

Federer Versus Nadal - The Greatest Versus The Not So Great

Riaan Booyesen (www.riaanbooyesen.com)

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The game of tennis lends itself to rivalry between two contesting individuals probably more than any other type of public sport. With Roger Federer having been replaced as the world's number one tennis player by Rafael Nadal, it is perhaps an appropriate time to take a look at the character of both players. Federer is viewed by many as possibly the greatest tennis player so far, whereas Nadal certainly holds the promise of surpassing even Federer's achievements. It is not only Federer's accomplishments on the tennis court that has earned him respect, but also his on and off court behaviour. He is very popular among his fellow players and the public alike, having won the Laureus World Sportsman award for the past four years consecutively in competition with all other sportsmen across the globe. Nadal's career has virtually only started, but he has already been around long enough to allow a judgement of his character as a tennis player to be made.

There is no question that Nadal thoroughly earned his position as the number one tennis player in the world, although Federer's illness at the beginning of the year certainly contributed significantly to his lack of form throughout most of the year and therefore Nadal's ultimate success. Unlike Federer though, Nadal's image is not completely untarnished. I have long contended among my friends that in addition to being on top of the game in many respects, Nadal is also a master of gamesmanship. This is of course a contentious statement and very difficult to prove. We all know that Nadal takes his time to prepare for serving, but how bad is it really? Did he feign injury against Federer in Monte Carlo, or did he genuinely require medical attention? What is his on-court behaviour like in general?

In this article, written for the fun of it, I will endeavour to prove that Nadal is indeed guilty of gamesmanship of significant proportions. The first to be addressed will be his timely medical time-out called for during the Monte Carlo final on clay this year, followed by a point-by-point analysis of his delay tactics as witnessed during the epic Wimbledon 2008 final. Nadal is of course not the only tennis player to be guilty of these forms of gamesmanship and in order to put a stop to it, I will propose methods and regulations that I have no doubt will succeed in doing so.

Oh my leg, my leg (foot, foot, toe, toe, ear, ear ...)

The ATP tennis rules [ATP 2008 Official Rulebook (ATPRB), attached] allow for a medical time-out of 3 minutes to be called once for every type of injury a player may suffer [ATPRB, VI-P to VI-Q, pp. 102-107]. This even includes cramps, which one usually associates with a lack of fitness rather than being considered as an 'injury' of any nature. Although the umpire has the authority to disallow a request for a medical time-out, it is virtually impossible to judge whether an injury is real or not. Apart from requesting Nadal to submit himself to a polygraph test, there is likewise no direct means of proving that he had stooped very low during the crucial final in Monte Carlo this year. Instead, I will use an example of a similar event that occurred some years ago and the effect it had on the outcome of that match. I will also show that Nadal had every reason to resort to such tactics.

Being a South African, I closely followed the roller-coaster career of Wayne Ferreira, one of the

handful of top ten ranked players we have had. The year 2003 began on a high note for Wayne, who defeated the number four seed Juan Carlos Ferreiro 7-6, 7-6, 6-1 in the Australian Open. These two players would again come face to face in October that year, this time during the Madrid Masters Series Event, the home town of Ferreiro. Ferreira had lost the first set 3-6, but won the second set 6-2 and was leading the final set 5-2 when Ferreiro called for an injury time-out to have ankle strapping removed. Ferreira's momentum and concentration were broken, he missed two match points and eventually lost the match. The fact that also had to face a partisan crowd who cheered his mistakes and booed whenever he got the ball in did not contribute to his mental state either (is this what we can expect in Madrid whenever Nadal faces tough opposition?).

It is well known that at the professional level it usually is the mental state of a player which determines whether he will win or lose a closely contested match. Once a player believes that he can win the higher ranked player, his chance of doing so increases significantly. This is even more true when the lower ranked player had already succeeded in doing so, as Ferreira had done during the Australian Open. At 2-5 Ferreiro had his back against the wall, facing an opponent who was charging to victory. He had only one fall-back to stop the charge - the injury time-out. And stop the charge he did.

So, back to Nadal. Nadal had enjoyed an 81-0 unbeaten streak on clay courts until he was defeated on clay for the first time by Roger Federer at the Hamburg final in 2007. Federer had lost the first set 2-6, but won the second set 6-2 and then steam-rolled Nadal 6-0 in the final set. Apart from the French Open final shortly afterwards that year, Federer and Nadal did not have any clay court encounters leading up to Monte Carlo. In the first set of the Monte Carlo final Federer started off like a rocket and was leading 5-2 when, lo and behold, Nadal called for a medical time-out. I vividly remember the hushed silence amongst the spectators, echoing my own disbelief. During the treatment one could clearly hear Nadal's concern as to whether he should continue playing or not, which certainly created the impression that his injury was serious. Roger most certainly must have heard this as well. The treatment however worked a miracle and Nadal was back on court, as fit as a fiddle, the balance swung in his favour and he proceeded to take the first set and then also the match.

