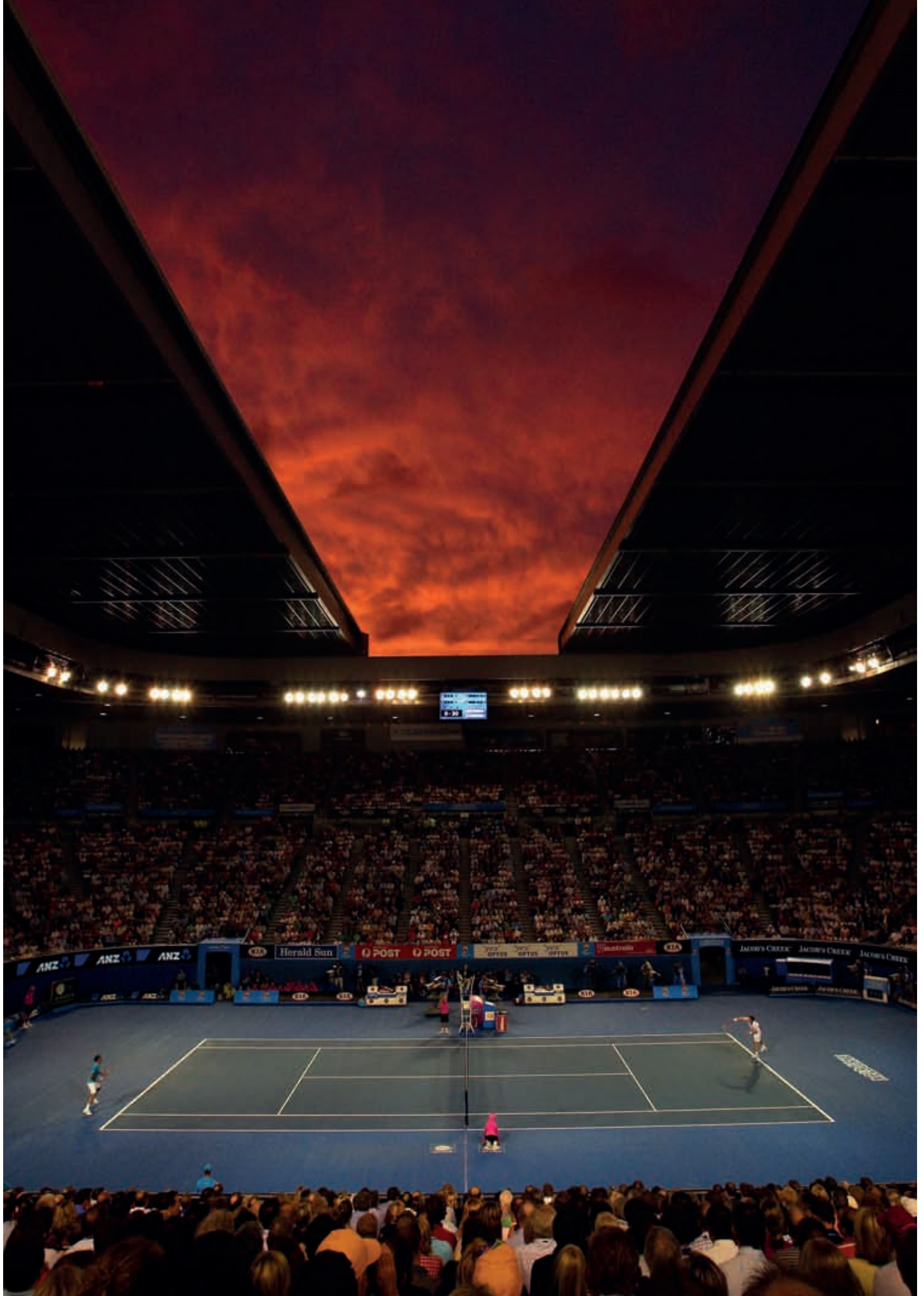


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Introduction by

Steve Wood



It is not something that I talk about often, but I once played in the Australian Open. It was nearly 30 years ago, one of the great moments of my life. It was the first round, Kooyong. I lost in five sets to American Paul Annacone – but let's not dwell on the result. The pride I felt playing in my country's Grand Slam is a feeling that remains today.

This enormous sense of pride is something that has now gone beyond the players and is shared by an entire city, if not an entire state and a nation.

January is our time to show the world we know tennis and we love tennis. Living and working in Melbourne you can literally see the build-up to the Australian Open.

Players arrive in a steady stream, some to prepare early and acclimatise, others to compete in an Australian Open Series event. The nation is abuzz with tennis talk: who will win, how are the favourites looking and who has a ticket to the biggest sporting event in January?

