

JONATHAN AGNEW



Andy Murray's rousing victory in the Aegon Championships at The Queen's Club last week has inevitably whetted our appetites for Wimbledon. Will this finally be our year? You know the headlines – and they'll be coming to the back page of a tabloid newspaper near you soon.

One of the great attractions of tennis, for me, is the fascinating contrast between the character and style of the best players, from the silky, elegant and natural movement of Roger Federer to the

pocket battleship that is Rafa Nadal. Between them comes probably the best match player in the world at the moment, Novac Djokovic, while the expressive, combative Murray combines flair with a simmering passion that, when he plays well, is a positive force that sweeps him to victory.

Everyone has a favourite – and I always go for the stylist. The first time I watched Thierry Henry play football he took my breath away. It helped that he scored a hat trick for Arsenal that day, but that was not what caught my eye. It was the effortless way he moved around the pitch with a sixth sense placing him in the right place at the right time. You cannot coach instinct like that, and when it is combined with grace and poise, you have the perfect sportsman.

I played much of my career with David Gower – the most light footed and natural batsman I have ever seen, who drew gasps when he played one of his languid

drives through the covers, and groans when a casual stroke brought about his downfall. I batted the other end to David once, and it was as if there were two matches being played simultaneously, depending on which of us was facing the bowling. From that perspective it was clear that David had more time to see the ball travelling at 90 miles per hour than the rest of us mere mortals.

Like Roger, David didn't practise a great deal. They don't need to because much of what they do is pure instinct. But I doubt if Federer's preparation is quite as casual as

David's, who would be engrossed in the *The Telegraph* crossword whenever his turn came to bat. Before pulling on his gloves and helmet and entering the fray, he would ensure his newspaper was left perfectly folded on his seat to await his return.

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