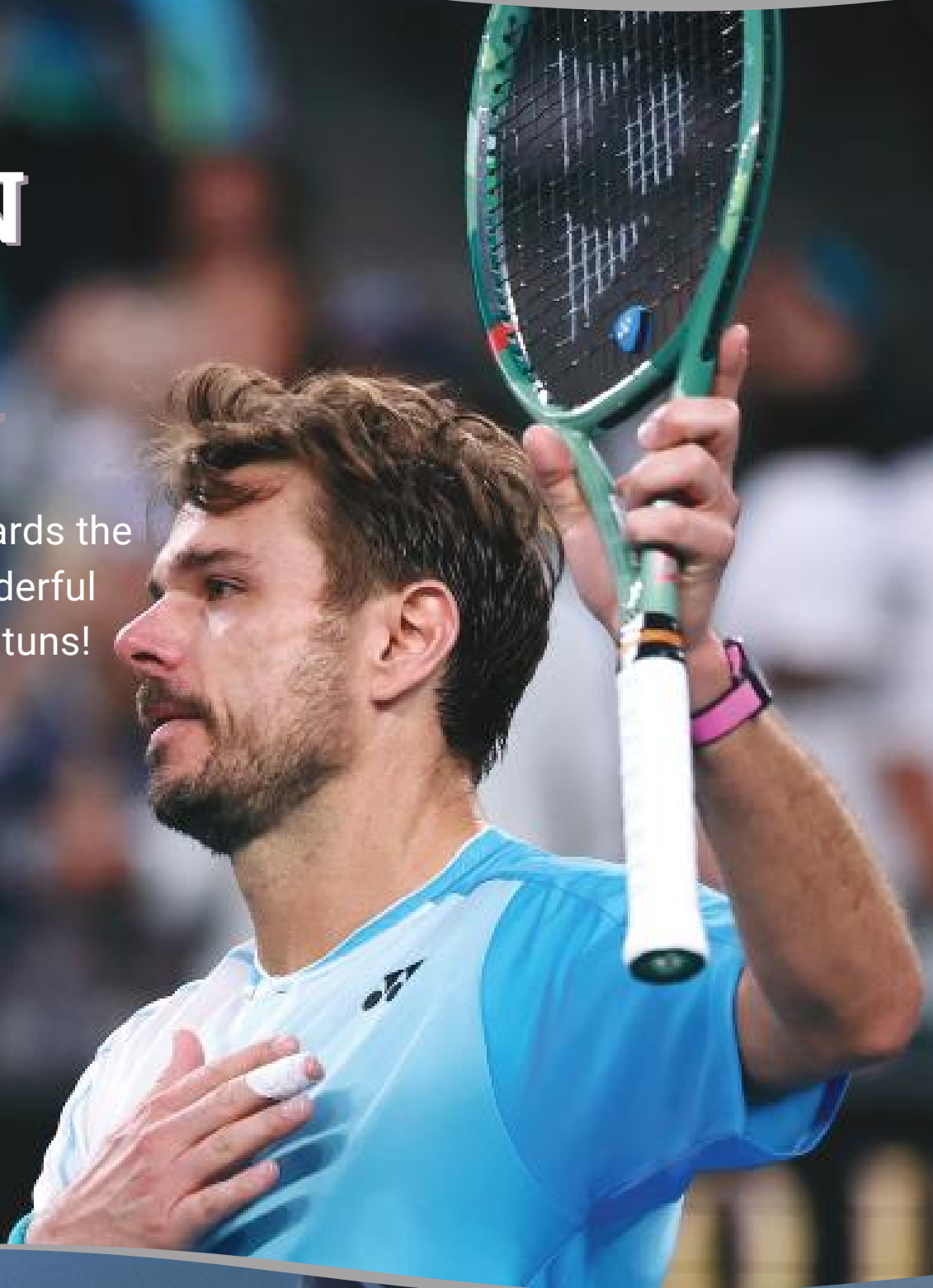


GRSA INTERNATIONAL ATW MAGAZINE

FEBRUARY 2026

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Felix Auger-Aliassime Crowned Canada's Most Successful Male Singles Player with Montpellier Title Defence

Félix Auger-Aliassime has further stamped his authority on the men's tour with a remarkable title defence at the Open Occitanie in Montpellier, capturing his ninth ATP singles crown and setting a new standard in Canadian tennis history.

The Montreal-born top seed prevailed in straight sets against French veteran Adrian Mannarino, prevailing 6-3, 7-6(4) in a compelling final on indoor hard courts. In doing so, Auger-Aliassime surpassed Milos Raonic for the most singles titles won by a Canadian man in the Open Era, a milestone that reflects both consistency and elite performance at tour-level events.

Having arrived in the south of France as defending champion, Auger-Aliassime finished the week where he started — lifting the trophy once again. He became only the second player in recent years to win back-to-back titles at this event, a feat matched previously by Richard Gasquet. Eight of Auger-Aliassime's nine career titles have come on indoor hard courts, underscoring his status as one of the surface's most formidable exponents.

In the title match, the Canadian drew first blood early, surging to an impressive eight-point run that helped secure the opening set. Mannarino, a respected competitor well into his veteran years, fought fiercely and even erased a championship point with an unreturnable serve late in the second set. Eventually, Auger-Aliassime reeled off five consecutive points in the tiebreak to close out the victory.



Reflecting on his achievement after the match, Auger-Aliassime said: It's amazing emotions to win again here. I'm thrilled with my whole week and especially today."

He also acknowledged the calibre of his opponent, noting the respect he and his peers on tour hold for Mannarino's competitive spirit throughout the match.

The triumph brings a satisfying balance to Auger-Aliassime's season after an earlier setback in which he was forced to retire from his opening match at the Australian Open due to cramps. With the Montpellier title secured, he is set to climb to No. 6 in the ATP rankings, narrowing the gap to the world's top five and signalling that his season — and aspirations — remain firmly on an upward trajectory.

This latest success not only highlights Auger-Aliassime's standing within Canadian sport, but also reinforces his burgeoning legacy on the ATP Tour as one of the most accomplished male players his country has ever produced.

Elena Rybakina: “I knew the road” to Grand Slam success after Australian Open triumph

Elena Rybakina has spoken candidly about her journey to becoming a two-time Grand Slam champion, reflecting on the mindset and experience that paved the way to her breakthrough at the Australian Open.

Speaking at the Qatar TotalEnergies Open following her victory in Melbourne, the world No. 3 admitted she carried a quiet, unshakeable belief in her ability to win major titles. Rybakina pointed to her first Grand Slam success at Wimbledon as the foundation for greater things, saying she “kind of knew the road” to repeating at the highest level, even if each match posed its own challenges.

