditions such as paranoia or schizophrenia and trigger behavioral outbursts and learning impairment in children with autistic spectrum disorder. It can cause weight gain, particularly in the abdomen, via its unique appetite-stimulating effect, making even athletes who train hours each day overweight. It can impair sports performance by provoking any of these and many other conditions, topped off with mind “fog,” fatigue,

and distortions of hormonal status, ultimately triggering a physical and emotional roller coaster that can strike anyone, anytime.

It struck Mr. Djokovic at that match against Tsonga in 2010—a match he knew he should have won.

As the father of a professional tennis player daughter, I can only begin to appreciate the extraordinary time and effort devoted to climbing to the top of the tennis world. Of all the hurdles one must face to achieve one's physical and mental peak, how can a simple nutritional misstep get in the way? Because eating wheat has always been the status quo, even at the lofty heights of the professional sports world, where it has the potential to cripple performance, cloud mental focus, and bring a champion to his knees.

It is a new age in sports performance. It is a new age in transforming ourselves in all spheres of life. It is a new age in rejecting the common advice to consume more “healthy whole grains.” Mr. Djokovic's experience is perfectly consistent with what I have observed in hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions, of people who have followed the advice to cut all traces of modern wheat from their diet: staggering improvements in health and life performance.

I am thrilled that a noted public figure such as Novak Djokovic, someone admired and trusted by millions of tennis fans, has chosen to speak out on this issue and set a winning example of what can be achieved through exceptional commitment and hard work, coupled with genuine insight into maximizing performance through diet.

William Davis, M.D.

[www.wheatbellyblog.com](http://www.wheatbellyblog.com)

Author of the #1 *New York Times* bestseller *Wheat Belly: Lose the Wheat, Lose the Weight, and Find Your Path Back to Health* and the *New York Times* bestseller *Wheat Belly Cookbook*

## INTRODUCTION

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# **The Diet That Transformed Me**

FROM THE BRINK OF FAILURE TO THE CHAMPION OF  
THE WORLD—IN 18 MONTHS

JUST AS I was reaching for the top, I hit bottom.

I was nineteen years old, an unknown kid from a war-torn country who had suddenly burst onto the professional scene. I was on a nine-match winning streak and poised to take a commanding lead in the final round of the 2006 Croatia Open. The stadium crowd was on my side; my team was cheering me on.

And yet I couldn't hear them. All I could hear was the roaring in my head. All I could feel was pain. Something was pinching my nose closed, bear-hugging my chest, pouring concrete into my legs.

I looked across the net at my opponent, Stanislas Wawrinka. I looked into the stands, where my mother sat. And then, suddenly, gravity sucked me backward onto the red clay court, and I was looking up at the open Croatian sky, my chest heaving. The Curse—the mysterious force that sapped my strength without warning—had closed in on me once more.

No matter how hard I inhaled, the air would not come.

My father, Srdjan, ran out onto the court and, with a doctor, lifted me up by my arms and sat me down in my court-side chair. I looked up at my mother, sobbing in the

stands, and I knew. This tournament was over. And maybe my life's dream was over, too.

Most people don't decide what they want from life when they're six years old, but I had. Thirteen years earlier, sitting in the tiny living room over my parents' pizza parlor in the remote mountain town of Kopaonik in rural Serbia, I watched Pete Sampras win Wimbledon, and I knew: One day that would be me.

I'd never played tennis. No one I knew played tennis. In Serbia, tennis was as obscure a sport as, say, fencing. And the glamour of London was about as far as you could get from the desolate little resort town where my family lived. Yet at that very moment, I knew what I wanted more than anything: I wanted to lift the Wimbledon Cup over my head, hear the crowd cheer, and know I had become the number one player in the world.

My parents had bought me a little rainbow-colored racquet and some Wiffle balls when I was four, and I would entertain myself for hours, hitting the balls against the wall of the restaurant. But from the moment I saw Sampras that day, I knew. And for the next thirteen years, I gave every day of my life to reaching my goal. My family, who made countless sacrifices; my friends who supported me from the beginning; my trainers and coaches and fans—they all came together to get me as close to my life's dream as possible.

But there was something about me that was broken, unhealthy, unfit. Some called it allergies, some called it asthma, some just called it being out of shape. But no matter what we called it, no one knew how to fix it.

It wasn't the first time I'd collapsed in a big tournament. A year earlier, ranked just 153rd in the world, I shocked 8th-seed Guillermo Coria by taking the first set of our match in my very first French Open appearance. But by the third set, my legs had turned to rock and I couldn't breathe, and finally I resigned. "Obviously, he was tired after a while,"

Coria remarked afterward. “When you’re fit, you ought to be able to play a long match in hot weather.”