There can be no doubt that had Federer won the first set, it would have been very difficult for Nadal to avoid defeat. The very last thing Nadal could afford was for Federer to beat him on clay just before the French Open. Nadal would be trying to equal Bjorn Borg's record of four consecutive titles at Roland Garos, whereas Federer would be aiming for his first. A victory at Monte Carlo would have boosted Federer's confidence tremendously, at the same time undermining Nadal's belief in himself. And all the time, just beyond the horizon, lay in waiting Wimbledon. They met again on clay in Hamburg, Nadal winning 7-5, 6-7, 6-3, further eroding Federer's self-belief on clay. Federer was no match for Nadal at Roland Garos, losing 6-1, 6-3, 6-0.

Would Nadal have stood any chance at Wimbledon against Federer had the latter won his first French Open title? Probably not. It is therefore very clear that although the Monte Carlo tournament itself was not of particularly high importance, it was immensely important for Nadal to deny Federer a victory. He succeeded in doing so and how well did he not succeed. During the first two sets at Wimbledon Federer squandered several break point opportunities in

uncharacteristic manner, a clear indication that he did not believe in his own ability to take crucial points.

Nadal regularly expresses his respect for Federer, but is it real? If I recall correctly, John McEnroe, probably the most infamous player of modern times, was once asked why we did not witness his characteristic outbursts during his matches against Bjorn Borg. His answer was that he had too much respect for Borg. The use of any form of gamesmanship against an opponent demonstrates disrespect for that opponent. Nadal's dirty trick in Monte Carlo was nothing short of an insult to Roger Federer.

No one will rush Rafael Nadal ...

Everybody who has an interest in tennis knows that new stars like Nadal and Novak Djokovic take their time when they prepare to serve. Unless one times every point with a stopwatch (as is effectively expected from the umpire), it is however difficult to judge exactly how much time is wasted by their settling down routines. Before attempting to assess the latter, we should first take a look at the rule book. According to the ATP 2008 Tennis Rulebook

- Play shall be continuous and shall not unreasonably be delayed [ATPRB, Rule IV-D-2, p. 44, Rule VI-M-1 p. 97, Rule VII-J-4-o), pp. 131-132].
- Players have 25 seconds to strike the first serve from the moment the previous point has been decided (ball has gone out of play) or the players have been ordered to play by the umpire [ATPRB, Rule VI-M-1, p. 97]. Various rules apply to determine when the ball is in play and when a point has been lost [ATPRB, Rule IX-O-1, p. 181, IX-O-24, p. 184].
- The first failure to strike the ball within 25 seconds results in a warning for Time Violation [ATPRB, Rule VI-M-1, p. 97].
- For the second time violation and every subsequent time violation, the player shall receive a Delay of Game Code Violation [ATPRB, Rule VI-M-1, p. 97], resulting in a point penalty (second violation) and thereafter a game penalty for subsequent violations [ATPRB, Rule VII-J-2, p. 127].

A time violation warning appears to be a very unpopular not only with the players (understandably), but even with the spectators. During the matches that I have seen, the umpire never went any further than issuing a time violation warning. Players like Nadal are of course fully aware of this and simply shrug off the warning. A second violation will result in a penalty point and one can only guess what the reaction will be, not to mention a game penalty. Even when the umpire gave Nadal a time violation warning during the Wimbledon 2008 final (point #124, with the score 4-5, 30-30 in favour of Nadal in the 2nd set), one of the commentators questioned indignantly whether it was really necessary to do so at that stage (he also incorrectly stated that the time allowed is 20 seconds, the impractical ITF rule indeed [ITF Rules Of Tennis 2008, Rule 29a, p. 14], but not an ATP rule) . The point is, in a closely contested match there may never be an appropriate time to do so. It is also very difficult for the umpire to monitor each and every serve by means of a stopwatch, as he has to concentrate on keeping score and then the actual play from the moment the point had started. The situation at present is therefore that play is not continuous and players do more or less what they want to do. When play had to commence after one of the rain delays at Wimbledon (point # 188, Nadal's serve # 111), Nadal took all the

time in the world, prompting one commentator to reiterate that the umpire had already called time. The warm-up period was not recorded on the DVD, but from a tape recording of the match, Nadal continued with his warm-up for 34 seconds after the umpire had called time (Federer had already returned to his chair). Nadal delivered his first serve 111 seconds after time had been called, more than 50 seconds after Federer had already been in position, ready to receive. This point in particular demonstrated Nadal's blatant disregard of the play-shall-be-continuous rule.

In order to determine the extent to which Nadal delays the game, I had written a program to record every point of the match as it progresses and specifically the time progression of the match. A stopwatch on the computer is started at the end of every point and stopped when the first serve ball is struck. The scoreboard advances automatically as the points are awarded to a player and as far as possible all aspects of the game were taken into account (challenges, umpire overrule, changeovers, etc). The accuracy of the time recording process is of course dependent on reaction time, but it tends to average out since a key is pushed when a point is awarded and again when the first serve is played. The reaction time is admittedly not constant either, but all in all the time record should be accurate to within a few percent.

What stands to be gained by delay tactics?

Before continuing with the time analysis as recorded by means of this program, it is perhaps appropriate to first consider what can be gained by a player employing delay tactics.