“I kind of knew the road, but every day is different. There’s new expectations and new approach, as each match is a little bit different.”



Despite the triumphs of her 2022 Wimbledon title, Rybakina explained that her success did not immediately translate into the recognition or stability often afforded Grand Slam winners. She recounted the paradox of feeling like a champion yet not always being treated as one in terms of rankings and on-court considerations, a stark reminder of the complexities within the professional tour.

At the time of her Doha press conference, Rybakina was contending with a minor cold, yet her focus remained on her performance and the work still ahead. She made clear that celebrations, while deserved, were secondary to preparation and continued improvement:

“If we have time, we celebrate, but if we don’t, there’s a lot of tournaments ahead,” she noted. “I don’t put too much pressure or expectations, that’s for sure. But I definitely want to do well and we’ll see how it’s going to go day by day.”

Rybakina’s Australian Open win signalled a significant shift in her career narrative: overcoming past setbacks, affirming her place among the elite of women’s tennis, and demonstrating an ability to sustain excellence beyond a single breakthrough.

Zverev and De Minaur Locked In for London Laver Cup Showdown

Alcaraz and Fritz already headline 2026 edition

The O2 is preparing for another electric September.

Alexander Zverev and Alex de Minaur have confirmed their returns for the ninth edition of the Laver Cup, set for 25–27 September 2026 in London. With Carlos Alcaraz already committed to Team Europe and Taylor Fritz spearheading Team World, the rivalry that has reshaped this exhibition-turned-heavyweight contest is building once more.

And if recent history is anything to go by, this one will simmer long before the first serve is struck.



Zverev's London Redemption

For Alexander Zverev, London is not just another stop on the calendar, it is layered with memories.

A six-time Laver Cup competitor and the event's all-time leading points scorer, the German returns with something rare in his Laver Cup career: unfinished business. Last year's defeat in San Francisco marked the first time he had tasted loss in the competition. Until then, Zverev had been a constant in Team Europe's dominance, lifting the trophy in Prague (2017), Chicago (2018), Geneva (2019), Boston (2021) and Berlin (2024).

Now, he comes back to a city that has historically brought out his best.

It was at The O2 in 2018 that Zverev claimed the Nitto ATP Finals crown, defeating Novak Djokovic in the final, a statement moment in his early ascent. London's indoor stage clearly suits his flat, penetrating groundstrokes and composed big-match temperament.

He has also begun 2026 in strong fashion, reaching the Australian Open semi-finals before falling to Alcaraz in a high-quality encounter that reminded everyone of the generational tug-of-war currently shaping men's tennis.

"I always love being part of the Laver Cup," said Zverev. "The team atmosphere is incredible, and the intensity is unlike anything else we play all year. London is a great tennis city and The O2 is one of the most special stadiums in the world for me... I'm excited to return and hopefully we can win the title back for Team Europe."

With Alcaraz now the No. 1 player in the PIF ATP Rankings, Europe will again carry star power. But after consecutive Team World triumphs, reclaiming supremacy will demand more than nostalgia.

De Minaur: The Relentless Spark

If Zverev represents Europe's established firepower, Alex de Minaur embodies Team World's modern edge, pace, grit and unshakeable belief.

Fresh off an ATP 500 title in Rotterdam, the Australian arrives in form and brimming with confidence. London 2026 will mark his third Laver Cup appearance, and he has already proven himself a decisive force.

He was part of Team World's breakthrough victory in London in 2022 – a watershed moment that ended Europe's stranglehold. Then came San Francisco, where De Minaur delivered a flawless 3–0 personal record, swinging momentum with his trademark speed and relentless baseline pressure.

In a competition where energy can turn in an instant, few players feed off the team dynamic quite like him.

“Laver Cup is one of the most intense and exciting weeks on the calendar,” said De Minaur. “Playing in London in 2022 was a special moment for our team and San Francisco showed what this group is capable of. I loved playing under Andre Agassi last year and I’m really looking forward to getting back out there in London with him and the team.”

Under Agassi's guidance, Team World has developed a sharper identity, fearless, united and increasingly comfortable on the biggest indoor stages.

A Rivalry Reignited

With Alcaraz and Fritz already confirmed, the foundations are in place for another compelling chapter. Alcaraz's explosive athleticism and flair contrast intriguingly with Fritz's measured power. Add Zverev's experience and De Minaur's speed, and the stylistic clashes almost write themselves.

Did You Know?

Zverev remains the Laver Cup's all-time leading points scorer, a statistic that underlines just how influential he has been in Europe's success. Meanwhile, Team World have won two of the past three editions, signalling a genuine power shift in the competition.

The Laver Cup began as a tribute to Rod Laver's legacy. It has since evolved into something more combustible, part exhibition, part gladiatorial team duel, and entirely compelling.

London has seen both Europe's dominance and Team World's breakthrough. In September 2026, it may well witness the next swing in tennis's most theatrical rivalry.

One thing is certain: The O2 will not be short of noise.

Putting Sinner's Doha Defeat in Perspective: The Numbers Behind Relentless Consistency

Defeat has become such a rarity for Jannik Sinner that when it happens, it echoes.

In Doha, that echo was loud.

Jakub Mensik, the reigning Miami champion and one of the tour's most dangerous young shot-makers, stunned the World No. 2 7-6(3), 2-6, 6-3 in the quarter-finals of the Qatar ExxonMobil Open. It came on the heels of Sinner's Australian Open semi-final exit at the hands of Novak Djokovic.

Back-to-back tournaments without reaching a final. For most players, that's routine. For Sinner, it's almost headline material.

