

## ★ Gentle aspects of tennis

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

**Date:** Thurs, May 6 1993 12:10 pm

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Tennis is always regarded as gentle people's game, being witnessed by gentle-minded spectators. The recent Monica Seles tragedy at Hamburg has only confirmed that. Imagine an insane spectator attempted to murder a Pele, Beckenbauer, Cryuff, Maradona or Bobby Moore in a soccer match. It might have sparked an instant riot resulting heavy casualties both in the stadium and outside. Tennis is primarily an individual sports. Rarely, we witness any overflow of emotions, let alone any bloodshed in a tennis stadium. Recently, some eye-catching theatrics by the grand ole man of tennis (Connors) have swayed the crowd to a certain extent, but it is nothing like a mass hysteria what we witness in a soccer match. That is why the gentle men of tennis used to wear white T shirt, white shorts, white shoe and white socks. For long time the tennis authorities managed to enforce the dress code, but then sponsoring agencies and sporting goods manufacturers came with big bucks. Now we see players wearing kaleidoscopic colorful dresses displaying logos of an array of sponsors. Now and then, we see Nasty Illie type antics, we see McEnroe type psychopathic outbursts, and we hear swear words and curses. Yet, we, the spectators, have been unaffected by all these minor faux pas and enjoyed the game without being overly afflicted by the outcome of a match. May be, only exception, we find, is in a Davis Cup Match when the prestige of an entire country is at stake, consequently the spectators are often very boisterous, but, what I recall, were never violent.

What happened in Germany is a sad event for the game. Nevertheless, the way it was handled brings pride to all those who love this game. The sick-minded man was restrained by the spectators in the absence of security men and was handed over to the Hamburg police. Everyone was shocked, but no mob lynching or any other form of vandalism. Even though the intended beneficiary for this dastardly act was Steffi, she herself was emotionally affected by the event and eventually she lost the tournament. Even though Steffi and Monica were never great friends, no top women players are within themselves (it may be different with men; often the top players are very friendly outside the court, but inside the court they are business like - examples: Sampras and Courier, Agassi and McEnroe, Laver and Emerson, ...), but they came closer to each other after the incident. Some net readers and others may have condemned Steffi for this plight of Monica, but we must remember that Steffi, unlike many others including Martina, never complained about Monica's

grunting and never insinuated that she lost any match because of that. I have rarely seen Monica or Steffi making an issue over a controversial line call or any other unpleasant decision made by an umpire. These two players have enhanced the prestige of the game and, by dint of their sheer dedication to the game, they have elevated the standard of women's tennis much to the delights of tennis-loving spectators.

Presumably, there is no way one can prevent such freak act. Only the pro players can discourage such things by being more vociferous and publicly condemning such things. We must recall the solidarity the male pros showed during the 1973 Wimbledon Match by boycotting the tournament en masse to protest the ban on Nicki Pillic, coincidentally a Yugoslav player. Even though Steffi has shown her deep sympathy to Monica and her family members, she and other pro women players should publicly condemn such things. This may deter some icon-worshippers to do crazy things that we have witnessed in Hamburg and more frequently on the net, albeit innocuous ones.

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**From:** [htilney](#) - [view profile](#)

**Date:** Thurs, May 6 1993 6:06 pm

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In semi-response to this post, I'll point out a couple of things that I didn't know about the incident (from this week's Sports Illustrated):

Graf publicly condemned the occurrence, not only expressing disdain for the "fan," but also stating that players should continue to attend tournaments in intimate settings & not give in to the fear created by the stabbing. Graf also requested that only normal security measures be taken in the final.

The security officers who restrained the attacker put him in a half-nelson and broke his arm. The man, who was unemployed and living with his mother for the past 22 years, was described by his mother as solitary, and that he spends all his time watching TV. (Anybody see "Falling Down??")

This tennis-fanaticism is nothing new in Germany, and probably has been somewhat prevalent since Becker and Graf rose to the top. Graf has apparently been followed on occasion, and two incidents mentioned in SI were of a "fan" who slit his wrists in front of her, and another who was arrested for trespassing after he tried to get by guards on Graf's property. Anke Huber was allegedly followed by one fan, who was eventually arrested

outside of her hotel room, where he had been loitering.

SI inferred that the Seles incident may well affect all sports, but I wonder if this phenomenon of true "fanaticism" is much more focused in Germany particularly. I'd be interested in comments on this, and if it might be true, why it is the case.

Webb

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**From:** [Holger Hellmuth](#) - [view profile](#)

**Date:** Mon, May 10 1993 11:19 am

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htil...@vax.clarku.edu writes:

>SI inferred that the Seles incident may well affect all sports, but I wonder  
>if this phenomenon of true "fanaticism" is much more focused in Germany  
>particularly. I'd be interested in comments on this, and if it might be  
>>true, why it is the case.  
>Webb

Before Becker and Graf, the main sport event in Germany was soccer, with nothing else in a position to be called second. Tennis was too expensive for the masses and this reputation stayed on even when it got cheaper than (for example) skiing.

After Beckers Wimbledon success the situation changed dramatically within 3 years. A lot of tennis clubs were founded at that time and old ones increased their membership numbers. Tennis became cheaper and the number 2 in sports. No other sport had so many hours on TV than tennis.

Since then the situation cooled off a bit, at least on TV where too much tennis led to a saturation of the viewing public (another reason may be that the exceptionality of the situation has faded). But tennis is a mass sport in Germany by now.

So much for the background. Fanatics tend to show up in popular areas because:

1. The press focus is on popular areas, because there is more public interest involved, so that harassment of a player in a popular sport receives more attention (that's true even for incidents as shocking as this attack on

Monica Seles). This is a minor point in my opinion, just worth noting.

2. Mentally deranged people (most fanatics fall into that category) have the same interests as normal people, their views just get distorted by an attempt to function despite the illness of the mind (this is only my layman opinion). So sports that have the attention of normal people have the attention of deranged people too. A simpler way of saying this is: Fanaticism is the extreme of fandom, so the more fans, the more fanatics.

Tennis is very popular in Germany, so the possibility of fanatics is higher here than for example in the USA, where tennis is only number 4 or 5 (just a guess, please correct me).

After reading this, you could ask, why soccer players never were attacked (or a baseball player in the USA) ?

Because

1. soccer fans (and maybe baseball fans, too?) turn their aggression against fans of the other teams
2. soccer (and baseball) is a team sport, so the person cult is not so evident here.
3. soccer (and baseball) is practically unknown as a women sport in the public eye.

I think, it's significant, that all the incidents (the Seles attack, the harassments of Huber and Graf) were attacks of males on females. Lunatics tend to have sexual reasons behind their fanaticism and (don't ask me why) male lunatics seem to turn to violence more often than female lunatics. The victims are mostly women. It was Jack the Ripper and not Jackie the Ripper :-).

So as a conclusion I would say: That the fanatic who stabbed Seles was German was a coincidence, but the probability was higher for him to be German than Japanese (for example).

That reminds me: It would shake my theory, if other women tennis players were not victims of fanatics (I am referring to minor incidents like the man following Huber). Can anyone report of similar incidents with Sabatini or M.J.Fernandez or others ?

Since I am German I'd like to add that the attack on Monica Seles shocked me quite a bit and that for me her nationality is totally unimportant. I hope she gets well soon and I think she is mentally strong enough to get over this attack.

--

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