

# WIMBLEDON THROUGH THE DECADES

By Richard Evans

**Do you remember what happened on these lawns 10 years ago, or 20? How about 30? Read on to discover what made each Championships special in 1952, 1962, 1972, 1982, 1992 and 2002.**

## 1952 – NEW CHAMPIONS

**With the devastation of World War II just starting to fade, the British public were ready to embrace something new and exciting and, in 1952, Wimbledon provided it. Frank Sedgman and Maureen Connolly swept on to the scene with all the energy and grace of youth and established themselves as two of the game's brightest new stars.**

Sedgman, who defeated the Czech left-hander Jaroslav Drobný in four sets in the final, was the first, but very much not the last, of Harry Hopman's new breed. The tough, wily coach was in the process

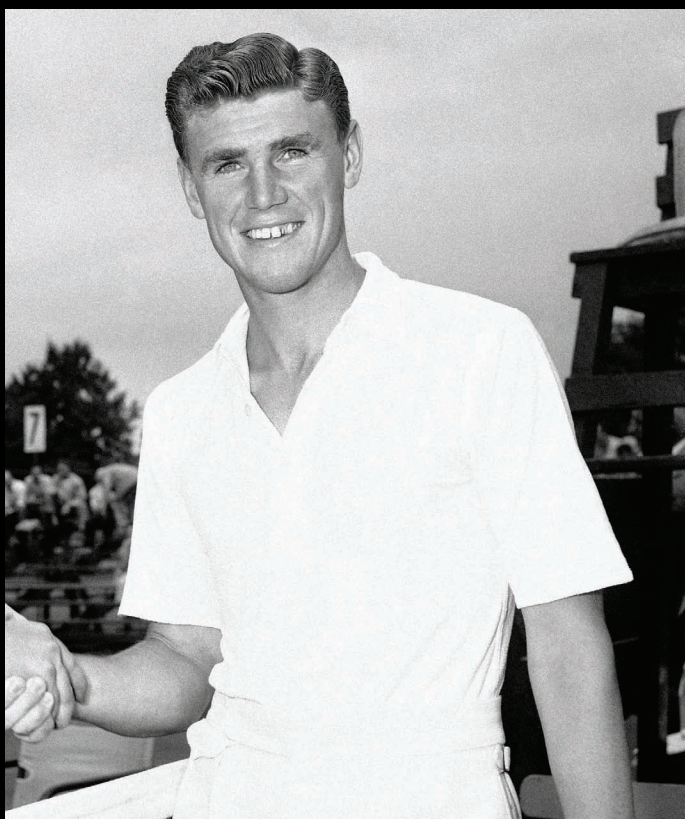
of taking the game to new levels of speed and fitness and Sedgman imbued those qualities as he raced around the Centre Court, volleying from impossible angles.

Connolly, dubbed 'Little Mo' after the battleship 'Big Mo', was, contrastingly, lithe and petite and just 17. But she nearly didn't play. Three days before, she injured her shoulder at Queen's and received conflicting opinions on the nature of the injury. Defying her coach 'Teach' Tennant who was afraid she might be jeopardising her career, Connolly beat Evelyn Moeller 6-0, 6-2 in her first match and then called

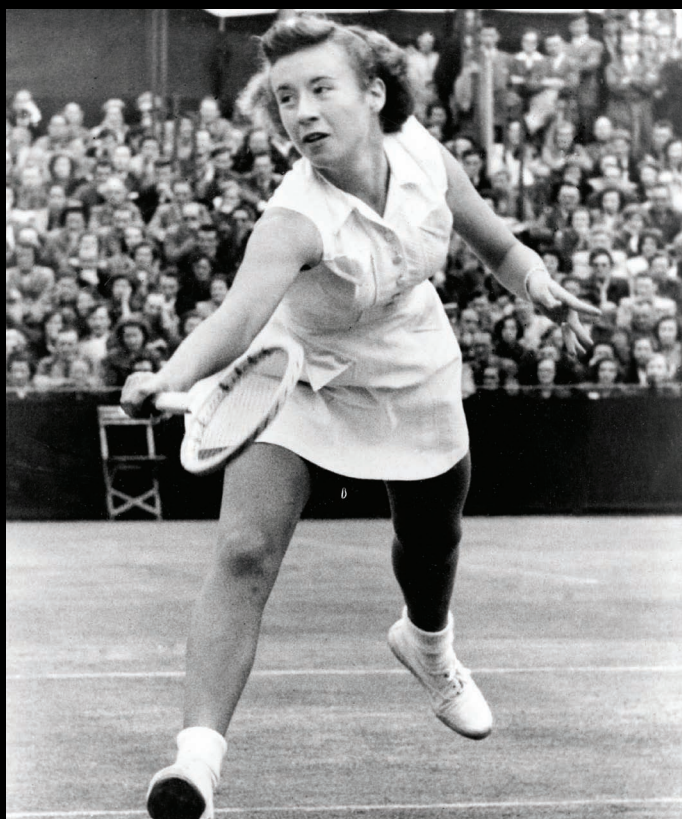
a sensational press conference to announce that Tennant was no longer her coach.