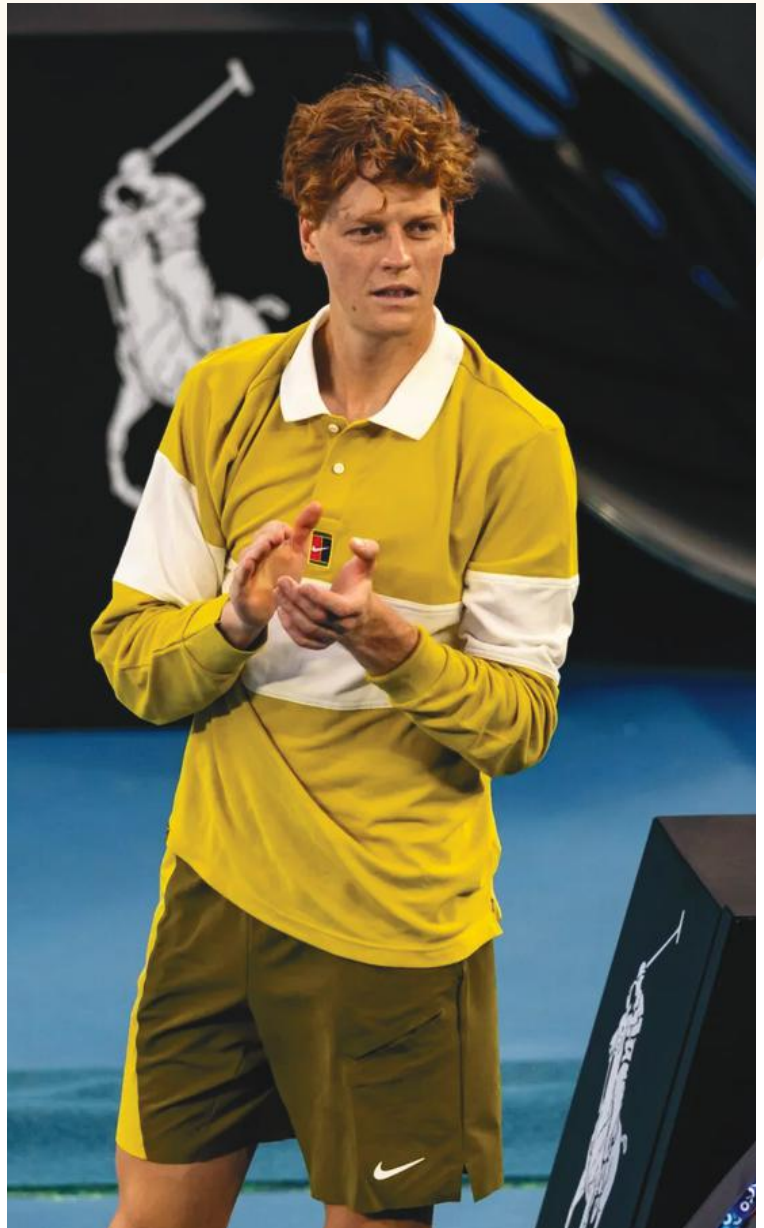
A Statistical Outlier

You have to rewind 18 months to find the last time Sinner fell short of the final in consecutive events. In 2024, he exited at the quarter-final stage at both Wimbledon and the ATP Masters 1000 in Montreal. Since then? A near-constant presence on championship Sunday.

According to the Infosys ATP Win/Loss Index, Sinner is 138-14 since the start of the 2024 season. That translates to a staggering 90.8 per cent winning rate.

To put that into historical perspective, Novak Djokovic, widely regarded as the most statistically dominant player in the Open Era, owns the best tour-level winning percentage ever recorded at 83.3 per cent.

Sinner isn't just winning. He's operating in statistical territory rarely seen in modern men's tennis.



The Final-Four Machine

Since that Montreal quarter-final defeat in 2024, Sinner has competed in 19 tournaments.

He has reached 15 finals and has lifted 10 trophies.

And the five times he fell short in championship matches? All against Carlos Alcaraz.

That detail matters. His defeats haven't come from inconsistency or surprise early exits. They've come at the very summit of the sport, against his generational rival.

Perspective Is Everything

So yes — Sinner has now lost before the final in consecutive events. But framing it as a dip requires selective memory.

The Italian's baseline has shifted so dramatically that anything short of a title challenge feels unusual. Quarter-finals have become the floor, not the ceiling.

That is the true story behind Doha.

For most of the tour, reaching a last-eight clash with a red-hot youngster like Mensik would be considered a solid week. For Sinner, it sparks analysis pieces.

That is the burden, and the privilege, of consistency.

The Bigger Picture

Every great champion experiences brief turbulence. The difference lies in the body of work surrounding it. Sinner's body of work remains extraordinary: sustained excellence across surfaces, deep runs at nearly every stop, and a win rate that nudges into historic territory.

Two tournaments without a final may feel significant in the moment. Over 152 matches and counting, it barely dents the broader pattern.

If anything, it underlines just how high Sinner has set his own standard.

And that may be the most impressive statistic of all.

Win/Loss Record (since start of 2024 season) 138-14, Winning Percentage, 90.8% (For context: Novak Djokovic holds the best tour-level winning percentage in history at 83.3%.)
Tournaments Played (since Montreal 2024) 19, Finals Reached: 15 Titles Won: 10, Championship-Match Losses: 5, all against Carlos Alcaraz
Consecutive Events Without Reaching a Final: First time since 2024 (Wimbledon & Montreal)

Federer Courtside as Wawrinka Rolls Back the Years in Dubai

There are wins, and then there are wins with Roger Federer in your corner.

Stan Wawrinka opened his Dubai Duty Free Tennis Championships campaign on Monday with a polished 7-5, 6-3 victory over Benjamin Hassan, but it was the familiar face in the stands that added a layer of nostalgia to the desert evening. Federer, an eight-time Dubai champion and long-time standard-bearer of Swiss tennis, watched on as his compatriot produced a performance that felt both timely and timeless.

Federer had been making the rounds throughout the day at a tournament he once owned, before settling in to witness Wawrinka's composed first-round display. For a player navigating the closing chapter of a glittering career, the symbolism was hard to ignore.

Wawrinka, now 40, is embarking on a season-long farewell, having confirmed he will retire at the end of 2026. Yet if this is a goodbye tour, he is determined to make it competitive. Against Hassan, he struck his groundstrokes with trademark authority, dictating from the baseline and sealing the opening set with a late surge before controlling the second with veteran assurance.





There is a certain defiance in the way Wawrinka continues to compete. Earlier this year, he reached the third round of the Australian Open and picked up solid wins in Montpellier and Rotterdam, evidence that, even as the clock ticks, the fire still burns.

In Melbourne, during an emotional on-court tribute, Wawrinka laid bare what has kept him going.

“The reason why I was still playing was because of you, because of the love of the game and the emotions you can give me,” he told the crowd. “I’m sad to leave but it’s been an amazing journey.”

That journey has spanned three Grand Slam titles, Olympic gold in doubles alongside Federer, and countless nights where his one-handed backhand carved its way into tennis folklore.

Did You Know?

Federer’s eight titles in Dubai remain one of the tournament’s enduring records — a testament to his affinity with the Emirate’s hard courts. Seeing him back on site, applauding from the stands, felt like a passing of the torch between eras of Swiss excellence.

For now, Wawrinka’s story is not quite finished. Each tournament offers another chapter, another opportunity to summon the power and poise that once toppled the sport’s giants.

And in Dubai, with Federer watching, he reminded everyone — perhaps even himself — that there is still plenty of life left in that celebrated backhand.

