

# LOVE MATCH

This year sees tennis's most celebrated couple, Andre Agassi and Stefanie Graf, invited to The Championships as the Chairman's Special Guests. Now married with two children and living in Andre's hometown of Las Vegas, we look back at their contribution to Wimbledon and their place in the history of tennis.

by Mike Dickson  
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## Agassi on Wimbledon:

"It took me a bit of time before I realised what it represents in the sport but then I quickly grew to love everything about Wimbledon. You feel it as you come through the gates, the sense of history, there is nowhere else like it in the game."



**By the time Andre Agassi and Stefanie Graf got round to being invited to the Champions' Dinner at The Savoy, the obligation to dance together had disappeared into history but, as they sat at their table late on that Sunday night in 1991, they obviously made an impression on each other.**

Just how much was not apparent until much later in the decade when they became perhaps the most illustrious coupling this sport has ever seen.

To cut a very long honour roll short, Agassi and Graf retired with 30 Grand Slam singles titles between them and well over \$50 million in official prize money alone. They are certainly the only husband and wife who can claim to have won every major prize in their sport, including an Olympic singles gold medal each. Steffi, as she is fondly known, managed that all in one year, in her incredible season of 1988.

But they took very different paths to get to that same place of treasuring this little patch of South-West London. Steffi was immediately smitten with Wimbledon from the first time she walked through the gates as a senior player in 1984, while for Andre it was, shall we say, something more of a slow-burning love affair.

He first played in 1987, but the brash boy from Las Vegas found Flushing Meadows more to his taste and was to stay away for the next three years. But

once he had made up his mind to embrace SW19, the impact was not long in coming.

His victory in the 1992 final against Goran Ivanisevic proved to be a breakthrough Grand Slam at the event where it had seemed least likely. Not that

### Graf on Wimbledon:

"From the first time I came here I loved the place. The atmosphere, the tradition, the way they do things, something about it made me comfortable and excited. A lot of my best memories from tennis are from Wimbledon."

this was to herald a completely smooth ride in his career. There were injuries and controversies, which, at one point midway through 1997, saw him drop to No.141 in the world and consider retirement.

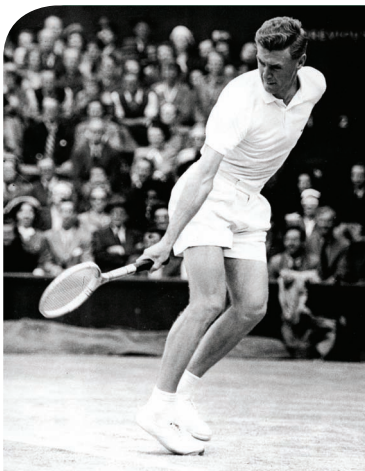
Two years later, he came back to join the exclusive club of players to have won all four Grand Slams with his triumph at Roland Garros in 1999, and reached the final of Wimbledon in the same year, only to be defeated by his enduring rival, Pete Sampras. Producing some of his best tennis beyond the age of 30, Agassi's major final appearances spanned 15 years.

But while Agassi managed eight Grand Slam titles, Graf won an incredible 22 major singles titles between 1987 and 1999. Seven of these came at Wimbledon, which always suited her whiplash forehand, exquisite sliced backhand and supreme ease of movement.

Two of Graf's Wimbledon finals particularly stand out, her third-set recovery to beat the eventually tearful Jana Novotna in 1993 and the epic against Arantxa Sanchez-Vicario two years later, in which she prevailed 7-5 in the decider. Relentless upon the court while warm-spirited and sometimes vulnerable away from it, her last Wimbledon appearance saw her reach the final in 1999, retiring with a phenomenal 74-7 match record at SW19.

Since retiring in 2006, Agassi has limited his involvement in tennis to a few senior tour appearances and charity matches, as has his wife, but in the spring of 2009 they both flew over to Wimbledon to play in the match that inaugurated the Centre Court roof in the company of Kim Clijsters and Tim Henman.

It was a relatively rare visit back to the arena which provided some of their finest moments as, with young children, their lives are very much anchored on the other side of America. 20 years ago Agassi might never have envisaged himself as being a guest of honour in the Royal Box, but he will be there with his wife in 2012 and both of them are sure to be hugely welcomed. 🎾



### FRANK SEDGMAN

One of the quickest men around the court, Frank Sedgman amassed 22 Grand Slam titles over a five-year period in the late 1940s and early 1950s, winning an extraordinary 16 of the 24 major trophies on offer in 1951 and 1952. A vintage serve and volleyer, the Melbourne native was particularly comfortable on grass, winning the

gentlemen's singles at The Championships in 1952, the gentleman's doubles in 1948, 1951 and 1952, and the mixed doubles in 1951 and 1952. Along the way, he and doubles partner Ken McGregor also completed the calendar doubles Grand Slam in 1951. Having turned professional in 1953, Sedgman became the first tennis player, according to fellow professional and friend Jack Kramer, to make more than \$100,000 in a single year. It is a pleasure to welcome Mr Sedgman to The Championships as a Special Guest in 2012, 60 years since he completed the sweep of the gentlemen's singles, doubles and mixed doubles events in 1952.

### ROD LAVER

The 'Rockhampton Rocket', as he is fondly known, remains one of the greatest male players ever to compete on a tennis court. Described as 'technically faultless,' the 5ft 10ins Australian, four times a Wimbledon Champion, twice completed the calendar Grand Slam, first as an amateur in 1962, and again as a professional

in 1969, when he, as someone put it 'beat the lot'. While causing havoc to his opponents and wearing out his hitting partners, Laver, closed and poker-faced on court, was also blessed with a wonderful temperament. Confessing once with a twinkle in his eye that "we all choke, you just have to recognise it and give the ball an extra nudge," he received a Mappin & Webb voucher for £75 for winning his first Championships in 1961, and always epitomised the term professional. 50 years since he achieved his first sweep of the four majors, it is a privilege to welcome Mr Laver back to Wimbledon.

