

## Will the U.S. Open Finally have a U.S. Winner?

As U.S. Open fever grows, the Open starts August 27 at Flushing Meadow, American tennis fans ask themselves the same question they ask every year: will this be the year an American wins the Open? The last time someone not named Nadal, Djokovic, or Federer won a major was Del Potro's win at the 2009 U.S. Open. However the men's draw is a bit more open this year because some of the top players seem to be struggling. Rafael Nadal has withdrawn with knee trouble, Novak Djokovic has not been in top form, Andy Murray coming off his gold medal win at the Olympics seems to be struggling with knee issues and did not perform well in the warm up tournaments, and Del Potro who seemed in top form at the Olympics is struggling with the same wrist problem that made him miss most of the 2010 season. This would be a great year for a player not considered to be at the very top of the game to win. Even though the U.S. has eight players ranked in the top 104, the cut-off for direct entry into the U.S. Open, only a couple of these men stand a chance of making a deep run and winning the event. Most of the U.S. players do well in the smaller events but struggle against the top players and there is little reason to believe that this will change at the Open. That said it is still important to take a closer look at the top American and try to determine whether they have a realistic chance of winning the Open.

**JOHN ISNER:** Isner is currently the highest ranked American at number 10, with a 2012 record of 36-15 and one title in Newport on the grass in July; he is the American who stands the greatest chance of winning the Open. Isner has made great strides against the top players this year. He defeated Federer in four sets during the first Davis Cup tie of the year in Switzerland, and defeated Djokovic in three sets in the Indian Wells semifinals this past March. However Isner has not performed well at the slams this year losing in the first round at Wimbledon, the second round at Roland Garos, and the third round of Australia, in each case losing to opponents ranked well beneath him. It seems that Isner's lack of return game is blame. Isner's is able to protect his own serve but does not appear to be able to use his strong ground strokes to manufacture break points. This means that he must win most of sets in a tie break resulting in long matches and these tires him out leaving him drained in later rounds. This is especially true in the slams where it is best three out of five sets; by the time Isner gets to the third or fourth round he loses because he has expended too much energy in the early rounds. This said Isner still remains America's greatest hope at the U.S. Open because his monster serve and ground strokes have given the bigger players trouble this year. If Isner can win his early round matches easily he should be able to challenge the likes of Federer and Djokovic in the later rounds.

**ANDY RODDICK:** Andy's current ranking is 21 with a year to date record of 19-14 and two titles, one in Eastbourne on grass in June and one in Atlanta in July on hard courts. However, for the past couple of years Roddick has been plagued with injuries leaving it difficult for him to protect his serve at times, and protecting his serve has always been essential to his game. Of late opponents have been able to move him around the court and break his serve which was never used to be the case. Due to his injuries Roddick has struggled this year in the slams, he was forced to retire from a second round match against Hewitt with a leg injury in Australia, lost to Mahut in the first round of the French and lost to Ferrer in the third round of Wimbledon in spite of winning the first set. That said one of Roddick's best surfaces is hard courts and he is the 2003 U.S. Open champion. If he can string together a couple of strong matches without injuring himself he could make a deep run at this year's tournament.

**MARDY FISH:** Mardy is currently ranked number 24 and has a year to date record of 18-11 with no titles. Last year Mardy's improved fitness helped he reach the top ten, this year a very scary heart problem requiring surgery this spring caused him to miss the clay court season and has limited his play since the spring. Fish returned to the tour for Wimbledon but since then has only made one semi-final, losing to Haas in straight sets in Washington, but in the rest of the tournaments he has lost in the quarter finals or earlier. Mardy does not appear to have found his top physical form and it is unlikely he can win many three out of five set matches making it very unlikely he will win the open.

**SAM QUERRY:** Query is currently ranked number 28 with a year to date record of 24-18 and one title in Sarasota, Florida on the clay in May. Query has been on the comeback trail from injury this year; he had elbow surgery in 2011, and has been making great strides in his comeback. As the year has gone on he has been making it deeper into tournaments and is beating lower ranked players with ease. His problem of late has been beating the top ranked players; he trouble making matches against them competitive. In the two major lead-up events to the U.S. Open he lost to Novak Djokovic in Canada by a score of 4-6, 4-6 and lost to Andy Murray in Cincinnati by a score of 2-6, 4-6. In both these matches Query seemed at a loss of how to effectively serve or return against these two opponents. He appeared to lack the confidence in his game, a game that has proved successful against lower ranked players, when it he needed it the most. If he is unable to beat the big players in a best two out of three matches it is very unlikely he will beat them in a best three out of five matches making it very unlikely he will win the open.

**BRIAN BAKER:** There has not been a better comeback story in recent tennis history then the 70<sup>th</sup> ranked Baker, whose year to date record of 9-7. Baker showed great promise as a junior, achieving the number two ranking and reaching the Roland Garros junior's final in 2003 losing to Stan Wawrinka, but after that a series of surgeries on several body parts including hips threatened to put an end to his career. This year has been one of the first years in his career he has been able to play consistently. He began the year with a ranking of 456 so he played mainly in challengers but he did qualify for and play in Roland Garros reaching the second round losing to Giles Simon. He then qualified for and impressed at Wimbledon where he reached the round of 16 losing a competitive three set match to Philipp Kohlschreiber. By the end of Wimbledon he had raised his ranking high enough to gain direct entry into the U.S. Open. In every tournament he has played this year he has improved and there is no reason to believe this won't continue at the Open. However, the problem at the Open is his lack of play against the top players. Having not played against the likes of the top ten it is unlikely that Baker would win against them for the first time in the U.S. Open. However, if Baker continues to improve there is no reason to think he will not be a threat in Australia in January and the rest of the majors of 2013.

The other U.S. players ranked in the top 104 are: Ryan Harrison, Donald Young, Jesse Levine, and Rajeev Ram, James Blake will also be playing because he has been given a wild card. These players struggle to win matches on a regular basis so to consider them as potential winners of the U.S. Open would be unrealistic. Is there a possibility of an American winner at this year's Open? There is always a possibility but for it to happen one of these guys would have to have the tournament of their lives. Stranger things have happened so all we can do is hope and wait.