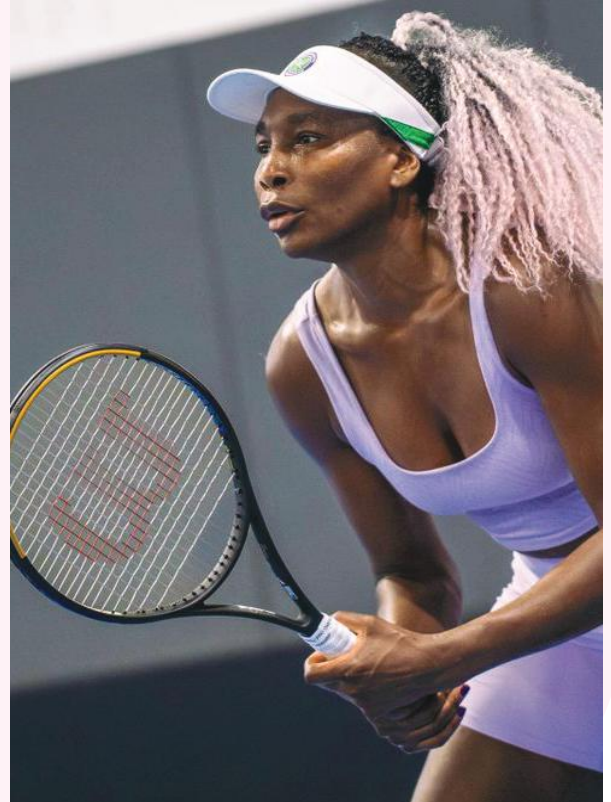
Venus Returns: A Desert Homecoming at Indian Wells

Some players enter tournaments. Others transform them. Venus Williams has always belonged to the latter category, and this March, Indian Wells will feel her presence once more.

The BNP Paribas Open has confirmed that the former world No. 1 has received a main draw wild card in both singles and doubles, marking her first appearance in the California desert since 2024.

“I’m so excited to be heading back to Indian Wells and can’t wait to return home to play in California,” Williams said. “This tournament is always such a special experience, and there’s nothing like competing in front of these incredible fans.”

At 45, Williams continues to extend a career that has already reshaped the sport.



A Story Bigger Than Tennis

A three-time semi-finalist at Indian Wells, most recently in 2018, Williams has experienced both triumph and turbulence at the event.

After withdrawing ahead of her 2001 semi-final against Serena Williams, Venus and her father Richard endured boos and racist abuse from sections of the crowd. The episode led the Williams sisters to boycott the tournament from 2002 to 2016, a stand that became one of the defining chapters of their legacy.

Their eventual return symbolised resilience and reconciliation. Last year, an erroneous announcement suggested Williams would compete before she publicly clarified she would not. This time, her comeback is official.

Tournament director Tommy Haas called it “an honour” to award her the first wild card, describing Williams as “one of the most accomplished players our sport has ever seen.”

Few careers compare.

Seven Grand Slam singles titles. Fourteen in doubles. Forty-nine WTA trophies. Four Olympic gold medals.

Did You Know?

Venus was the first Black woman to reach world No. 1 in the Open Era, and a driving force behind the fight for equal prize money.

Doubles and the Road Ahead

Williams will also compete in doubles alongside Leylah Fernandez, rekindling a partnership that reached the US Open quarter-finals in 2025. The blend of experience and youthful energy offers an intriguing subplot.

Before Indian Wells, she is set to appear at the ATX Open in Austin, also via wild card, partnering fellow American Peyton Stearns. Her 2026 season has begun quietly, with early exits in Auckland, Hobart and Melbourne.

Yet with Venus Williams, statistics rarely tell the full story.

Her return to the desert is not merely about results. It is about legacy, longevity and the enduring magnetism of a champion who continues to shape the sport she helped redefine.

Indian Wells awaits, and so does another chapter.



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In 2024



In 2025



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DID YOU KNOW?

There is always something to learn each day, but trying to take it all in at once can be counterproductive. Rather than multitasking your way through information, focus on what's essential. Absorb the key points, act with purpose, and return later to deepen your understanding. Effective learning is deliberate, not accidental.

TEAM GRSA

Some brilliance doesn't just feature on the court, the are those who excel off the court too!

1

Novak Djokovic – The Linguist & Wellness Devotee

Beyond his 24 Grand Slam titles, Djokovic is fluent in multiple languages (Serbian, English, Italian, German, French and Spanish). He's also deeply invested in alternative wellness practices, meditation and plant-based nutrition – long before it became mainstream in tennis.

2

Serena Williams – Venture Capitalist

Serena isn't just a champion – she's built Serena Ventures, investing in over 60 start-ups, many founded by women and minorities.

3

Viktor Axelsen – Language Enthusiast

Axelsen taught himself Mandarin to better integrate on the Asian circuit. He conducts interviews in Chinese and has built a huge following in China.

4

Wang Shixian – Academic Focus

Several Chinese players have pursued university education while competing internationally, often in sports science or management, part of China's athlete development system.



Tour Stringing, what should I take?

This is a question that most stringers ask themselves before an event. The more experienced stringer will have already worked out what he or she needs after trial and error and experience of having done it multiple times.

I often see stringers turning up with large metal cases with different compartments with everything from grommets and double sided tape to staplers and hammers and other tools.

The head stringer at the event will have already thought of everything needed to cover the team's needs and player requests. However, some requests just can't be satisfied as it's impossible to have all the tools on site in the stringing room, there just isn't enough room.

You only need to take the tools that are necessary for restringing a racket, so starting clamps, awls, cutters, pliers, setting off awl and string scissors. Some extra small items can be taken, like lip balm to help enlarge a grommet, it takes no space but can be a life saver and maybe a small amount of tubing to repair any damaged grommets.

Keep the tools to a minimum as space is never abundant and everything else should already be there anyway.

As they say... **“Less is more”**

Remember – The difference is in the small details.

Any personal tips to help your fellow stringers? Let us know and get them published in the Stringer Solutions part of the GRSA ATW Magazine

Leaving your mark on the industry

In many professions, there are individuals who strive to be the best they can be, continually learning and bringing better things to their workplace, company, and industry. These individuals stand out not just because of their personalities, abilities, and commitment to their craft, but also because of their achievements both as a team and as individuals. They have left a mark, becoming references in their field.

Over decades of learning, there have been countless opportunities to share knowledge, teach, and help others rise through the ranks. It's important to always strive for excellence and avoid mediocrity. A select few earn the title of GRSA Grand Master, a rare distinction due to the uncommon trait of consistently putting others before oneself and giving back to the industry that shaped their careers.

The attributes of a GRSA Grand Master include the unselfish sharing of time, knowledge, and support. These individuals have years of experience at every level and stage, maintaining humility while becoming respected names within the industry. Nearly every dedicated stringer will have heard of them for one reason or another.