After coming within two points of defeat against Britain's Suzanne Partridge in the next round, Little Mo swept on to win the first of three consecutive titles by beating the experienced Louise Brough in the final 7-5, 6-3.

Connolly had threatened to tear her Ted Tinling evening gown to shreds if she had not won. But, instead, she looked resplendent in it as she danced with Sedgman, equally handsome in a white tuxedo, at the Wimbledon Ball.



Frank Sedgman



Maureen Connolly





Rod Laver



Karen Hantze Susman

## 1962 – A GRAND SLAM!

**The impacts on the game of the two singles champions of 1962 could not have offered greater contrast. Karen Hantze Susman, a strictly amateur talent, grabbed her only Grand Slam title and then returned to the relative obscurity of suburban California.**

Life would be very different for Rod Laver as he backed up his second Wimbledon crown by sweeping all four majors that year to follow Don Budge as a true Grand Slammer – a feat Laver would repeat in 1969 to establish himself as one of the two or three greatest players of all time.

Laver beat the surprise finalist Marty Mulligan in a one-sided final but his greatest

tests had come earlier, first against the future champion from Spain, Manolo Santana, whom he beat 14-16, 9-7, 6-2, 6-2 and then against Neale Fraser, his fellow Aussie to whom he had lost in the 1960 final.

Having defeated Britain's Ann Haydon (later Mrs Jones) in the semi-final, Susman found herself facing the unseeded Czech, Vera Sukova, in the final. Sukova, whose daughter Helena would reach the quarter-finals in 1986, had cut the bottom half of the draw to shreds, beating No.3 seed Maria Bueno in the semis and, before that, No.2 seed Darlene Hard and sixth-seeded Angela Mortimer. But Susman's swift serve-and-volley game was too much for Sukova in the final and the eighth-seeded American triumphed 6-4, 6-4.





