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Mats Wilander (Sweden), born Vaxjo on 22nd August 1964.

As every young prodigy discovers it is difficult to live with a reputation. For Mats Wilander, the gentle country boy from the sleepy Swedish town of Vaxjo, it has been particularly difficult for his achievement in winning the French Open, unseeded, in 1982 was the most extraordinary happening in the whole of recorded tennis history.

Thus Mats at 17 years and 288 days became the youngest ever winner of a Grand Slam championship. He was also the first since Ken Rosewall in 1953 to win the junior and senior French titles in successive years. As the media kept on making the comparison with Borg young Mats made a delightfully honest and emphatic plea to be recognised for his own virtues . . . "I'm not Borg No.2", he said. "I'm Wilander No.1."

For most young men there would have been a reaction after such an astonishing success but, incredibly, in the ensuing two years Mats has continued to make rapid progress. Ranked 7 at the end of 1982 he improved that position by three places last year with nine tournament victories that, significantly, included a first Australian title. That, for the second time in 1983, he should have been able to beat McEnroe and Lendl back to back, this time on unfamiliar grass, speaks volumes for his adaptability and for the guidance of his astute coach Jan Anders Sjogren who had been captain of the S.I.A.B. Squad when Mats had been its leading member in 1980 and 1981.

Not surprisingly Wilander's fellow Swedes have little respect for his reputation, though they do respect his ability and his exemplary attitude. Already in 1984 Mats has twice been beaten in finals by fellow-Swedes. In

Milan in March it was 18-year-old Stefan Edberg who volleyed him off the court and in Monte Carlo a month later it was Henrik Sundstrom, six months older than Mats, who dethroned him in straight sets by beating him at his own game.

No, the life of a prodigy is never easy, but I fancy that this one is made of the right stuff. I believe that Wilander has as much character and ability as Borg and it will not surprise me if he pushes back the frontiers of attainment beyond the boundaries set by his famous countryman. Even if he does not, it will be fascinating to watch the attempt.

Wimbledon Programme
1984