Before you know it all roads, all trains, all trams, all planes, all conversations and indeed all planning arrangements lead to and revolve around the Australian Open.

Many years ago the Australian Open became much more than a tennis tournament. It became an event, on court and off court. It is now an occasion, an experience. While uniquely and clearly Australian, we embrace visitors from all around the world and our strength comes from being affordable and accessible to the broadest audience.

The *Australian Open Book* takes you through every facet of this magnificent event, from its origins at the Warehousemen's Cricket Ground in Victoria as the Australasian Championships won by Rodney Heath, to the inclusion of women in 1922 and the great line-up of players who have dominated the Grand Slam® of Asia-Pacific since, an event which changed location several times before settling at Melbourne Park in 1988.

But this isn't just a history lesson. *The Australian Open Book* tells us how the Australian Open found its identity among the Big Four as the contemporary, innovative, fan friendly Grand Slam, the tennis event that kicks off each calendar year. The world's best players love the fans and they love the city in which it is held.

As a former tennis professional, it is my great honour to now run one of the biggest sporting spectacles in the world and as I read through *the Australian Open Book*, I am humbled by the magnitude of this event and my role in its evolution. I am sure you will enjoy reading about the Australian Open and continue to share the journey of this wonderful Australian treasure.

Regards

Steve Wood
Chief Executive Officer

support from the Victorian government. The government wanted a multi-purpose facility particularly suited to pop concerts and the like. Grass simply wouldn't work.

As it transpired, the loss of grass was generally forgotten in the excitement of so many foreign players and international tennis writers descending on Melbourne Park for the first tournament held there in January 1988. Everyone lavished praise on the new citadel, even though the ditching of grass probably cost us a golden opportunity to crown an Australian-born champion.

Pat Cash was one of only a handful of outstanding grass-court players in the men's field. He had won Wimbledon six months earlier, beating Sweden's Mats Wilander in a quarter-final, and Czech Ivan Lendl in the final. Now, the same two baseliners blocked his path at Melbourne Park. He again beat Lendl, but Wilander, so smart at mixing up his game on a slower surface, thwarted him in a gripping final, 6-3, 6-7, 3-6, 6-1, 8-6.

Cash would have been the first Australian winner of the men's singles since Mark Edmondson in 1976. He never made the final again, and Edmondson remains to this day the last Australian to hoist the coveted Norman Brookes trophy above his head.

There were no grumbles: the much admired Swedes – Wilander, Stefan Edberg, Anders Jarryd and others – were regarded as 'honorary' Aussies. There was more controversy in the women's singles between Steffi Graf and Chris Evert when a heavy shower interrupted play. Evert, always a tough competitor, was making a brave recovery from a slow start. But closure of the roof confused her and she lost to the young German 6-1, 7-6.

I wrote a piece for the *Sydney Morning Herald* in which I questioned her preparation. She'd arrived rather late, whereas Graf had come 10 days before the commencement and had spent time practising on centre court in different conditions. Chris, in a letter to me, resented my 'slur' on her professionalism and reckoned she'd been treated unfairly.

Although she described Melbourne Park as 'the best facility in the world, bar none', she added: 'To play 13 days in bright sunlight and then to play the Grand Finale indoors in dark conditions is a bit unfair, especially when I had no matches at night under the lights previously.'

'You people,' she continued, 'are going to have a major problem with the players in future if you (a) don't allow practice indoors on the stadium court, and (b) make the top players play one indoor night match before the later rounds...'

It was her last appearance Down Under.

Chris's criticism was unfounded. The retractable roofs – on Rod Laver Arena, Hisense Arena, and (soon) Margaret Court Arena – are wonderful assets and have been used judiciously. The Open is still, fundamentally, an outdoor tournament, subject to certain rules. But it is also mass entertainment, and sensible compromises