- **Resting between points** - An obvious advantage. Even though both players will seemingly enjoy the same advantage, the server decides when he or she is ready to play. Theoretically, if the receiver is able to hit every ball into an opposite corner, thereby forcing the server to return defensively straight to the middle of the court, the server will be running himself half to death while the receiver hardly raises a sweat. It would then be very much in the interest of the server to take time to catch his breath, with no particular benefit to the receiver. One of the trademarks of Nadal's game is his ability to run down virtually every ball, which requires tremendous physical effort and even more so as the match progresses (e.g. Andy Murray's victory over Nadal in the US Open 2008 semi-finals).
- **Frustrating the opponent** - Many players find it frustrating to have to wait for their opponent to start a point. Invariably this reduces the ability of the receiver to concentrate.
- **Requires receiver to concentrate longer** - One of the first things any tennis player is taught is to relax when he or she is preparing to serve. The server knows exactly when he intends to serve and can relax completely up to that moment. The receiver however does not know this precise moment and therefore has to concentrate intensely for a longer period of time. Nadal's time to serve varies from less than 20 seconds to more than 40 seconds, making it difficult to judge when he will start the point. Even if this extra concentration is required for only 5 seconds, Federer would have had to concentrate 18' 10" longer during the match than what should have been the case.
- **Display of arrogance towards all** - The player who uses delay tactics knows very well that there realistically is nothing his opponent, the umpire or the spectators can do to put

a stop to these tactics. This only serves to further annoy and upset the receiver.

Time analysis of the Wimbledon 2008 final

Returning to the actual time both players took to deliver their serves, Federer took 3974 seconds in total to prepare for his 195 serves (average 20.4 seconds), while Nadal took 6629 seconds to prepare for his 218 serves (average 30.4 seconds). This not only shows that Federer maintained a safe margin of 5 seconds with respect to the rules, but that Nadal constantly violated the time limit by about the same margin. If the time limit rule would have been strictly enforced, Nadal too would have had to maintain a safe margin, probably also at least 5 seconds. *One can therefore conclude that we spent more or less 2180 seconds (36' 20") too long watching Nadal prepare for his serve.* About half of this time was in direct violation of the rules.

During the five set Wimbledon 2008 final won 6-4, 6-4, 6-7 (5), 6-7 (8), 9-7 by Nadal, Federer served 195 times and Nadal 218. The time each player took to play the first serve is shown in Figures 1 and 2 for Federer and Nadal respectively. In both graphs a time limit of 25 seconds was used throughout and is shown in green. The red bars indicate time in excess of 25 seconds. It is immediately obvious that Federer is also guilty of regularly violating the time limit, but then not nearly as excessively as Nadal. Reviewing the points where Federer exceeded the time limit quickly revealed the reason. Whenever a ball changeover occurs (the total number of games is an even number or there is a change of server during a tie-break), the balls have to be passed to the opposite side of the court and a delay of up to 10 seconds can occur before the ball boys can hand the balls to a player for serving. A similar delay occurs when the umpire calls 'time' and the players have to walk from their chairs to the base line. An even longer delay occurs when the players change sides after the first game of each set or during tie-breaks. If the time limit is nevertheless maintained at 25 seconds, Federer exceeded this limit by a total of 219 seconds (3' 39") while Nadal did so by 1375 seconds (22' 55"). At first glance it therefore appears that we spent in excess of 26 minutes watching the players wasting time in direct violation of the rules, the bulk of the delay being caused by Nadal. An alternative time limit methodology will be proposed towards the end of this article.

