

 French Open: Musing on the Roles of Tennis Papas

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**From:** Pinaki Mazumder - [view profile](#)

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1994 French Open: Musing on the Roles of Tennis Papas  
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As the dawn cracks in and morning sun shines on the placid Stade Roland Garros, many tennis lovers across the world, who were delighted to witness a silver lining on the murky firmament of the women's tennis on the 2nd June, will eagerly wait to see whether Mary Caroline Pierce will emerge as a new Grand Slam queen on the Red Clay of Paris, which heralded the arrivals of so many new stars in the past. No single victory in a semifinal match gladdened so many people and never was a single win so heartily cheered by so many tennis fans around the world. Mary Pierce, with her dauntless attitude and incredible hitting power, has invigorated the sagging morale of women's tennis. She will surely instill courage and strength to many capable young players who came in the past very close to beating Steffi or Monica, but pitifully choked and succumbed under pressure.

Her triumph, smile and confidence have also vindicated that "tennis papas", like Peter, Stefano, Jimmy, Karoju, ... should move out from their daughters' career after certain time and should allow them to blossom on their own. There was a time, when Tennis was not a big milking cow. Tennis fathers then played very rarely a dominating role once their daughters turned pro and were on the pro-circuit road. I know very little of the fathers of Margaret Smith, Billie Jean King, Margaret Navratilova, and Chris Evert. I do not think any of them left their individual profession to manage the career of their daughters. However, as big money started pouring in, we have witnessed the emergence of new tennis papas who coach their daughters, manage their tours and endorsements, invest their winning, and keep hungry wolves, all around, at bay. Alas, often in their zeal to drive their daughters to pulverize their opponents and bring more big bucks, they took the fun of the game away from

their daughters; sometimes abused them, inadvertently imperiled their career, and made them suffer in physical pain and mental anguish.

1. We saw Peter Graf, a used car salesperson, who taught Steffi how to play tennis in his living room, inflicted a lot of pain and agony on her, albeit inadvertently, when his lone clandestine affair was leaked out in the tabloid press. He had the right sense to move out from Steffi's tennis life when it was clear that she was striving and failing to win because of the distractions caused by his presence during her tennis matches.
2. We saw Stefano Capriati, a real-estate agent, who left his profession and relocated himself when he sensed that his little gal has the gift to crush tennis balls. I suspect very strongly that his overdrive for making hay when the sun shines had a negative influence on Jennifer's tennis career, forcing her to hang her boot in despair when she barely became a teenager.
3. Unless the good sense had prevailed upon the WTA to ban Jimmy Pierce from the last year's French Open and all tennis events where his daughter plays, Mary might not have been able to resurrect and reassert herself as strongly as we are witnessing her in this year's French Open tournament.
4. Then was this gentle Hungarian, Karoij Seles, seems to me an ordinary peasant, who groomed Monica under his tutelage and made her the awesome Champion who we saw so many times in the past. It was the bright era of women's tennis when the battle between Steffi, a deposed Golden Slam queen, and Monica, who ripped her like a blood-thirsty gladiator of the ancient Rome, took the women's tennis to a different dizzying height never scaled before - a brilliant combination of power, speed and precision. Then the bright azure sky suddenly darkened on that fateful April afternoon in Hamburg when a lunatic fan incapacitated Monica with a piercing knife. Even though many of us had hoped that Monica would return very soon, but she did not. Many conjectures float around: That she did not overcome the mental wound, even though the physical wound had healed long time back. That she was dismayed to find out that the WTA had stripped off her ranking. That she was upset that the media literally had given many misgivings about her incessant high-decibel grunting. That she was shocked that the Hamburg court had set her attacker Scott free. That her fellow players hardly came forward and denounced this attack. But, I strongly feel that the single most reason that she cannot start playing now is that her father, who mentored her tenderly, toured with her everywhere she played, planned with her about her game plans, is now terminally ill and cannot escort her anymore and perhaps cannot coach her with the enthusiasm and vigor he displayed in the past. Now Monica, good or bad, has to accept that she is a Tennis Icon and she must forsake the

emotions of a distressed family and get on with her career by herself.  
And I am pretty sure that she will retrieve her #1 ranking.

Therefore, tennis papas, who have startled us lately by bringing forth a bevy of young prodigies who are hitting tennis balls with incredible spin and pace, must know when their time is up and gracefully move out from their daughters' tennis life. Good or bad, their presence, as we have witnessed in the above four cases, finally will stifle the growth of their kids' career. Let their gifted progenies be the delight of fans and spectators of the game and let the elated papas glow in pride and gratification from the background.

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**From:** "Wendy Grossman" - [view profile](#)  
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Er, you should know something about Chris Evert's father, since he taught her to play and managed her investments for many years.

wg

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