Three months later, in the opening round of my first US Open, playing against Gael Monfils, I literally collapsed on the court. I lay on my back like a beached whale in the humid 80-degree heat, laboring for breath, waiting for a trainer. After four embarrassing time-outs, I managed to win that match, but I was booed off the court, and my lack of fitness was the talk of the tournament. “Maybe he ought to change some things,” Monfils suggested.

I tried. In professional tennis today, the slightest change in your skill level, your physical conditioning, or your mindset makes all the difference. I practiced every morning and every afternoon, I lifted weights, I biked or ran for hours at a stretch every single day. It made no sense that I was unfit. I changed trainers, looking for a new workout regimen. I changed coaches, thinking that something in my technique would free me from this curse. I had nasal surgery, hoping that would allow me to breathe more freely. Each change helped, a little; season by season, I grew a little stronger and fitter. In 2007, I became only the second player to beat both Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal since their ascent to the top of the game.

Yet every time I took a big step toward my dream, I felt as though a rope were around my torso, pulling me back. Professional tennis is one continuous, eleven-month-long season, and the key to consistency is being able to recover quickly from one match to the next. I’d win one tournament, then collapse unexpectedly in the next; win one epic match, then retire in the middle of the following round.

Maybe my problem wasn’t physical, but mental: I took up meditation, then yoga, trying to calm my mind. My training became obsessive: For fourteen hours a day, every single day, I did nothing but focus on improving my mental and physical game. And in the process, I became one of the top ten tennis players in the world.

But I had a dream, and it wasn't to be *one of the best*. There were two men in the world who were the best—Federer and Nadal—and to them, I was nothing but an occasional annoyance, one who might quit at any moment when the going got tough. These guys were the elite; I was stuck somewhere in the second tier.

I won my first Grand Slam, the Australian Open, in January of 2008—a breakthrough. But a year later, against Andy Roddick, I once again had to retire from the tournament. The defending champion, and I quit?! What was wrong with me? “Cramp, bird flu, anthrax, SARS, common cough and cold,” Roddick said about me, making fun of the fact that I so often fell ill. Even Federer, who's so quiet and gentlemanly, dismissed me when talking to reporters: “I think he's a joke, you know, when it comes down to his injuries.”

At the end of 2009, I even moved my training camp to Abu Dhabi, hoping that by practicing in the sizzling heat of the Persian Gulf, I'd be better prepared for the Australian Open in Melbourne. Maybe by acclimating myself better, I'd finally beat this thing.

And at first, it looked as though I'd finally figured it all out. By January 27, 2010, I'd made it to the quarterfinals of the Australian Open, handling my opposition easily along the way. Across the net in my quarterfinal match was JoWilfried Tsonga, the tenth-ranked tennis player in the world. I was ranked number three. Two years earlier to the day, I'd beaten him on this very court on my way to winning my first Grand Slam tournament at age twenty-one. And on this day, I needed to be just as good. No, better.

Tsonga is two hundred pounds of pure muscle, one of the biggest and strongest players in the game, and his serve comes in at 140 miles an hour. When he puts his body weight into a return, the ball comes in “heavy,” with a combination of speed and topspin that feels like it could knock the racquet right out of your hand. And yet he moves with great quickness around the court. On this day, in his

neon yellow T-shirt, he looked as big as the sun, and just as relentless. He had taken the first set, 7-6, after a punishing tiebreaker that drove the crowd to their feet over and over again.

But by the second set, my obsessive preparation finally started to take over. I took that set, 7-6, and then I began to control him, running him back and forth along the baseline. The singles court is twenty-seven feet from side to side, and I could cover that distance as well as anyone.

I took the third set easily, 6-1. I had him.

And then it happened, again. With Tsonga up 1-0 in the fourth set, the invisible force attacked. I couldn't breathe. When he took the next game, something rose up in my throat; I pleaded with the chair umpire for a toilet break. I didn't want my opponent to see what I was about to do.

I raced into the locker room, burst into a stall, and fell to my knees. Gripping the side of the toilet bowl, my stomach in spasms, I felt as though I were vomiting up all of my strength.

When I walked back onto the court, I was a different player.

Tsonga knew my body was breaking down, and holding serve, he could run me back and forth across the court like a toy. I felt the crowd shift to his side, and his serve seemed faster, heavier—or maybe I was slower, weaker. It was as though I were playing against a giant. More than once, his shots left my feet stuck to the blue Plexicushion surface; I simply couldn't move them. He took the fourth set, 6-3.

By the start of the fifth set, it was clear to everyone in the park how this match would turn out. Serving 0-40, with Tsonga up 3-1, I hit the lowest point of my career. It was break point, in more ways than one.

I had to deliver a perfect serve, knock him off balance, regain some control. If there was one chance for me to battle back, I needed to make this serve the best of the hundreds of thousands I'd hit in my lifetime.