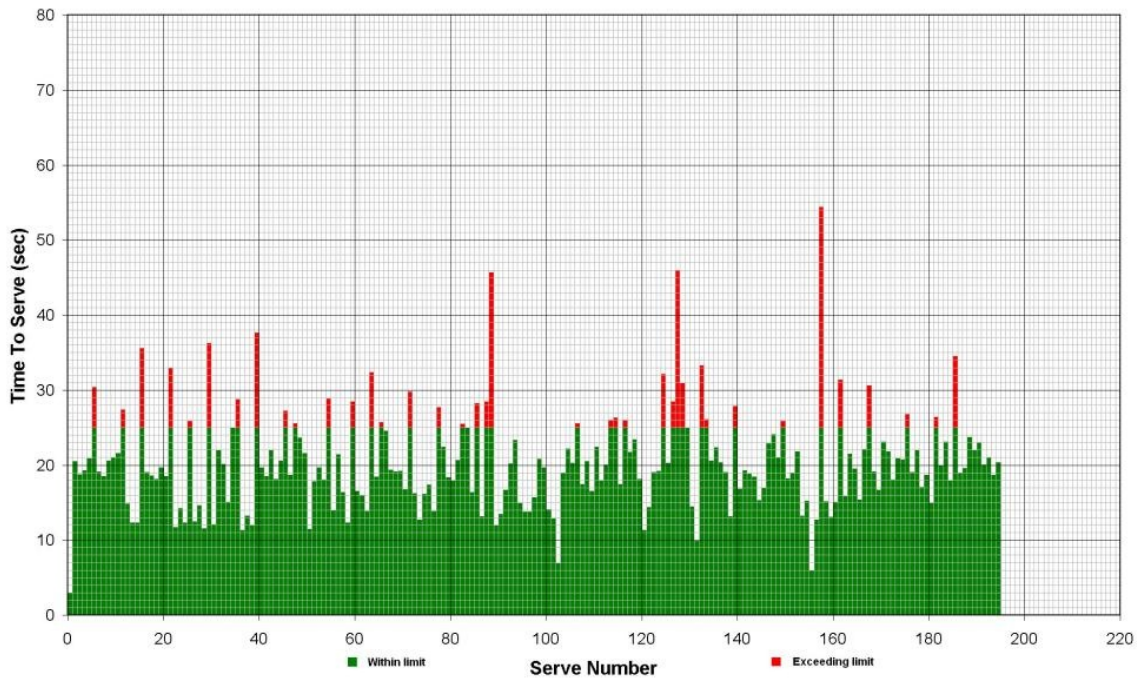


Figure 1. Federer's Time To Serve for the Wimbledon 2008 Final, time limit 25 seconds

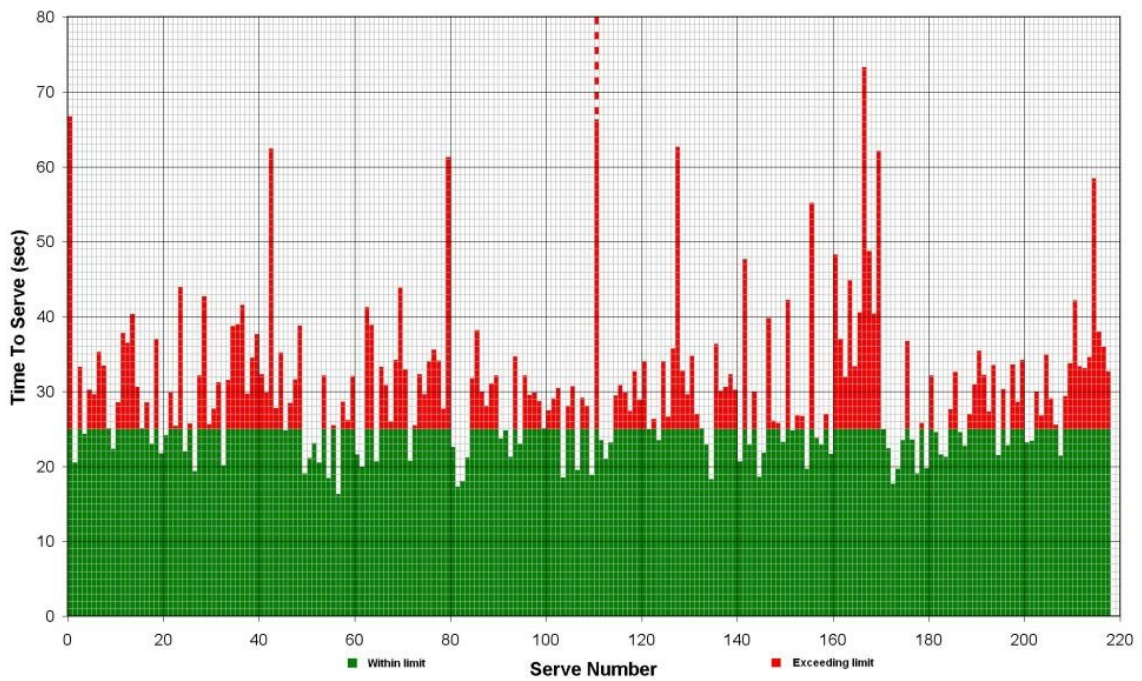


Figure 2. Nadal's Time To Serve for the Wimbledon 2008 Final, time limit 25 seconds

Some points of either very short or very long time-to-serve need to be clarified and are listed in the tables below for the Federer and Nadal serves respectively.

Serve #	Point #	Score	TTS (s)	Comment
1	1	S1, 0-0, 0-0	3.1	Match begins
89	224	S4, 0-1, 0-0	45.8	Change of sides after first game
103	249	S4, 2-3, 40-40	7.0	Nadal challenged previous point
128	291	S4, 6-6, 2-4	46.0	Change of sides during tie-break
132	299	S4, 6-6, 7-7	10.0	Nadal challenged previous point
156	336	S5, 2-2, 40-40	6.0	Play resumes after rain delay
158	343	S5, 3-3, 0-0	54.5	Nadal takes 50 seconds to change rackets

Table 1. Federer serves of either short or long time-to-serve (TTS)

Serve #	Point #	Score	TTS (s)	Comment
1	6	S1, 1-0, 0-0	66.8	Change of sides after first game
43	224	S2, 1-0, 0-0	62.5	Change of sides after first game
80	134	S3, 1-0, 0-0	61.3	Change of sides after first game
111	188	S3, 5-4, 0-0	66.4	Play resumes after rain delay, Nadal serves 111 seconds after time was called, but timing program was only started 66.4 seconds before serve
128	213	S3, 6-6, 4-2	62.7	Change of sides during tie-break
142	240	S4, 2-2, 0-0	47.8	Federer takes 36 seconds to change rackets
167	297	S4, 6-6, 6-6	73.3	Change of sides during tie-break, "Continue with play .. Rafa will not be rushed"
170	309	S5, 1-0, 0-0	62.2	Change of sides after first game
215	410	S5, 7-8, 30-30	58.5	Federer complains about something

Table 2. Nadal serves of long time-to-serve (TTS)

Nadal's other little sins ...

