

# SIGHT LINES

## VALUES WORTH VALUING

by Tim Bauer

Tennis struggles for popularity because it demands many of the same values we are losing in society. Don't agree? Try this exercise: Imagine a day through the eyes of a 14-year-old, a potentially new tennis player. How would tennis fit your world?



Jump on the couch after your phys ed-free day in our "non-competitive educational system;" watch some "unreality" TV, flooded with ads for fast food, cars, beer, diets, pain killers and a host of pharmaceutical aids; or click to MTV, watching scenes change by the millisecond, custom fit for the small attention span. Bored? Plug in a video game and transform into a street-fighter, a rap star or even an ATP tennis player, who effortlessly attains world class status. Restart the game any time the result doesn't suit you. Want companion-

ship? Just flip open your cell phone or jump online to chat using "instant messenger." Should you shop at the mall or online? Tough decisions. Just grab that credit card and go.

Industry entices this "Me"

Generation with conscience-free instant gratification, as values disappear. Many in the tennis industry respond to this by marketing tennis right along these very themes, losing traditional supporters and hurting the integrity of the game. Notice the ATP commercials and the way its stars are portrayed. Who looks like a gangster? Who is a rebel? Collars and sleeves must surely go; show off those tattoos. How

much more attention do WTA Tour players get when they trade the red clay of Roland Garros for the red carpet of Hollywood? In the name of sales, we trade sportsmanship for "excitement." Through TV, our strongest link to this new generation, we glorify players "expressing themselves" by yelling obscenities at officials and angrily tossing their racquets without consequences during each segment before commercial. Indeed those very same segments used to show a replay of a great backhand that we once learned from. The ATP even considers playing tie-breaks at 4-4 to hold on to shrinking attention spans of TV viewers. As ESPN's Cliff Drysdale remarks, "Anything that shortens matches is good for TV." Why do we twist tennis into something it's not? For viewership? What choices are good for tennis in the long run?

I see the harmful results of this "sell-out" marketing approach every day, as players imitate and exaggerate what they see on TV. The girls' USTA junior tennis scene resembles the world of the "child beauty pageant" more each day. In boys' USTA junior play, I notice terrible sportsmanship, poor language, cocky attitudes and plenty of racquet abuse. Both the boys and girls too often share a general lack of emotional control, exhibiting thoughtlessness and impatience in matchplay as well as laziness in practice.

This "Fast Food Tennis" is damaging a sport known for its class, integrity and intellectual demands. Among the casu-

alties are coaches and even USTA officials tired of dealing with such player drama. We should each do our part to change these trends by showing youth "what is in it for them." Tennis is not only a beautiful sport with a long history, but a wonderful teaching tool. Successful tennis requires skill, honor, competitive spirit and total concentration. Harry Hopman said it best: "Tennis is a game of control and restraint." Just imagine a new player struggling with the service grip for the first time; nothing is instant. One must be persistent in learning skills. Tennis rewards those willing to work at solving problems, those who patiently overcome difficulties and invest for the long term with self-confidence and optimism. Tennis teaches us to improve ourselves, to get to know our own strengths and weaknesses, and to enjoy the highs and lows along the long journey of constant improvement.

Singles places accountability on the athlete more directly than almost any other sport or job. In doubles we find a perfect vehicle for teaching teamwork and communication, ideal for a society struggling with interpersonal relationships.

When we compete in tennis, we learn quick decision-making skills. We must face trial by fire, summoning grace under pressure to win. When unsuccessful, we find no one to blame our losses on, no refuge but the practice court. We compete using an honor system, often calling our own lines and keeping things fair amid the toughest competition. Each match ending, not when TV time runs out, but when a winner emerges.

Tennis needs more people promoting and protecting its positives. We should teach, reward and pursue these values, not merely rankings, scholarships and money. To say that this generation is not capable of (or interested in) these values of sportsmanship, work ethic, honesty and concentration is selling them very short indeed — and certainly taking the easy way out.