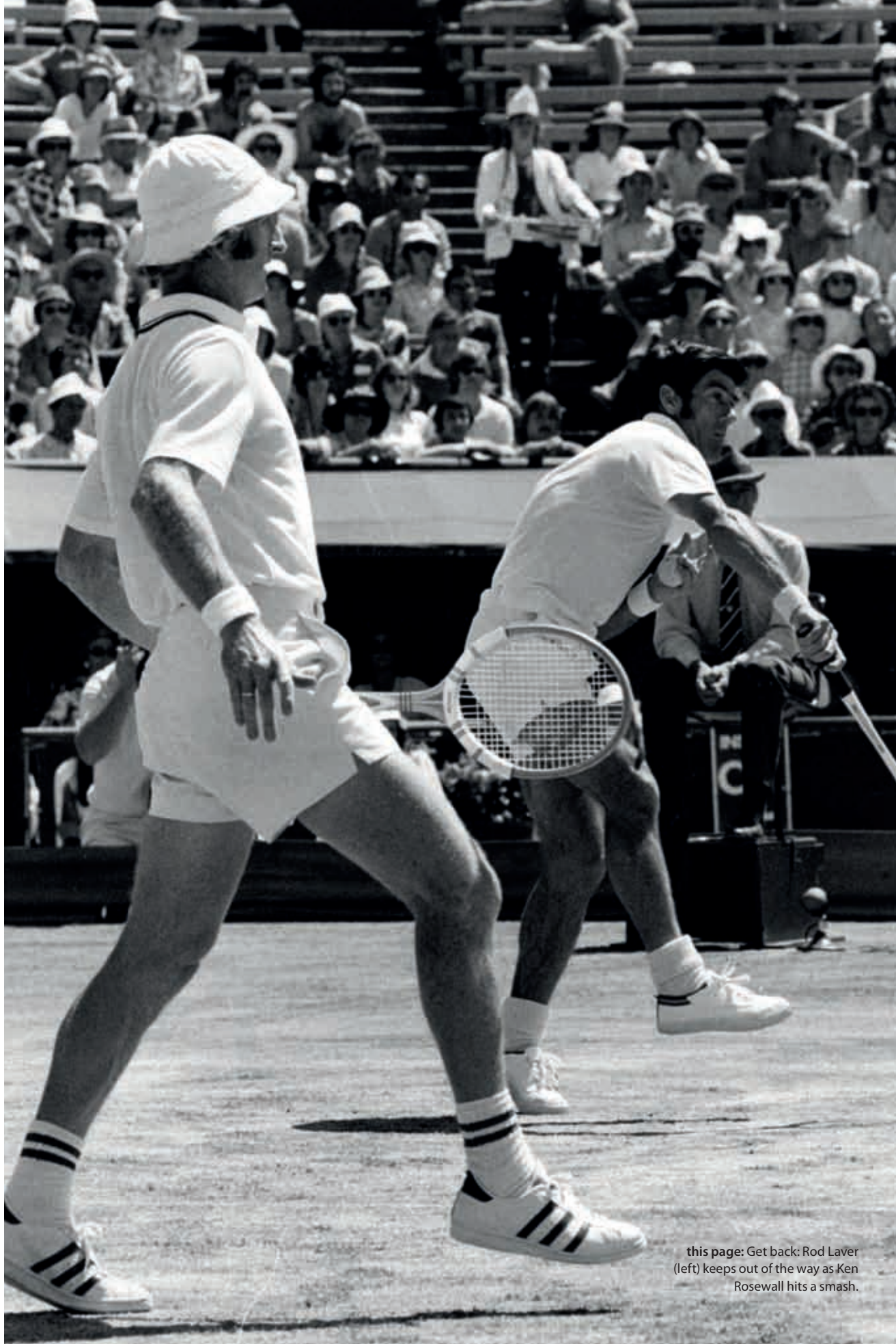


are sometimes needed to achieve the best result, especially in a country as challenged by the elements as Australia.

The various roofs have contributed significantly to the 'Blockbuster' concept over the last two decades. Fans know that, rain, hail or shine, there'll be a good chance of witnessing, at one of the show courts or at home on television, a tennis classic – possibly one to match Agassi v Rafter in 2001, Roddick v El Aynaoui in 2003, Hewitt v Baghdatis in 2008, and Nadal v Verdasco in 2009.

A seat at Melbourne Park offers a vastly different experience than one at Kooyong. But if it's a balmy summer Saturday night and you can watch two of the leading contenders for a Grand Slam crown – go for it. I might even break a veteran sports writer's golden rule and buy a seat myself!

above: Pat Rafter congratulates winner Andre Agassi after their blockbuster semi-final at Melbourne Park in 2001.



this page: Get back: Rod Laver (left) keeps out of the way as Ken Rosewall hits a smash.

Boilover

Mark Philippoussis d. Pete Sampras, 1996

It was a boilover that almost blew the lid off Melbourne Park. On the rainy first Saturday night of the 1996 Open, local boy Mark Philippoussis won a 6-4, 7-6, 7-6 blockbuster against world No.1 Pete Sampras. Both accomplished all-court players, both of Greek descent, this was a drool-worthy encounter for fans of power tennis. In the end, the superior firepower came from the 19-year-old known as 'Scud'. Philippoussis served 29 aces to Sampras's five and stunned the world champion with the consistency of his barrage. 'The thing I learned tonight was that I could beat anyone in the world,' said the strapping young Aussie. Alas, in his injury-ravaged career, this stands as the best Grand Slam win of Mark's career.