Nadal's gamesmanship is not limited to service delay tactics only. I can remember one particular match that was due to start, with the umpire and his opponent already waiting at the net ready to toss the coin. Nadal remained seated and continued with his rituals, then jumped up and stormed onto court, bouncing around like a ball. A bit odd, don't you think? He evidently uses similar delay and intimidation tactics when he and his opponent have to leave the cloakroom to go on court and he is regularly guilty of glaring at opponents when he wins crucial points. Not that the latter is against the rules - it is simply not good sportsmanship to do so. And then he has that other little problem. I have no doubt that Boxer will gladly offer him a sponsorship!

In defence of Rafa ...

Despite all the negative criticism handed out, not even I for a moment question the fact that Nadal is a great ambassador for the game of tennis and that as a person he is a particularly friendly and humble guy. It must be very difficult for any young man (or woman, of course!) to fight his way to the top against the best in the world, in full view of the public, always putting the best foot forward. Many champions have come and gone, but few will be remembered. I sincerely hope that Rafa will discard his bad little habits and become one of the greatest tennis players the world has ever seen, in all respects.

Some other interesting Wimbledon 2008 Final statistics

- The match timer (clock) was started 1 minute late.
- At the end of 4th set the match could not have been more evenly balanced. Both players had won two sets and both had won the same number of points, 151. When the last point had been decided, Federer had won 204 points and Nadal 209, for a total of 413 points.
- Federer served 25 aces as opposed to 6 for Nadal.
- Federer won 1/13 break points while Nadal converted 4/13.
- Federer's challenge success ratio was 3/10 and Nadal's 3/8.
- The average duration of a point (1st serve struck to point decided, the program does not allow the time of the 2nd serve to be recorded) was 10.7 seconds, the longest point lasting 45 seconds.
- The total time of active play (1st serve struck to point decided) was in the order of 1 hour and 13 minutes in a match that lasted just over 4 hours and 48 minutes.

So what can be done about those timely injuries?

As stated before, it is not only Nadal who uses gamesmanship to influence the outcome of his matches, but numerous other players do so as well. The most unsettling form of gamesmanship to an opponent must certainly be the well-timed call for a medical time-out. Rain delays regularly come to rescue of players, as for instance during the Goran Ivanišević / Tim Henman Wimbledon 2001 semi-final. Henman was leading 5-7, 7-6, 6-0, 2-1 and was dominating play when the rain came down. The momentum changed, Ivanišević scraped through and eventually went on to defeat Pat Rafter in the final. All players are aware that a medical time-out can have the same effect, especially when an opponent knows that the injury is feigned.

The ATP has in good faith and probably for very good reasons introduced rules that allow medical time-outs to be called. These rules however have numerous drawbacks:

- A medical time-out is direct conflict with the rules that require play to be continuous.
- The medical time-out has become an popular instrument in the hands of players who wish to interrupt the momentum of their opponent, regain their own composure or even simply catch their breath during a crucial stage of a match.
- Probably only a very small percentage (<10%) of medical time-outs called for are truly warranted.
- Since one time-out for each type of injury may be called, a player can theoretically claim to have 10 different types of injury during the match, fully aware that the umpire has little choice but to comply. The injury time-outs may then last longer than some sets do.
- There is no means of verifying whether or not a player is lying about an injury. A shadow of suspicion will therefore nearly always hang over the player who calls for the time-out.
- Television time, especially during prime events, is extremely expensive. A player who abuses the injury time-out is wasting a lot of someone else's money.
- We as spectators are really not interested in watching such displays of gamesmanship.

In my opinion **there is only one way to resolve this problem and that is to allow the clock and score board to keep ticking during a medical time-out.** The latter must of course be allowed as a sudden but brief injury related problem may occur. I specifically remember an incident during which John McEnroe was bouncing the ball, but somehow managed to get it into his eye. He was then allowed some time to recover, although strictly speaking it was all of his own doing. This is of course perfectly in order, as no one would have preferred the match to be cancelled at that point. As another example, the number one player in the world may be leading 2-0 in sets and 5-0 in games in the 3rd set when he accidentally injures his knee. All he needs is a couple of minutes to recover, but at that very instant he will not be able to continue with play, so there can be no doubt that medical time-outs must be allowed. However, in order to counter dishonesty, I would like to suggest that whenever a player calls for a 3-minute medical time-out, he or she should immediately forfeit the next 6 points ($180/25 = 7.2$, allowing one extra grace period of 25 seconds). One may argue that if a player calls for a medical time-out to be taken during the 90 second changeover, the penalty should only be $(180-90)/25=3.6$, or 3 points, but one should take into account the fact that the continuity of play is interrupted and that it may have a negative impact on the other player. An additional penalty would therefore seem appropriate. Should the injury occur just after a changeover and be of such a nature that it requires immediate attention, at least 7 more points will anyway have to be played before the next changeover occurs, so that 6 points for 3 minutes will be nothing but fair. To keep matters simple, I would therefore suggest that a player immediately forfeits 6 points whenever he or she calls for a medical time-out.