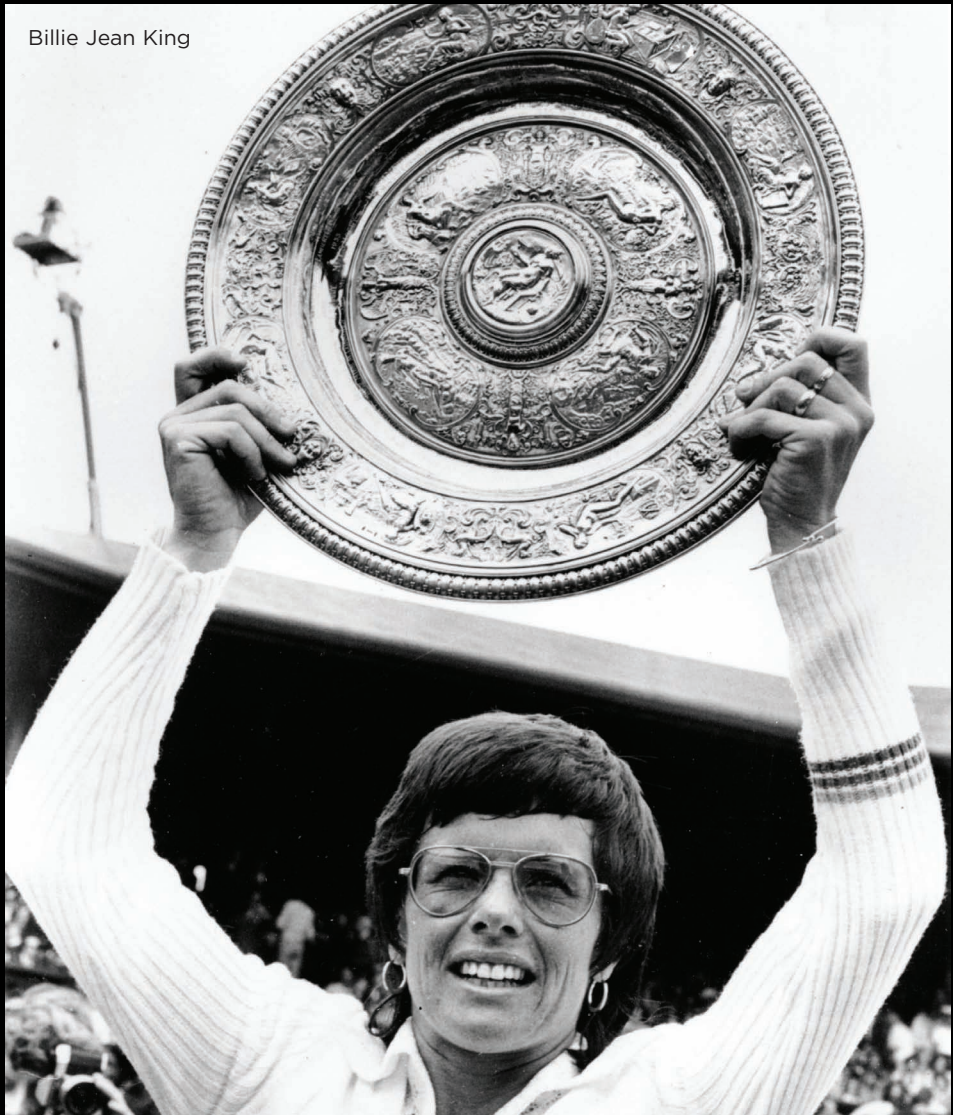
## 1972 – POLITICS

Sadly, 1972 was the first of two years in which politics got its ugly claws into the men's game, culminating with the ATP boycott in '73. It was a ban on World Championship Tennis pros which affected '72 because the defending champion John Newcombe was not allowed to return along with such players as Ken Rosewall and Rod Laver.

But earning titles is about grabbing opportunities and Stan Smith, the elegant Californian, did that in style by winning a tremendous final 7-5 in the fifth set against Ilie Nastase, who was as chaotic in his attitude as Smith was focused and serene. Smith, who had beaten the following year's champion, Jan Kodes, in the semis, got the job done while Nastase, in between some miraculous stroke play, fretted vociferously about string tension and line calls.

Billie Jean King's politics stayed off court and that allowed this trail-blazing champion to claim the fourth of her six singles titles (she won 20 in all) with a 6-3, 6-3 win over Evonne Goolagong, having beaten Rosie Casals and Virginia Wade in previous rounds. Goolagong, the graceful defending champion from Australia, had defeated Chris Evert in the semi-final but was no match for Billie Jean's all-action net play on this occasion. Billie Jean was to have one of three knee operations that year but she soldiered on to win again in '73 and '75.

Billie Jean King



Stan Smith



Jimmy Connors



Martina Navratilova

## 1982 – DEFENDERS BEATEN

**Neither defending champion managed to retain their crown despite both reaching the final. The most surprising reverse, perhaps, was that of John McEnroe, whose defeat of six-time champion Bjorn Borg the previous year had played a part in the Swede's premature retirement.**

At two sets to one up against Jimmy Connors in the final, McEnroe seemed set for another triumph but if one man could match McEnroe for intensity it was the street-fighter from Illinois and Connors came through to claim his second Wimbledon title 3-6, 6-3, 6-7, 7-6, 6-4, eight years after he had won his first.

Martina Navratilova was always going to be favourite to beat Chris Evert on grass although few of their matches were ever easy. Winning the third of a remarkable nine Wimbledon singles titles, Navratilova came through 6-1, 3-6, 6-2, finally taking charge of the net to stop the flow of Chrissie's passing shots. For a clay-courter, Evert finished with a remarkable Wimbledon record as well – appearing in no less than 10 finals – of which this was the eighth – and winning three of them.

Five of her defeats in Wimbledon finals were at the hands of her good friend Martina, with whom she is still in constant contact, while two other losses came against Billie Jean King, whom she had defeated in this '82 semi-final and Evonne Goolagong.