But how does one achieve this accolade? It is an invitational honour that requires at least 10 years of stringing and organising at major Tour events and slams. It demands clear support for other stringers, helping them grow and promoting their recognition. Moreover, it involves a deep commitment to helping others find passion and meaning in this unique workplace.

These are the main criteria for becoming a GRSA Grand Master Stringer, and we celebrate some of these exceptional individuals from around the world.

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at every level

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constantly during a
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slams, 1000's & other
major events

Give back to the
craft that has provided
so much over the
years, helping others
achieve their goals
and grow

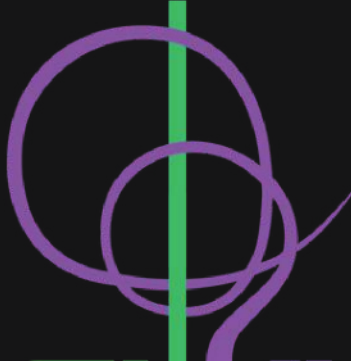


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Approved Stringer Workshop in Klagenfurt, Austria With Stefan Müller.

On November 29–30, the first stringing workshop was held in Klagenfurt, Austria. The event brought together participants who wanted to improve their skills in professional racket stringing.

During the workshop, attendees received practical insights into professional stringing techniques, different string materials, and proper machine maintenance. Through hands-on practice, everyone had the opportunity to strengthen their skills and gain more confidence in their work.

The workshop was an important step for the local stringing community and highlighted the importance of quality and ongoing education in racket service.

Congratulations to Sarah Kanduth, Christoph Brugger, Peter-Sebastian Puaschitz, and Peter Kampusch on earning their first “Approved Stringer” certificate. This achievement reflects



ITF The Hague | 15 – 22 February

Mark Jan Greebe

From 15 February to 22 May, GRSA International had the privilege of delivering the official stringing service at the inaugural winter edition of the J100-M25-W35 ITF Tennis Tournament in The Hague.

As with any first edition, there was a sense of stepping into the unknown. With no previous data on player numbers or anticipated workload, we prepared for every scenario — launching the event with a team of three stringers and one front desk coordinator. After the opening three days, and once demand patterns became clear, we streamlined operations and completed the tournament with two stringers on-site.

The week ran smoothly from start to finish.

In total, we strung 240 rackets — a figure that exceeded expectations for a debut winter edition. Tensions ranged from a feather-light 14.5 kg to a tour-level 33 kg, highlighting the diversity of playing styles and preferences across the draw.

It's always fascinating to see such a wide spectrum of setups at professional events — proof that in modern tennis, precision is personal.

We're already looking forward to returning this summer, when we will once again oversee the stringing service for the tournament's summer edition.

A huge thank you to ITF The Hague and De Rhijenhof for their continued trust in our team and our service. We value the partnership and look forward to building on a strong first chapter.



GRSA International Master Class with Martin Mann, held on the 24th of January 2026 at the brand new P.R.S. Pro Lab facility, Frankfurt.

Dr. Anja Kerkmann came to see us to successfully upgrade her certification level to Certified Professional Stringer.

Starting her journey as a very committed stringer we are happy to support her the best way we can to teach her more about that one thing which has become her passion.

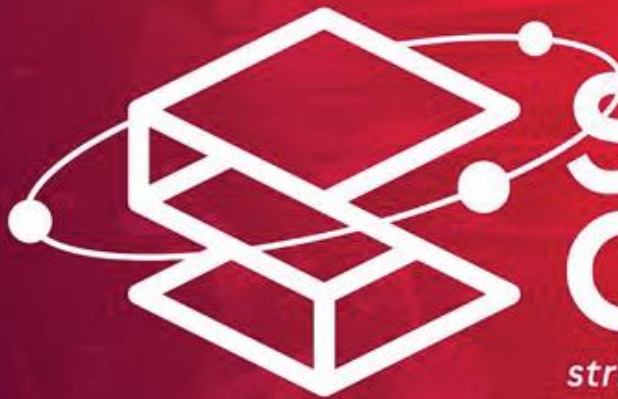


GRSA International Advanced Customizing workshop on 31st of January 2026!

Bulgarian GRSA member Ivan Spasov and Swiss GRSA member Pascal Hämmerli came all the way from their hometowns to the P.R.S. HQ in Frankfurt to attend the 2nd level customizing taking them deeper into the world of customizing.

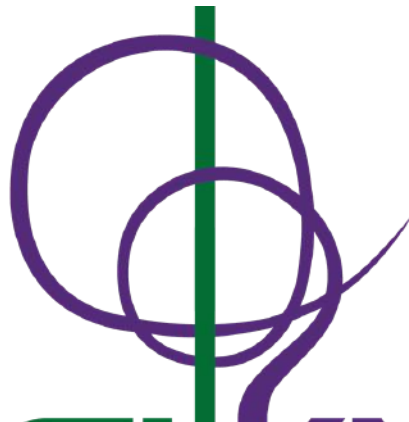
A lot of new tweaks and tips were shared and practiced in a very intense hands on part to learn how to master new things. A nice lunch break and a Coffey break made it a truly interesting and enjoyable day ! Thanks for the trust and all the way coming to see us from Plovdiv and Zürich !





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NICK DOWN

talks about the

The Wilson Power Hinge



The Wilson Whip range of rackets have now been discontinued, however, they are on the list of Non-Standard rackets for several reasons. There are at least two types of metal ring type inserts at the throat and they are called Power Hinges by Wilson.

They are similar to the Prince Beast and Shark, in that all models have 14 mains and start at the throat, around the Hinge.

They all have 18 crosses and a long run of string around the outside of the head leading to knots or starting places. These can be minimised by following the instructions below.

Unlike the Prince rackets, there are not enough tie-off points, to string with 2 pieces (4 knots). So, unless the stringer makes extra wide knot-holes, it must be strung in one piece with 2 knots.

As there are only 14 mains, starting at the throat, there is no need to use an around the world method.

For this article, I have used a Wilson Whip 155 which has the larger type of metal hinge. The Larger type of hinge has a hole on the outer corners as can be seen in the pictures. They are self-explanatory and strung exactly the same way.

It is very important that a hard weave is achieved at the throat as far as the bottom cross-string is concerned.

The left side will be the Short Side. The SS will need enough string to string 7 mains and then the 6 top cross-strings followed by a tie off. The 6 top cross-strings must be strung up the racket. All cross-strings on the Long Side (right) must be strung down the racket.



Nick's Nugget

In Squash, it's become common to see pro players using "Closed Throat" rackets, with no bridge or hole. This type of racket has longer main strings, designed for more power.