The proposed 6-point penalty rule for medical time-outs will have the following benefits:

- The rule of continuous play will be honoured.
- Medical time-outs will only be called for in cases of extreme emergency, as should be the case.
- The number of medical time-outs taken on the professional circuit will probably drop by 90%, if not 99%.
- There will be no doubt about the seriousness of the injury and there will be no suspicion

of gamesmanship. In the same manner that Hawkeye has given players an opportunity to challenge calls they deem to be incorrect, the opponent and spectators alike will no longer have reason to be unfairly upset or unsettled because of the time-out.

- No time will be wasted because of gamesmanship.
- As a matter of interest, there are rules that allow the umpire to suspend a match when a player is no longer able to compete at a professional level (see [ATPRB examples p. 107]). For instance, if Nadal should injure his left hand beyond rapid recovery, he will probably not be allowed to continue the match playing with his right hand. But then again, Nadal reportedly is right-handed in real life and he happens to be a very talented player!

Too little time?

Regarding the time restriction of 25 seconds for a player to serve, there are two aspects to be considered, namely the actual duration of the time limit and then of course violation of that time limit.

From Figures 1 and 2 above it is clear that some points take significantly longer than others to initiate (play the serve). As already mentioned, it can take up to 10 seconds for the ball boys to pass the balls to the other side of the court when the number of games is level or when the server changes during a tie-break. For such points one should therefore allow at least 35 seconds instead of the customary 25 seconds. Even longer delays occur when players have to walk to the other side of the court, as occurs after the first game in each set and at the change of sides during a tie-break. It can take up to 15 seconds for a player to take his towel and walk to his chair and another 15 to walk to the opposite side of the court. The players also stop briefly to take in some fluid, which typically takes 10 seconds. All in all we therefore have to add about 40 seconds to the 25 seconds allowed between points, but as the players are not really allowed to stop during the changeover, one should probably allow only 35 seconds extra. The time limit for changeovers should therefore be 60 seconds in total. When the players are seated and the umpire calls time, an additional period of at least 10-15 seconds should likewise be allowed for the players to take position (for simplicity's sake, make it 10 seconds again). A brisk walk is all that is required and 35 seconds to serve should be ample time. For all other points the time limit should remain 25 seconds.

If we apply the proposed time restrictions to the Wimbledon 2008 final, the time-to-serve for both players changes significantly. Federer's time-to-serve now rarely exceed the limits (Figure 3), while Nadal's (Figure 4) still does so, but to a significantly lesser extent than before. Federer's only significant time violation (serve #158) was caused by Nadal changing rackets and was therefore not a time violation on his side. Federer then exceeded the time limit by an accumulative duration of only 11 seconds during the entire match. Nadal, on the other hand, did so by 869 seconds, from which one should subtract 12.8 seconds (point #240, a Federer racket change) and 33.5 seconds (point #210, a Federer delay), but then again add at least another 20-40 seconds for the delay during point #188. Nadal's delays then add up to more or less 14' 30", which still far exceeds any reasonable delay.

As a matter of interest, Nadal is certainly capable of serving within 25 seconds. Virtually all his time violations occur when he towels himself after a point and then goes through his customary

routine in preparation for serve (in itself a slow process). However, if virtually all other players on the tour can force themselves to adhere to the rules, our Mr Nadal can certainly be expected to do so as well.

Timing something that cannot realistically be timed ...

Even if the more practical time limit scheme proposed above is accepted, the question still remains as to how it can be enforced. According to the rules, a player should receive a warning following the first time violation offence, then be penalized by a point and thereafter be penalized by a game for every offence. To begin with, this will require the umpire to time virtually every point by means of a stopwatch. It is a totally unrealistic expectation as the umpire has many other aspects of the game to concentrate on.

Secondly, and even more difficult to implement, is the decision when to penalize. Strictly speaking, when a player has already been penalized by a point and then takes 26 seconds instead of 25 to deliver his first serve, he must forfeit one complete game. This would of course be utterly ridiculous and would wreak havoc on the nerves of the server. There therefore seems to be no practical way in which the time limit rules can be enforced as they stand. An option would of course be to simply scrap all the time limit rules, but that would allow players to take as much time between points as they want to - a 10 minute rest break mid-way through a game would for example still be in order.

