

Djokovic details mental struggles in open letter

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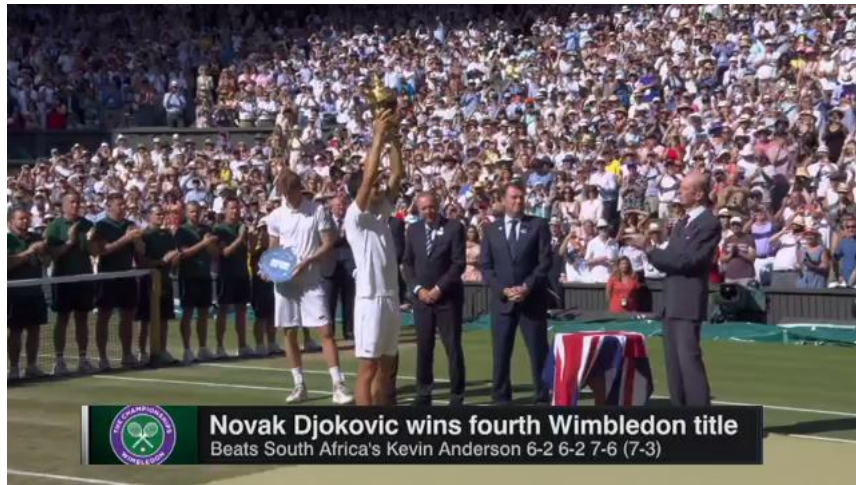
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Novak Djokovic: Open letter details 'mental hurdles' that led to Wimbledon win



Novak Djokovic wins fourth Wimbledon title
Beats South Africa's Kevin Anderson 6-2 6-2 7-6 (7-3)



ESPN staff

Jul 20, 2018

Novak Djokovic has published an open letter on his website explaining the mental struggles he has overcome in order to claim his fourth Wimbledon title.

The former World No.1 has found it difficult to rediscover his form in coming back from an injured right elbow that needed surgery and forced him off the tour for the last half of 2017.

As his losses accumulated, his ranking fell out of the top 20 for the first time in more than a decade. He grew so frustrated with his form that he spoke ahead about skipping the grass-court circuit and a drop in motivation for off-court reasons.



Novak Djokovic wrapped up the Wimbledon title in just over 2 hours, 15 minutes. Oli Scarff/AFP/Getty Images

"In 2017, the injury of my right elbow was so severe that I was forced to be out from the Tour for 6 months," Djokovic said on his website.

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[ICYMI at Wimbledon: Djokovic's son steals the show](#)

Yes, Novak Djokovic has been crowned Wimbledon champion for the fourth time, but it was his 3-year-old son Stefan who melted people's hearts on men's final day at Wimbledon.



[Wimbledon win could spark another era of Djokovic dominance](#)

Will Novak Djokovic be satisfied after completing his comeback with a Wimbledon victory? Don't bet on that. The now 13-time Grand Slam winner is poised to dominate the game yet again.



[Djokovic: Nadal deserves to be No.1](#)

Novak Djokovic says Rafael Nadal is the best tennis player in the world, despite his victory over the Spaniard in the Wimbledon semifinals.



"Injury was one of the issues, the other big one was any motivation. I didn't have problems to practice and to enjoy the tennis court but I had mental hurdles when I had to compete. One day I will share more in depth what kind of challenges I had to face and how I felt.

"I have always respected people that share their most vulnerable moments as their turning points in finding true strength that inspires so many people. I was vulnerable so many times in the last few years. And I am still vulnerable. I am not ashamed of it. In contrary, it makes me more true to myself and others. It allows me to get closer to people. It allows me to "dig deep" and analyze what is truly happening inside of me. When I find that out, I am able to create a strategy to overcome this occurring issue and move on as a stronger, wiser, happier human being.



Gerry Penny/EPA-EFE/REX/Shutterstock

"For the last 2 years, I wasn't patient with my tennis expectations. I wasn't wise in strategizing. And I certainly wasn't clearly hearing my body telling me that there is something serious happening with my elbow. I was trying to find solutions somewhere else and solution was always inside of me."

Djokovic also thanked his family enthusiastically and described his straight-sets win over [Kevin Anderson](#) as one of the best of his career.



Michael Steele/Getty Images

"The feeling of having my son in my wife's arms at the trophy ceremony in the Players box was the most wonderful sensation I have had at any tournament that I have ever won in my career.

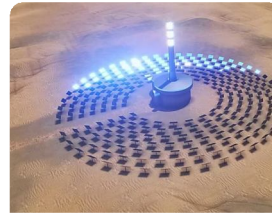
"Everyone keeps on asking me to describe the feeling. I have said it is unforgettable, special, fulfilling, wonderful, joyful. But most of all, it is Magical! When I thought that moment could not get any better, he shouted "Daddy, Daddy!" That's when I completely melted. Overwhelmed with emotions. Happy and joyful beyond belief. I am so GRATEFUL to have experienced that."

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Wimbledon win could spark another era of Djokovic dominance



ESPN's Chris McKendry and Brad Gilbert sit down with Novak Djokovic after his 2018 Wimbledon singles title win. (6:36)



Peter Bodo
Tennis

Jul 16, 2018



WIMBLEDON -- The "whap" of the ball striking the net tape and falling back was painful enough, seeming to echo in the silence of Centre Court before the umpire called, "Game, Djokovic." But the really unnerving thing was the murmur from within the crowd that gradually grew louder, posing an uncomfortable question that couldn't be ignored.