There is only one shared hole on each side, with a main string and a cross-string in the same hole.

Mains (When installing mains, only pull tension at the head.)

Start at T, above hinge to LH1
 Below hinge to RH1, RH1 to RH2
 RH2 to above hinge
 Below hinge to RH3, LH1 to LH2
 LH2 to below hinge, above hinge to LH3
 LH3 to LH4, LH4 to below hinge
 Above hinge to LH6, RH3 to RH4
 RH4 to above hinge
 Below hinge to RH6, RH6 to RH9
 RH9 to above hinge (through hole)
 Below hinge to RH14 and secure outside frame.
 LH6 to LH9
 LH9 to below hinge (through hole), above hinge to LH14.

Note: both sides H14 is shared with a cross

Crosses

(SS on the Left)

LH14 to LH12 (string top 6 crosses towards head)
 First cross at LH12 must go UNDER the first main it reaches,
 skip LH9 and LH6, top cross at LH5, Tie off at LH9.

(LS on the right)

RH14 to RH13 (string 12 crosses towards throat)
 Last cross is at T1 both sides, Tie off at RT2.

Next month:- the Tecnifibre Dynergy range with Arch Power
 (AP125, AP130, AP135)





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Rob Owen on Fast-Tracking Player Transformation in World Squash Talk

What does it truly take to transform a player, not gradually, but decisively and quickly?

That question will sit at the heart of the next World Squash Talk, as world-renowned coach Rob Owen joins David Champion for an in-depth virtual session exploring his philosophy on “Effecting Change Quickly in Players.”

The session takes place on Tuesday 24th March at 12:00 (GMT) and promises rare insight into the methods behind one of the sport’s most respected coaching minds.

From World No.19 to World-Class Coach

Owen’s journey through the game gives him a rare dual perspective. A former World No.19, he understands the pressures of elite competition first-hand. Yet it is in the coaching arena where his influence has arguably been even more profound.

Early in his development, Owen spent formative years working alongside the legendary Jonah Barrington — a period that shaped his approach to discipline, standards and high-performance culture. He later went on to manage one of England Squash’s high-performance centres at his academy at West Warwickshire Sports Club, building a reputation for blending technical precision with psychological sharpness.

Trusted by the Game’s Elite

At the very top of the professional game, Owen’s client list reads like a roll call of modern squash excellence.

He has worked with — and in many cases helped reshape the careers of, Paul Coll, Nele Gilis, Simon Herbert, Jasmine Hutton, Joel Makin and Sarah-Jane Perry.

Players often speak of his clarity. His ability to diagnose issues rapidly. His willingness to challenge habits. Change, under Owen, is rarely cosmetic, it is structural.

Did You Know?

Paul Coll reached World No.1 in 2022, becoming only the second New Zealander ever to top the men’s rankings after Ross Norman, a milestone achieved during a period of close collaboration with Owen.

The Talent Architect

Beyond the tour, Owen has become one of the sport's most trusted developers of emerging talent.

He oversees the development of Jonah Bryant, the 20-year-old World No.11 widely tipped as one of England's brightest prospects. Alongside Bryant, Owen coaches a group of six elite juniors, four of whom currently sit at No.1 in their respective UK age groups.

Producing champions is one thing. Producing them repeatedly is something else entirely.

Olympic Vision

In 2024, Owen's standing within the sport was further underlined by his appointment as Olympic Programme Consultant for England Squash, reflecting the growing strategic focus on squash's Olympic future.

His expertise is no longer confined to individual players, it now contributes to shaping national direction.

What to Expect from the Session

In conversation with David Campion, the upcoming World Squash Talk will dig into:

How Owen identifies the most impactful changes to make first. The psychology behind rapid transformation, balancing technical adjustment with competitive confidence, why some players adapt quickly, and others resist change

Participants can expect practical insight, honest reflections, and actionable ideas applicable across all coaching levels.

A Global Coaching Conversation

"World Squash Talks" forms part of a rolling 18-month series designed to bring leading thinkers and practitioners together to elevate coaching standards worldwide. Each session aims to provide tangible tools for coaches — whether working with juniors at grassroots level or professionals on the PSA Tour.

Attendance is capped at 100 participants, ensuring meaningful interaction.

Priority booking will be given to: Members of the World Squash Coaching community, SPIN members, the remaining places will be allocated on a first-come, first-served basis.

World Squash accredited coaches and SPIN members will receive invitations directly via email. Any remaining spaces will be promoted via the World Squash website and social channels.

Because in modern squash, adaptation isn't optional. It's everything.

Riyadh P1 Crowns Its First Champions of 2026

Saudi Arabia staged the season's opening statement. After a week of tension, questions and high-quality drama, the Riyadh P1 delivered a familiar ending, order restored when it mattered most.

The first champions of 2026 have been crowned. And if the week flirted with upheaval, finals day reminded everyone why the elite sit where they do.



Coello & Tapia: Doubt, Danger... and Domination

Arturo Coello and Agustín Tapia did not arrive in Riyadh looking invincible.

Through the early rounds they wobbled. In the semi-finals they were pushed to the brink by Juan Lebrón and Leo Augsburger, staring down moments that could easily have derailed their opening campaign. Across the net in the final stood Ale Galán and Fede Chingotto, sharp, confident and barely tested all week.

On paper, the ingredients for a shift in power were there.

Reality had other ideas.

The Riyadh final marked the 30th meeting between the two heavyweight pairings. The head-to-head already leaned heavily towards the world number ones (20–9 before the match). By the end of the night, the gap had widened further.

Because when the margins tighten, Coello and Tapia operate on a different frequency.

The match turned on details, a brave return here, a bold passing shot there. From the first tie-break in the semi-finals, something shifted in Tapia. His body language hardened. His decision-making sharpened. The hesitation vanished.

From that moment on, the outcome felt inevitable.

A controlled 6-4, 6-2 victory sealed their first title of 2026. It may not have been their most fluent week, but champions are not measured by aesthetics, they are measured by trophies.

And once again, Gustavo Pratto's project stands tallest.

Did You Know?

This rivalry is rapidly becoming the defining duel of the modern era. Thirty meetings already, and we are only just getting started in 2026.

Sánchez & Ustero: The Future Has Arrived

If the men's final restored hierarchy, the women's draw confirmed momentum.

Ari Sánchez and Andrea Ustero came into Riyadh unbeaten in 2026 after their Hexagon Cup run. There was quiet belief around the circuit that something serious was building. In Saudi Arabia, they made it official.

Unbeaten became untouchable.

For Ustero, this was her first P1 title, a milestone that signals far more than a breakthrough win. She is no longer "one for the future". She is very much the present.