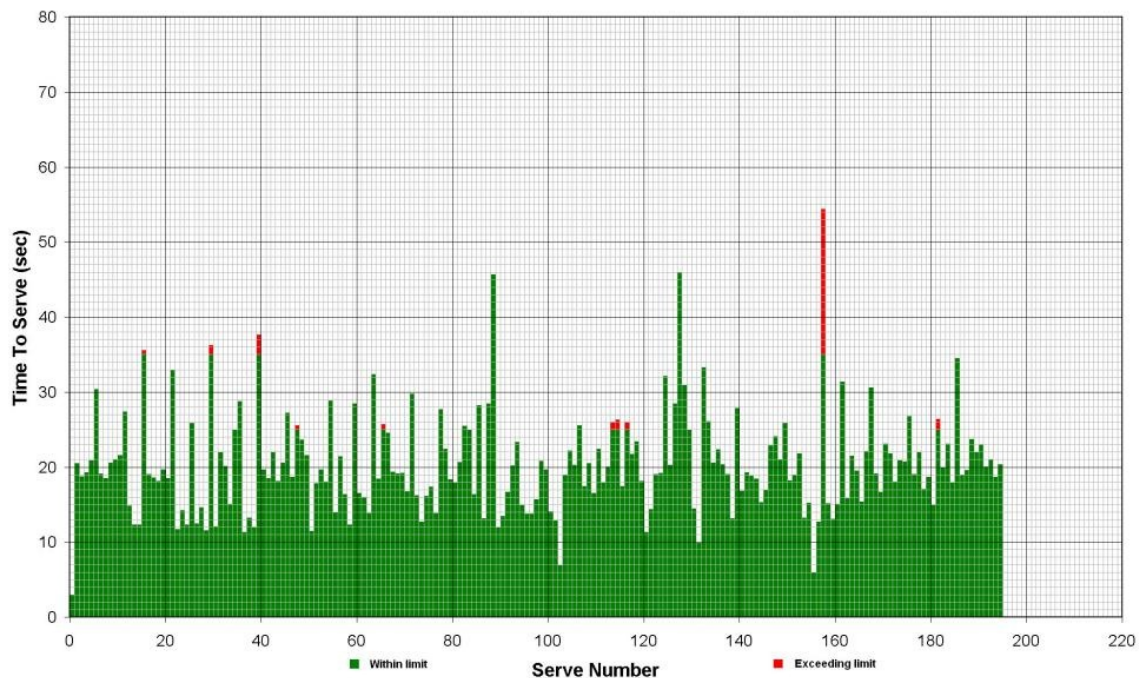


Figure 3. Federer's Time To Serve for the Wimbledon 2008 Final, proposed time limit scheme

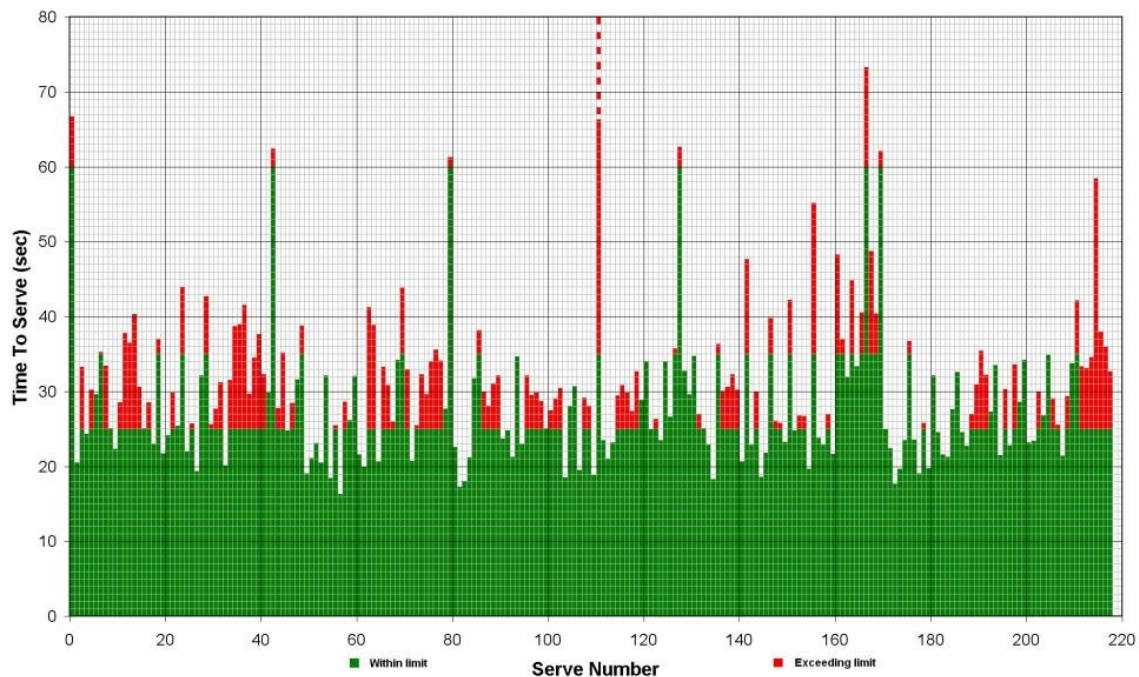


Figure 4. Nadal's Time To Serve for Wimbledon 2008 Final, proposed time limit scheme

A method that could potentially work very well is not to penalize a player on a point by point basis, but rather on the basis of an accumulation of time violations, a balance of excess time. For instance, if a player exceeds a serve time limit of 35 seconds by 2 seconds, then 2 seconds must be added to the excess time balance. Once a specified balance limit is exceeded, the player loses one point, the balance is cleared and the process of accumulation starts afresh. A realistic limit would be 25 seconds, which means that a player loses a point for every full point he delays. As the accumulated time can easily build up to 25 seconds during a long match, it would be essential to clear the balance at the end of every set, regardless of the balance at that point in time. With the proposed time limit scheme, Federer would nevertheless not have lost a single point even if the account had not been cleared after every set. One may be tempted to say that Nadal would have lost about 35 points, but had the accumulated time penalty scheme been in place, he would of course have avoided being penalized by hurrying between points on his serve.