If [Kevin Anderson](#), whose greatest weapon is his serve, couldn't hold his very first service game, what could he do to compete against the best returner in the game in Sunday's Wimbledon men's final? The answer was implicit in [Novak Djokovic's](#) tidy, 2-hour, 19-minute deconstruction of Anderson's big game: not much.

EDITOR'S PICKS

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Before his 6-2, 6-2, 7-6 (3) loss Sunday, Anderson had played over 21 hours of tennis at this tournament, including over six and a half in his record-breaking semifinal win against American [John Isner](#). Anderson's legs were not ready; neither was his mind.

"The way the ball was coming off my racquet, sort of the quality of my footwork, my ball striking wasn't where it needed to be to compete with somebody like Novak," Anderson said afterward. "That's tough. It's tough being out there at that stage knowing you're not playing the kind of tennis you want to play."

The six other men Djokovic beat en route to the Wimbledon final – and, again, at the very top of the game -- might have expressed similar sentiments. The larger question looming behind Djokovic's accomplishment is: Will he be satisfied with emerging from his slump and re-establishing his Big Four credentials, or will he mount another campaign to dominate the way he did during those halcyon days between 2013 and 2016?

"I understand that people are questioning whether I can consistently play on this level. Trust me, I am, too," Djokovic said in his postmatch news conference, a smile slowly spreading across his gaunt face. "At the same time, I can't look too far down the road because I have to embrace and cherish this kind of accomplishment."

Take that as a provisional "yes." At 31, Djokovic is the youngest of the Big Four. True, this was *only* his 13th Grand Slam title ([Rafael Nadal](#) has 17, [Roger Federer](#) 20), yet Djokovic has a winning record against both (27-25 versus Nadal, 23-22 against Federer) and has routinely crushed the fourth member of the Big Four, [Andy Murray](#) (25-11). Still, Djokovic isn't really spoken of in the same reverential tones as Federer or Nadal.

"Everyone loves Roger and Rafa; Novak is respected," Boris Becker, who coached Djokovic through his recent dominant period, said during his BBC broadcast of the final. "It's something that bothers him, but that love is something you can't buy. He takes it personal, because that's his character. He's very sensitive."

Djokovic might eventually belt his way to earn that love now that his game is back on track. It couldn't have happened at a better time, or in a more appropriate place.

1:49



Djokovic wins 2018 Wimbledon men's title Novak Djokovic wins his fourth Wimbledon title and 13th overall major championship after beating Kevin Anderson in straight sets.

The pressure has been building during Djokovic's comeback like steam in a plugged kettle. The cork finally blew out on Centre Court, where Djokovic's childhood fantasies of conquest covered all the bases of the experience short of holding a postmatch news conference. "I dreamed of winning it when I was a 7-year-old boy," he said. "I made a lot of improvised Wimbledon trophies from different materials."

In winning his fourth Wimbledon crown, Djokovic established himself as a grass-court expert, second only among active players to Roger Federer. His win put him two titles ahead of Nadal, whom he beat in their memorable two-day semifinal. Sunday's victory also elevated his total number of wins at Wimbledon to 64, one more than Djokovic's childhood idol, Pete Sampras.

Those numbers might surprise someone who thinks of Djokovic as primarily a hard-court expert (he has six Australian Open titles and two at the US Open) who was weaned on clay. The full body of stats simply suggest he's a master of all surfaces thanks to his exceptionally limber, lean body. It's a biological machine that enables him to stretch and bend like a contortionist, cover the court like a center fielder and yet also drive forehands and serves with the power of a prizefighter.

"I have to be grateful for my body and to my body," he said the other day when asked how he managed to transform a Nadal drop shot into a Djokovic winner. "I mean, we take things for granted sometimes, so I try to take care of my body. All my life, I've been really trying to be aware of my body, my mind and everything, work on getting myself to the optimal shape so I can do these kinds of elastic things on the court."

Kevin Anderson, right, pushed Novak Djokovic in the third set in the men's final Sunday, but it wasn't enough to stop the Serbian's mobile game. Cynthia Lum/Icon Sportswire

The elasticity briefly turned brittle in the third set, and the Djokovic machine threatened to seize up as the end of his 24 months of trials and tribulations came into view. Could it really be, he wondered? Was that long and lesson-filled "journey" he kept alluding to about to come to an end? As the implication became a psychological backdrop, Anderson lifted his own game. He kept pace with Djokovic, exchanging service holds to build a 6-5 lead. He wasted two set points in getting there and had three more as Djokovic floundered.

"He was the better player, without a doubt," Djokovic said of the third set. "I was just trying to hold on and keep my composure in decisive moments."

That was no easy task, because right up and into this final, Djokovic wasn't entirely convinced he was prepared to close this painful chapter of his career -- a chapter that began with turmoil in his personal life, drifted into a period of soul-searching and house cleaning (Djokovic off-loaded his entire, successful support team only to rehire them earlier this year) and finally morphed into a saga of injury and rehabilitation.

Djokovic struggled with a painful elbow injury since last year's Wimbledon but put off surgery until February. He said he returned too early and took his lumps, struggling in the spring and early summer. His confidence was damaged, the embers of doubt still glowing as recently as the French Open. "I had to learn the lessons in a hard way," he said. "I did not expect to be back in the top shape already here in Wimbledon so quickly, [but] there is a part of me that always believes in my own abilities."

It was that part of Djokovic that took hold of his racket under the mellow sunshine of a Sunday afternoon in London, hit a backhand passing shot past Anderson and fired an ace to force a third-set tiebreaker. Djokovic then rolled through, a Wimbledon champion again.



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