Alongside Ari Sánchez, one of the sport's most intelligent and tactically astute leaders, her development looks set to accelerate rapidly. Sánchez provides structure and clarity; Ustero brings fearless ambition. It is a combination that feels both balanced and dangerous.



The season is young. The message, however, is already clear.

The champions of Riyadh are not simply starting strong, they are shaping the narrative of 2026.

And if this opening chapter is anything to go by, we are in for something special.

Whether you're a seasoned player or just picking up a paddle for the first time, discovering where you can join open competitions is part of the fun in this ever-growing sport. Here are some upcoming dates – and for full details, head over to the Pickleball Global website.

DUPR ROME OPEN CHAMPIONSHIP 6TH ED.**EID:** 2209 EUR 40**Organizer:** Marco Maurizi**EVENT - TOURNAMENT****Starting:** March 13, 2026 to March 15, 2026**City:****Tournament Venue:** Standout Pickleball Arena**Registration Deadline:** March 01, 2026 (OPEN)**Tier Level:** 3**WPC SERIES - ITALY 2026****EID:** 2240 EUR 40**Organizer:** Marco Maurizi**EVENT - TOURNAMENT****Starting:** May 08, 2026 to May 10, 2026**City:****Tournament Venue:** Standout Pickleball Arena**Registration Deadline:** April 30, 2026 (OPEN)**Tier Level:** 3**Skechers Pickleball Paris Open 2026****EID:** 2280 FREE**Organizer:** Pickleball Paris**EVENT - TOURNAMENT****Starting:** May 22, 2026 to May 24, 2026**City:** Montreuil, France**Tournament Venue:** Pickleball Paris**Registration Deadline:** May 10, 2026 (OPEN)**Tier Level:** 1**MORE
INFO**

The Streak Ends in Style: Bright and Patriquin Dethrone the Giants in Mesa

Every dynasty feels invincible, until it isn't.

On Sunday in Arizona, the unthinkable became reality. Third seeds Anna Bright and Hayden Patriquin delivered a statement performance at the Carvana Mesa Cup Presented by Cal-AM, dismantling top seeds Anna Leigh Waters and Ben Johns in straight games, 11-8, 11-9, 11-3.

Not edged. Not survived. Swept.

For a partnership that had lost six consecutive matches to the sport's most dominant mixed doubles pairing, several of them heartbreakers, this wasn't just victory. It was catharsis.



Mesa Redemption

Just weeks earlier in Cape Coral, Bright and Patriquin had stood on the brink of victory, holding match point before Waters and Johns escaped in five games. That near-miss lingered.

In Mesa, there would be no repeat.

Even at 10-3 in the deciding game, nerves pulsed through Bright.

"I was so nervous," she admitted afterwards. "I basically fed Ben an overhead with my third shot. I was smiling straight after it, just relieved it wasn't worse."

Championship point landed. Emotions followed.

Patriquin, surrounded by friends and family, struggled to contain his feelings. "Honestly, I might cry," he said. "It feels amazing. That's the best team."

Bright summed it up with a grin: "No one beats us seven times in a row."

It was playful, but pointed.

The Tactical Shift That Changed Everything

The difference in Mesa had a name: Hayden Patriquin.

From the opening rally, he asserted himself in the middle of the court, taking space, speeding up exchanges, and driving balls hard into the body of both Waters and Johns. The tactic was deliberate, cut down reaction time, disrupt rhythm, prevent the world's best from settling into their trademark hands battles.

He also mixed in soft touches at precisely the right moments, feathering balls into the kitchen to force awkward resets instead of allowing Waters and Johns to dictate from the baseline.

The statistical contrast was striking:

18-3 advantage in clean winners
14 from Patriquin
4 from Bright

Against arguably the most defensively sound team in the sport, such disparity is rare, almost unheard of.

Did You Know?

Waters and Johns entered the final with a staggering 59-2 record in championship matches together.



Drama Under the Desert Sun

The first two games were tight. In fact, Waters and Johns burst out to a 5-0 lead in Game Two, threatening to reassert their authority.

Then the environment joined the storyline.

Sunlight filtering through the stadium covering created visibility issues, forcing Bright to swap her glasses lens mid-game. In a match decided by fine margins, even slight visual disruption mattered.

Sportsmanship also made a cameo. Early in the second game, Johns struck a ball that clipped his paddle, touched the ground, and carried over the net. He immediately called the fault on himself, a reminder of the integrity that defines the elite level.

From that point on, the momentum subtly shifted.

“I tried to be a bit detached,” Bright explained. “In Cape Coral, I think I wanted it too badly. This time we just enjoyed playing. We were in a great mood all morning — and we sustained it.”

By Game Three, they weren’t just competing, they were cruising.

A Rare Finals Defeat

To appreciate the scale of the upset, consider what was at stake.

Waters and Johns were chasing their 60th mixed doubles title together. Waters herself was pursuing her 62nd career mixed gold. They had already captured ten titles during the 2025–26 season, from Orange County to Cape Coral, sweeping through the calendar with familiar authority.

Their only previous finals defeats as a team had come in:

Austin 2024 (to Bright and Andrei Daescu)

North Carolina 2025 (to the Johnson siblings)

Notably, Bright has now been involved in three separate teams to topple the pair, including Mesa and the 2023 PPA Finals pool stage.

Few players can claim such a résumé against the sport’s benchmark duo.

More Than a Medal

For Bright, the title adds another chapter to an already decorated mixed doubles career alongside partners such as James Ignatowich, Riley Newman, Andrei Daescu and Dylan Frazier.

For Patriquin, however, the triumph feels transformational. It marks just his second career mixed doubles gold, the first coming with Jorja Johnson — but this one carries different weight. Beating the world No. 1 pairing on a championship stage does more than earn hardware; it shifts belief.

Five Pickleball Habits That Might Be Sabotaging Your Game

Every pickleball player has them — those subtle on-court habits that creep in unnoticed. A favourite dink pattern. A rushed drive. A lazy reach instead of a quick shuffle.

They feel harmless. Familiar, even. but as coach Jess Improta points out, some of these comfort-zone behaviours could be quietly capping your progress.

Here are five common habits that may be holding your game back — and what to do about them.

1. Dinking on Autopilot

There's a rhythm to dinking rallies. Back and forth. Soft hands. Controlled tempo. It can feel almost meditative.

And that's the problem.

Improta warns against what she calls “dinking anaesthesia”, drifting into predictable exchanges that go nowhere.

Many players default to the same safe target over and over because it feels reliable. But predictable dinks don't create pressure. They don't force errors. They don't open space.

If you're not moving your opponent, you're not controlling the rally.