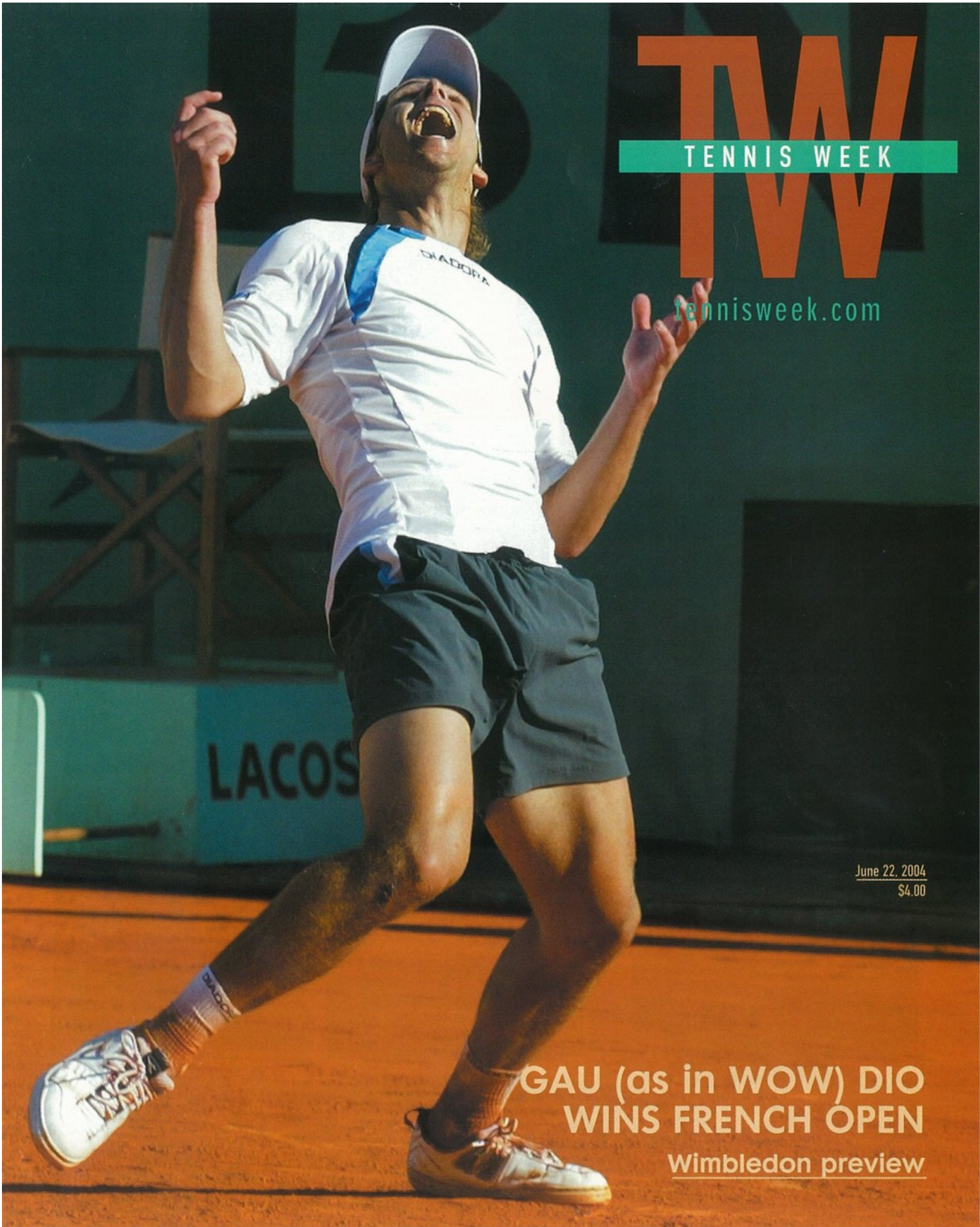
Everyone can play a role in promoting values. We must not shirk this responsibility because it may be difficult or make us unpopular. Coaches must hold players to high standards of effort, fitness and sportsmanship, encouraging them to grow and mature. Our tennis clubs, tournament directors and USTA officials can also contribute by simply promoting these positive values and enforcing the code of conduct. Most importantly, parents can make tennis available to their children for its lifetime of benefits, letting them make their own way and ensuring that their children represent themselves with class. Tennis should be used to bring out the best in all of us, helping us prepare "to meet with triumph and disaster, and treat those two imposters just the same."

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**The sport rewards solving problems, but too often the glory goes to players shouting obscenities or tossing their racquet.**

*We welcome your submissions for "Sight Lines." We only ask that these personal essays be of journalistic quality. Submissions of no more than 850 words may be sent to: Tennis Week, Sight Lines, 15 Elm Place, Rye, NY 10580 or [tennisweek@tennisweek.com](mailto:tennisweek@tennisweek.com). We are unable to acknowledge submissions or return manuscripts.*



A full-page photograph of a male tennis player in mid-celebration on a clay court. He is wearing a white Diadora t-shirt, dark shorts, white socks, and white sneakers. He has a white cap and his mouth is open in a shout, with his arms raised. The background is a dark green wall with a large 'LACOS' logo. In the top right corner, there is a large orange 'TW' logo with 'TENNIS WEEK' in a green bar across it, and the website 'tennisweek.com' below it.

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