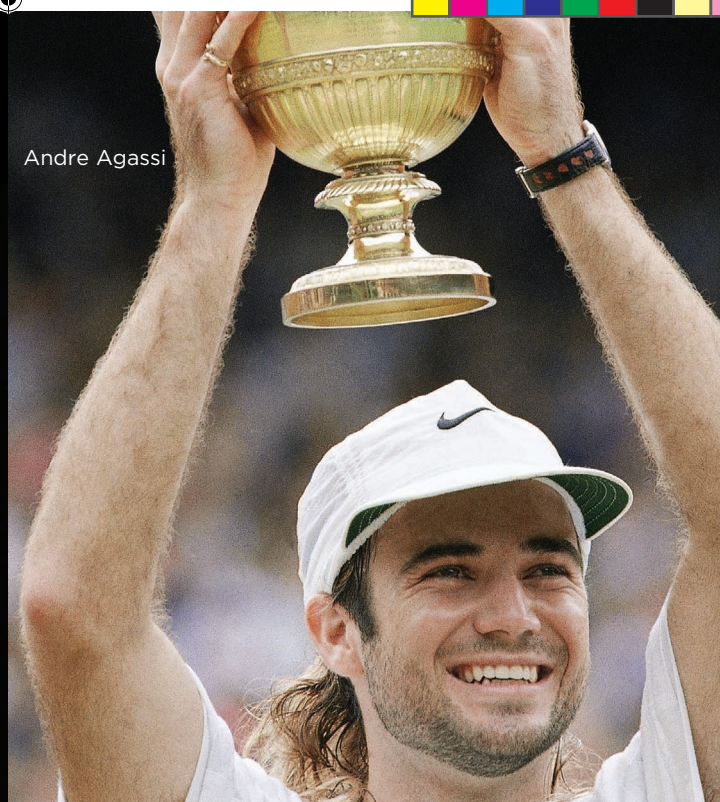




Stefanie Graf



Andre Agassi



## 1992 - ANDRE AND STEFFI

**Years before they became husband and wife, Andre Agassi and Stefanie Graf won the singles titles at Wimbledon this year and posed together at the Champions dinner - Andre with long, straggly hair and Steffi in a lovely short satin dress.**

There was no sign of romance for either on court as both went about their business with ruthless efficiency. Agassi won the first of eight Grand Slam singles titles with a brilliant display of early returning against the huge Goran Ivanisevic serve in the final, winning a thriller 6-7, 6-4, 6-4, 1-6, 6-4. Earlier Agassi had beaten an unseeded John McEnroe in the semi-final and Boris Becker a round earlier.

For Ivanisevic, a victor over Peter Sampras and Stefan Edberg, this was to be the first of three unsuccessful final appearances before finally winning in 2001.

Graf destroyed Monica Seles in the final 6-2, 6-1 which was hardly a reflection of the way the year went as Seles won the three other Slams in '92, plus the Australian Open again the following year.

There was an undercurrent to the final, as well. After losing to Seles in the quarter-final, Nathalie Tauziat had complained about the Serb's grunting. The press seized on the story and Monica, clearly embarrassed, was both silent and, by her high standards, inept in the final.

Rain and a rare Monday finish threw a spotlight on the doubles when McEnroe teamed up with Michael Stich to win a fantastic final against Jim Grabb and Richey Reneberg 19-17 in the fifth set in front of a young No.1 Court crowd that had been let in for free.

McEnroe and Stich were a scratch team. Not so Todd Woodbridge and Mark Woodforde who would win the doubles for the next five years!





## 2002 – BOUNCING INTO A NEW ERA

**The Pete Sampras era was over; Goran Ivanisevic had defeated Pat Rafter in a mighty serving battle the previous year but, in 2002, there was no longer any doubt that the courts at Wimbledon had changed. The ball was bouncing higher and the player of the moment, Lleyton Hewitt, seized his chance for glory just before Roger Federer matured.**

With the one exception, when Sjeng Schalken sliced forehands at him – and

twice had a break in the fifth in the quarter-finals, Hewitt found the ball bouncing right into his hitting zone and he used this luxury for a backcourt player to pass Tim Henman every whichway in the semi-finals and outplay the unseeded Argentine David Nalbandian in the final 6-1, 6-3, 6-2.

The serve-and-volley style was maintained for a few more years with Federer triumphing over the likes of Mark Philippoussis and Andy Roddick but soon the tell-tale signs were there for all to see on court: less of a furrow to the net and wide, worn patches on the baseline.

It was also the beginning of the Williams era. Between 2000 and 2010 either Venus or Serena or both appeared in every singles final save 2006 when Amelie Mauresmo beat Justine Henin. In 2002, it was Serena who stepped up to win the first of her four titles to date with a 7-6, 6-3 victory over her older sister.

Their hold over Wimbledon and, indeed, the entire women's game was remarkable. Not since the days of the Dohertys and Renshaws more than a hundred years before had one family turned The Championships into a family affair.

Lleyton Hewitt



Serena Williams