There are numerous other aspects of the scheme that have to be considered in the spirit of the game. The intention is neither to rush players nor to put them under any unnecessary stress - it is simply a means of preventing some players to exploit the time restriction rules. In the interest and spirit of the game, the following guidelines are suggested:

- An accumulated balance of 25 seconds is proposed as a time limit, which if exceeded will result in a player losing one point and the balance thereafter being cleared. The accumulation of excess time is restarted afresh.
- The balance should be cleared at the end of every set regardless of the balance at that stage.
- Either the umpire or a preferably an electronic signal could warn a player if his balance reaches say 20 seconds, so that he can avoid losing points by hurrying between further

points.

- If a player is preparing for serve and exceeds the serve time limit to such an extent that the balance then exceeds 25 seconds, a buzzer could immediately be sounded and the player would lose the point, even without completing the serve.
- One would not want a set to be decided in such a manner and if a player serves at set point and exceeds the time balance with yet another delay, the following rules could be implemented:
 - ▶ if he either wins or loses the point and the set, there will be no penalty and the balance will be cleared.
 - ▶ if he had advantage and loses the point, the penalty will kick in, he will lose the next point (deuce) immediately, the balance being cleared and he will serve again from the same (the advantage) side, this time with advantage to the receiver.
 - ▶ if the receiver had advantage and the server wins the point, the penalty will kick in, he will lose the next point (deuce) immediately, the balance being cleared and he will serve again from the same (the advantage) side, with advantage again to the receiver.
- The umpire and or match referee should always have the freedom to control the time excess balance and should be allowed to adjust the time balance for incorrectly awarded time delays etc.
- If a time delay of say more than 50 seconds (2 points) should occur, the umpire may declare this to be an injury time-out of 3 minutes, resulting in the immediate forfeiture of 4 additional points. This would prevent players from conceding successive points for arbitrary reasons.
- The umpire and/or match referee should always have the freedom to control the excess time balance and the actual awarding of penalty points. Should a match progress to a final set, the umpire and/or match referee should for instance have the freedom to suspend the time monitoring process altogether at any appropriate time, in the interest and spirit of the game.

The practical implementation of this timing scheme will require some additional electronic equipment, similar to but much less sophisticated than Hawkeye. When the time progression of the match was recorded with the computer program, the end of each point (signaling the beginning of the next time-to-serve period) and the time of the actual serve were both recorded by pressing a key. A personal computer could be used in identical fashion for actual matches, but a better approach would be to have only the end of points recorded by a person (more than one may be a good idea). The actual time when the serve is played can easily be recorded by a microphone with a focused beam (like the parabolic reflector type), which can be directed to pick up mainly the sound of the ball being hit. That sound can even be electronically processed to discern it from surrounding noise (there should of course not be any!). In addition to the conventional keyboard of the computer, a simple control panel may be added with keys for temporarily stopping the timing process when the receiver or external factors delay the game, correcting a specific time excess addition to the balance, clearing a specific time excess addition, etc.

This may all sound like an enormous effort to control a less important aspect of the game, but at the same time it is also ridiculous to have formal rules that are impossible to implement. On the other hand, these high profile matches are watched by millions of people around the globe

and millions are spent on broadcasting and advertising rights, in comparison to which the extra effort and expense would be insignificant.

Towards the conclusion of the Annus Horribilis ...

I was certainly not alone in feeling sad when Federer lost that last point. I immediately turned off the set as I am sure many others did as well. I have no doubt that he was graceful in defeat as he always is. That loss must have been the hardest of Federer's career and many must have believed that it signaled the end of his magnificent career. What a delight it was to see him fight through the US Open fourth round match against Igor Andreev (OK, only afterwards)! That victory must surely rank as one of his toughest and best. It was even better to see him play the way we have become used to seeing him play in the final. His 13th Grand Slam title also ended what may very well have been the worst year of his professional life. Adversity, however, only tends to make one stronger.

Returning to the subject of this article, the tennis world is looking forward to years of intense rivalry between its two top players - that is to say, of course, if they manage to stay at the top at all. In a lighter vein, the present contest can be compared to the finesse of a Swiss clock pitted against the power of a charging bull. Although this may seem unfairly balanced, everything depends on the clock. It simply needs to find a way to turn back time!

Riaan Booysen

A fervent supporter of tennis, sportsmanship and Roger Federer,
the Gentleman of Tennis,
up to now most certainly the Greatest Ever!

* Please let me know what you think of the proposed rules [here](#).

* Download the detailed match statistics [here](#) (MS Excel document, 122 KB).