

There's a New Sheriff in Town, but how Long Will he Last

When Novak Djokovic walked onto center court Sunday to play the Wimbledon final he did so secure in the knowledge regardless of the outcome of the match he would wake up Monday morning the new number one. He guaranteed himself the new ranking by winning his semifinal against Jo Wilfred Tsonga on Friday. Now that Djokovic is number one the question is how long will he remain there? Will he be like the man he took the ranking from, Rafael Nadal, and hold the ranking for a long period, Nadal's current reign lasted 56 weeks and he has held the ranking for total of 102 weeks, or will he be like Marat Safin and only hold the ranking for a matter of weeks; Safin's reign lasted a total of nine weeks? Based on Djokovic's personality and the level he had to play at to achieve the top ranking it is likely that his reign will be of the shorter nature.

Novak is not even assured of keeping the top ranking for the rest of the year. Going forward he has 3,390 points to defend and Nadal has 4,130 a difference of 740. There are some important factors to note in this differential, if Nadal can defend his US Open title and Novak losses before the semifinals it is possible Nadal could regain the number one ranking then. This will of course will depend how the two perform on the two Master Series events leading up to the U.S. Open. Performances at the Masters Events are important in determining who will finish the year at number one. In the four remaining Masters series, Djokovic has 990 points to defend and Nadal only has 630. Nadal did not play the Paris event last year so he has the opportunity to add a lot of points by doing well there. Nadal has only won three titles this year and will go into the late summer early fall season hungry, and when he is hungry and motivated he tends to win. Djokovic on the other hand has won eight titles and showed some signs of being tired at Wimbledon so the rest of the year may be more of struggle for him.

To achieve the top ranking Djokovic had to have a record of 48-1 this year; his only loss is to Federer in the semis of the French Open. Most analysts have said his game has improved from this year to last. However with the exception of his serve, which has improved, Novak's game has changed very little. What has changed is confidence level. Starting with Serbia's Davis Cup victory last December Novak's confidence has sky rocketed allowing his ground strokes to be more effective and his movement to improve. The confidence boost is effective in the short term but if Novak's confidence dips again he will start having some of the same problems he had in the past and will start losing again. When Nadal ascended to the number one ranking there were marked improvements in his game; he improved his serve, developed an effective net game, and turned his backhand into a weapon. These improvements helped him stay at number one for a longer period of time. If Novak wants to stay at number one he will have to improve his net game and ground strokes to compete with the top players.

The other question is does he have the personality to stay at number one? For years he has been the third man to Nadal and Federer with the nickname the Djoker for his

outgoing impersonations of other players and outgoing personality. When an opponent takes the court against him they may see him as the Djoker and not as an unbeatable force that they need to do something special against to win. Many opponents view a player like Nadal as unbeatable when they step on the court. Even if an opponent has a lead on Nadal, he is not confident he can beat him; just look at John Isner in the first round of the French Open had a two sets to one lead on Nadal but still lost the match in large part because he did not believe he could win. When a player steps on the court against Djokovic he's thinking this guy has been playing great but his level can't last forever so he is beatable. If Djokovic wants to stay at number one for an extended period of time he is going to have to exude an air of invincibility.

Players who have held the number one ranking for extended periods of time like Federer, Sampras, and Nadal have always appeared focused on the court, rarely showing their emotions. Off the court these players speak very humbly and stay out of the spotlight as much as possible. Many analysts have often questioned Djokovic's focus because he is prone to outbursts of emotion on the court, frequent chest pounding and gesturing to his box on court. Off the court he remains a showman, performing impersonations during press conferences leading the press to question whether he is a performer or player. Instead of remaining out of the spotlight Djokovic embraces it. Recently he withdrew from a tournament to rest, but turned up later that week on the red carpet with his girlfriend in black tie attire at the Cannes Film Festival. If he took the week off to rest shouldn't he be doing that instead of turning up at parties? If Djokovic wants to remain number one he needs to cut out the antics and appear as a serious focused player.

All signs point to Djokovic having a short reign at number one. Both his game and his personality do not indicate he can hold the top spot for long. However, who knows Djokovic could break the mold and become the first showman to hold the number one ranking for a long period of time.