Her solution? Be intentional. When you step to the kitchen line, vary your placement. Avoid hitting to the same spot more than twice. Probe for angles. Target the kitchen line at your opponent's feet. Look for that slight mis-hit, the pop-up you can punish.

Dinking isn't just survival. It's strategy.

2. Driving Low Balls in Transition

You're moving through transition. The ball drops low. Instinct says: drive it, but here's the catch.

If your opponent is set in the mid-court, that drive often rises right into their strike zone — shoulder height, perfect for an aggressive counter. Suddenly, the ball is dipping at your feet and you're scrambling.

Instead of firing low balls from transition, Improta recommends softening your touch, drop it into the kitchen.

A controlled drop neutralises the exchange, buys you time to advance, and prevents handing your opponent a comfortable attack ball. In transition, patience wins more points than power.

3. Reaching Instead of Moving

This one's subtle, and incredibly common.

Players reach, they lean. They flick at the ball with their wrist instead of adjusting their feet. The result? Loss of control and too many floating balls.

Improta stresses that strong footwork is fundamental if you want to elevate your level. Ideally, you should be striking the ball out in front and between your feet. When you reach wide and start involving excessive wrist action, your margin for error shrinks dramatically.

If balls are popping up off your paddle, don't blame your hands first, check your feet.

Clean positioning leads to cleaner contact. And cleaner contact keeps you in control of rallies.

4. The "Return and Admire" Mistake

The return of serve is one of the biggest built-in advantages in pickleball, so why give it away?

Too many players hit a solid return, then hesitate. They pause to watch. They hang back instead of advancing, but the returning team should reach the kitchen line before the serving team. That's the advantage. That's the opportunity.

Improta's advice is simple: return and go. you won't always make it fully to the line before the next ball comes back, but you should be closing in every time. Even gaining a few extra steps forward shifts the balance of the rally in your favour.

Standing still is surrendering ground.

5. Attacking While Off-Balance

Aggression is valuable, until it isn't. Many players try to speed up or drive the ball while leaning, stretched, or off-balance. It feels proactive. It feels bold, it's usually a mistake.

When you're unstable, your priority should be neutralising the rally, not escalating it.

Improta encourages players to soften their hands in these moments. Guide a controlled dink back into the middle of the kitchen. Buy yourself recovery time. Reset your positioning. Smart players recognise when to press, and when to pause.

The Bigger Picture

None of these habits are dramatic flaws. They're small tendencies. Comfortable shortcuts.

But at higher levels, pickleball is often decided by marginal gains, better positioning, smarter transitions, more intentional placement.

Jun Hao Carries Malaysia's Hopes into Thomas Cup Battle

KUALA LUMPUR: When Malaysia step onto court at the Thomas Cup in Denmark from April 29 to May 5, the spotlight will fall firmly on Leong Jun Hao.

At just 24, the world No. 27 is set to shoulder the burden as Malaysia's first men's singles, the man tasked with striking the opening blow in every tie at the world team championships. It is a role that demands not only quality, but consistency. And consistency has been the missing piece.



Jun Hao knows it.

As lead singles, he will be expected to set the tempo. In team events, early momentum is priceless. A commanding first victory can ripple through the line-up, lifting team-mates and unsettling opponents. Malaysia will look to him to ignite that spark.

A Season Interrupted

The year began with promise. A second-round appearance at the Malaysia Open offered a steady platform. Then illness intervened.

A fever forced his retirement in the opening round of the India Open. The Indonesia Masters and Thailand Masters were sacrificed as recovery took priority over ranking points.

"I was sick and that disrupted my preparation for Indonesia and Thailand," Jun Hao explained.

"My coach and I decided it was better to skip those tournaments and focus on building towards the All England."

It was a pragmatic decision, but it leaves him with ground to make up.

Germany: The Litmus Test

His return comes at next week's German Open in Mülheim, and the draw has offered little sympathy. Taiwan's world No. 20 Chi Yu Jen stands across the net in the first round — a stern examination for a player seeking rhythm.

A strong showing at the Super 300 event would provide exactly the kind of confidence injection he needs ahead of the All England in Birmingham (March 3–8), badminton's most prestigious stage.

Notably, Jun Hao will bypass both the Swiss Open and the Orléans Masters. Instead, his competitive build-up concludes at the Asian Championships in Ningbo, China (April 7–13) — the final proving ground before Denmark.

The Responsibility of No. 1

The Thomas Cup is unforgiving. There is no hiding place at first singles. You face the opposition's best every time. The margins are thin, the pressure immense.

Did You Know?

Malaysia last lifted the Thomas Cup in 1992. Since then, near-misses and semi-final heartbreaks have fuelled an enduring hunger to return to the summit.

For Jun Hao, this campaign could define his trajectory. Once heralded as one of Malaysia's brightest prospects, he now stands at the threshold of leadership. The role demands resilience as much as firepower.

Encouragingly, he insists the physical setback is behind him.



“I returned to Malaysia from India and immediately focused on recovery,” he said. “I’ve been training hard for Germany and building towards the All England. Everything is going to plan.”

Those words will reassure supporters. But in elite sport, plans must translate into performances.

If Malaysia are to mount a serious challenge in Denmark, they will need their spearhead sharp, fearless — and above all — reliable.

Now, it is over to Jun Hao.

Zii Jia's Aura Could Be Malaysia's Thomas Cup X-Factor

When the Thomas Cup reaches crunch time in Horsens (April 24–May 3), Malaysia could hold a psychological trump card — Lee Zii Jia.

Ranked No. 64, he may not lead the team on paper, but numbers tell only part of the story. A former All England champion and Olympic bronze medallist, Zii Jia brings pedigree — and presence.

“If he plays third singles and is at his best, we will be very strong,” said Malaysian legend Rashid Sidek. “His name alone puts pressure on opponents. Even with injury concerns, that aura is still there.”



Leong Jun Hao (27) and Justin Hoh (39) are expected to spearhead the singles, with Zii Jia potentially slotting in at third singles. Independent shuttler Aidil Sholeh Ali Sadikin (46) is another option.

But team events are rarely decided by rankings.

Third singles often becomes the deciding rubber — the match played with everything at stake. In that moment, reputation matters. Opponents know Zii Jia has conquered the All England stage and stood on an Olympic podium. That knowledge alone can shift the pressure.

His participation, however, remains uncertain after withdrawing from the German Open, despite receiving an official invitation from the Badminton Association of Malaysia.

For Rashid, spirit will ultimately define Malaysia's campaign.

“Even if we look strong on paper, it does not guarantee victory. What matters most is fighting spirit,” he said.

Malaysia last lifted the Thomas Cup in 1992. If Zii Jia is fit and firing in Horsens, his aura alone could give them an edge when it matters most.



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