

**Mats Wilander** (Born Vaxjo, Sweden, 22nd August 1964). It was like a fairy tale. In fact, if, before the event, you had written the script for the 1982 French Open the way it happened everyone would have dismissed it as a wildly improbable fantasy.

Yet the extraordinary exploits of 17-year-old Mats Wilander not only made us forget the absence of his countryman Björn Borg (whose dispute with the Men's Pro Council caused him to relinquish his title) but set us all frantically thumbing through the record books. With an astonishing run of upsets against the odds Wilander cut a mile-wide swath through the seeds with his Borg-like game and temperament. Yes, the comparisons were inevitable as first Lendl, the 2nd seed, then Gerulaitis, seeded 5, foundered on the rock-like consistency of the scurrying Wilander's whirling topspin. In the semi-final it was 4th seeded Clerc's turn to taste unexpected defeat. Surely, though, we all thought, a final victory against Vilas would be beyond the Swede's tender years.

However, it was the No. 3 seeded Argentinian who wilted after failing to clinch a point that would have given him a two-sets-to-love lead. After 4 hours and 42 minutes of frustration Vilas succumbed 1-6, 7-6, 6-0, 6-4 and Wilander, supported by elder brothers Anders (27) and Ingmar (24) who had hurriedly flown in, strode into history – the youngest male champion ever and the first unseeded winner since Joseph Asboth in 1947 – one year to the day

after winning the junior title. It was a curious coincidence that the mighty Ken Rosewall had executed the same double in 1952 and 1953 but he had been a year older than Wilander. It was another coincidence that exactly 8 years earlier Borg aged just 18 had won the first of his 6 French titles on the same court. Not surprisingly Mats hates the comparison with his famous predecessor. "I am not Borg No. 2 – I am Wilander No. 1 and that is enough for now," he said last year.

Wilander's victory was a tremendous boost for the Swedish L.T.A.'s new four-man squad which, under the control of former Davis Cup captain John Sjogren and supported by the S.I.A.B. building company with a two-year support package worth £200,000, had already made its mark. Hans Simonsson and Anders Jarryd had enjoyed solid doubles success though the fourth member Joachim Nystrom had not lived up to his junior promise. *(he did later on!)*

Wilander himself had enjoyed a spectacular junior career with more victories in the European Championships (Under 14, 16 and 18) than anyone before him. Refreshingly shy and much keener to spend time with his pretty girlfriend Annette Olsen than face the world's press, Wilander was the best thing to happen to the French Open in years – though, in truth, his errorless style did tend to become excruciatingly boring – as he was the first to admit.

Almost more impressive was Wilander's win 4 months later in

Barcelona where Lendl, Clerc and Vilas were again his victims. It is one thing to have a golden run of inspired victories but quite another to repeat them.

Unquestionably, Wilander's is a very special talent – not merely for the quality of his shot making but more impressively for the maturity of his temperament. What he achieved in Paris last year will almost certainly never be repeated.

The exciting thing for us here at Wimbledon is that he plays superbly well on grass. He has a first-class serve and beautifully natural volleys and already he has won five matches here – two in 1981 and three last year where Brian Teacher beat him in the fourth round. All he lacks is experience on grass and with the right preparation he could cause as much excitement at Wimbledon as he did last year in Paris. If he should win this time, though, the script will not look at all like a fairy tale.