WHAT'S THE STORY?

Facts, figures and FAQs

Building the Buzz

For two weeks each year the Australian Open hosts a party that few events in the world can match. More than 600,000 people turn out to soak up the sun, the tennis and the carnival-like atmosphere at Australia's biggest sporting event.

But it wasn't always this way. In the mid-1990s there was a perception that the Australian Open was elitist, expensive and inaccessible. In short, the public felt locked out.

In 1994, local fans had little to cheer about. Not one Australian player made it past the third round of the men's or women's singles championships. The titles would eventually go to Pete Sampras, who won his first Australian Open in an all-American final with Todd Martin, while Steffi Graf romped to victory over Arantxa Sanchez-Vicario in a lop-sided affair.

The response was critical – crowd figures had plunged by more than 30,000 people. Like an old friend who hasn't called in a while, it was clear that the public's relationship with the Australian Open was becoming rather distant.

Organisers read the warning signs and took the opportunity to set about changing the way tennis fans and the general public viewed the Australian Open.

The first challenge was to shift the perception that the Australian Open was expensive and elitist, and to strengthen tennis fans' relationship with Australia's Grand Slam tournament.

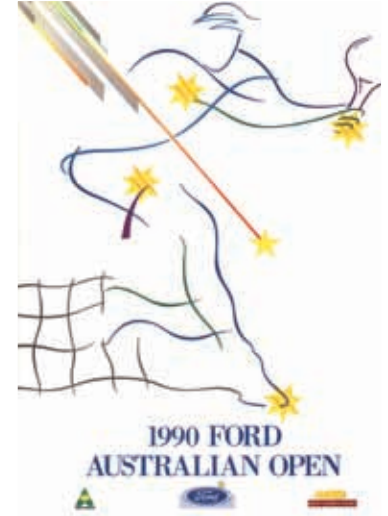
Organisers spent time analysing the other three majors – how had they built their tournament's brand? Each had forged its own unique identity – Wimbledon was steeped in tradition, Roland Garros was



1985



1989



1990



1991



1992



1993



1994

Fan Slam

More than just a tennis tournament, the Australian Open is a celebration of sport, fair play and courage. While the players provide the inspiration, it's the fans who bring the party-like atmosphere that permeates this much-loved summer event.

Flags as capes, wigs, face masks, inflatable mascots, chants, placards, hats from all corners of the world, face-paint, outfits straight from a fancy dress party, and player names spelt out on bodies, T-shirts and flags are just some of the ways fans show support for their favourite players.

Some fans, however, have taken things a little too far. Flares, streakers and scuffles between fans have all reared their ugly heads at the tournament. But unruly fan behaviour is not new – an on-court altercation back in 1947 is arguably the most bizarre incident of all.

In the semi-finals at Sydney's White City that year, American Gardner Mulloy found himself at the centre of one of the most unbelievable incidents in the tournament's history. After some hotly debated officiating, repeated taunting from two hecklers prompted Mulloy, a former US Marine, to challenge his deriders. At Mulloy's

invitation to 'come down here', the two men stormed the court and a scuffle broke out as White City's centre court momentarily turned into a boxing ring. Police soon broke up the fight and led the on-court intruders away. Mulloy, however, wasn't finished. 'I'll meet you out the front afterwards,' he challenged. Following the match, Mulloy, flanked by an inquisitive media pack, waited for round two, but the outspoken pair was nowhere to be seen.







Acknowledgments

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Additional images

Ben Solomon: pp 4, 10, 27, 29 (top right, bottom), 123, 143 (bottom), 147 (top), 168, 172, 173, 175, 181, 184, 186 (top left), 187, 188, 194–195, 196–197, 198–199, 200–201, 202–203, 206–207; Jeremy Heffernan: pp 155, 170–171, 174, 176, 186 (top right, bottom left and right), 189, 202, 208; Tennis Australia pp 13 (bottom right), 69, 73 (top), 74, 78, 81, 82, 87, 91 (left), 94, 100 (top), 127, 128 (top), 131 (right), 133, 138–139, 150–151, 156–159, 160–161, 182 (left and centre); News Limited/Newspix: pp 51, 53 (bottom right), 55, 65, 67 (top), 68, 71, 75, 77, 104 (bottom right), 117 (top), 131 (left), 133, 167, 168; Corbis: 124–125; Roger Gould: p17.

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