

Lendl loses No. 1 spot after five-hour final in US Open

# Wilander completes Swedish 'Grand Slam'

THE longest and certainly one of the most exhausting and compelling finals in United States Open history ended with Mats Wilander becoming a worthy successor to Ivan Lendl as champion and No. 1 in the world lawn tennis rankings.

Lendl's three-year dominance on both counts was broken 6-4, 4-6, 6-3, 5-7, 6-4 in the longest US Open final in history. It lasted six minutes short of five hours.

Wilander, the first Swede to win the title which so often eluded Bjorn Borg, said: "It is the best victory I've ever had; even better than my first French."

It was no wonder. This made Wilander, also the Australian and French champion, the first man since Jimmy Connors in 1974 to win three Grand Slam tournament titles in the same year.

One day after Steffi Graf had completed an individual women's Grand Slam it meant a men's overall slam for Sweden, with Stefan Edberg having won Wimbledon.

This was the first time this year that Wilander—who also won the 128-man tournament in Key Biscayne in a year of great success—had met Lendl. He had lost all six previous meetings since 1985.

"Now I realise why it was so hard for Bjorn to win here," said Wilander who might have won in straight sets and yet could easily have lost five. He led 4-1 in the second set until a time violation which seemed so unnecessary within the context of the match, temporarily ruined his concentration, and he also served for a 5-3 lead in the fourth set

"This tournament wears you down mentally and physically," he added. "To me, this is a

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breakthrough because Ivan won here so many times."

If there was one even more decisive point than any other as these two superfit champions battled for seven minutes longer than the tournament record they had set a year earlier, it came in the sixth game of the final set.

Lendl who had recovered from 0-2 to 3-2 and was suddenly looking strong and confidently resilient, would have had two chances to break for 4-2 but for the Swede's courage, reflexes and defiance in standing his ground to win a rally of close-in counter volleys.

In isolation it made the difference between 30-30 and 15-40. It probably decided the match for Wilander not only held, but then broke for 4-3 one game later with a magnificent forehand pass of his diving opponent.

Lendl, playing in his seventh consecutive Flushing Meadows final, did not start well. His serve lacked penetration, his volleying was erratic and his overheads were often spectacularly calamitous. Yet in the end no-one could have fought harder to have retained his crown. He would have become the first player since Bill Tilden in 1923 to win for a fourth successive year.

While full of admiration for what he called Wilander's "fantastic year", Lendl blamed his passing shots and missed chances. "I didn't make enough of my opportunities and when he saw also that I wasn't making any passing shots that encouraged him to keep coming in."

Certainly that was tactical key. Wilander ventured to the nets as never before, in almost cavalier fashion often to make stunning cut off volleys. It paid a richer dividend than he could ever have

imagined. What started sluggishly became a classic match, yet as the start was delayed until an American football match being shown by the same television channel had ended, the stadium was barely half full by the time Lendl made the last of too many back hand errors close to 9.15 pm.

It was a pity that whoever threw two tennis balls on to the court from high up in the stands between Wilander's serves late in the fourth set had not left with the others.

Lendl said: "The most important thing for me now is to be mentally fresh for next year and not to worry about having lost my number one ranking.

"Number one is not important. The most important is to be fresh mentally and physically for next year and to get ready for Australia."

Lendl has three tournaments remaining this year, at Los Angeles, Sydney and Tokyo.

For Wilander, there was rejoicing—but at a price. Because of shin splints from playing so much on hard courts it seems almost certain that he will withdraw from the Olympic Games, which begin in Seoul on Saturday.

How much that would be due to the inevitable soreness in his legs after such a titanic struggle or the fact that his wife Sonya, as a South African, will not be allowed in South Korea, one can only surmise.

However Wilander, who will decide "in a day or two" whether to play in Seoul, insisted there were no other reasons for his considering to withdraw.

"I have been pondering whether the Olympics and tennis belong together, but that is not the issue. If it weren't for the injury I would definitely go," he said.

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