

Roger's Cup Review

What have we Learned About the Hard courts so far?

With The Roger's Cup, the first big tournament of the Emirates Airline U.S. Open series complete it is time to take stock of what we know about what kind of shape the top men's players are in and label them as contenders or questionable as we head into the U.S. Open. This year the Roger's Cup suffered from a bit of bad timing, starting less than 24 hours after the Olympics concluded. This means the many of the top players were forced to go from London to Toronto very quickly and change surfaces from grass to hard court without the three weeks they usually have. This resulted in early losses for a couple and means that in predicting whether or not these players are contenders we have to look at their recent performance on the tour instead of just how their Roger's Cup performance.

Novak Djokovic: Questionable It is true that Novak won the tournament but to do it he only had to face one player in the top twenty, number nine Janko Tipsarevic, on his way to victory. His other opponents were Bernard Tomic, Sam Querrey, Tommy Haas, and Richard Gasquet Novak lost only one set in all these matches to Haas the only player in the group who has troubled him in the past. The reason I consider him questionable is his recent performance against top players in major tournaments. Since Novak won the Australian at the beginning of the year he has lost to Nadal at the French, Federer at Wimbledon and Murray and Del Potro at the Olympics. Of late he seems to have trouble playing the big points, missing break points and committing to many unforced errors. During the Roger's Cup he was lucky enough to only face players who commit more unforced errors on a regular basis than he does. When he gets to the U.S. Open and has to face the players like Murray, Federer, and Del Potro he will not be as lucky thus I consider him questionable.

Rafael Nadal: Questionable Nadal has not played since losing in the second round of Wimbledon to 100th ranked Lukas Rosol in late June due to reoccurrence of knee problems. He will not be playing this week in Cincinnati either. Although it does appear he has resumed training, even if he does play at the U.S. he won't have had any matches coming in. Nadal is the type of player who needs lots of matches to be competitive in tournaments so it is hard to see him having much of an impact at the Open.

Roger Federer: Questionable Roger Federer withdrew from the Roger's Cup after losing the gold medal match to Andy Murray at the Olympics. The specific reason for the withdraw was not given but it is assumed he was tired after his Olympic run and three set semi-final win that went to 19-17 in the third set, over Del Potro. He will play this week in Cincinnati but I consider him questionable going forward because his legs did not seem to have their normal life in the gold medal match against Murray. This could be an indication of exhaustion from his semifinal or it could be an indication of reoccurrence of his back problems. Until we know more about his fitness it is hard to label him as anything but questionable.

Andy Murray: Contender Murray has been on a role of late. True he pulled out of the Roger's Cup with a sore knee, a foreseeable consequence of having to go from grass to hard courts in under twenty four hours, but beyond that he has been playing well. He made the final at Wimbledon this year, losing to Federer after winning the first set, but just three weeks later he was able to reverse this result and

defeat Federer in straight sets in the gold medal match. Murray not only won the match he dominated Federer with a score line of 6-2, 6-1, 6-4, and undoubtedly gave himself a shot of self confidence in the process. Hard courts are Murray's best surface, one where he successfully dictates play from the baseline with his ground strokes allowing him to win points. As a former finalist at the U.S. Open the confidence he gained from winning the Olympic gold medal in his home country should help him take that extra step and be a serious contender at the Open.

Jo-Wilfried Tsonga: Contender Tsonga lost his opening match in Toronto, but he is another player drained by the Olympics. Tsonga made it to the quarter-finals of the Olympics but he won his second round match against Milos Ranoic by a score of 25-23 in the third set. Tsonga has done well in the past two majors, making it to the quarterfinals in the French and the semifinals at Wimbledon. He has a good record against the top players and is able to challenge them on a regular basis with his big serve and excellent fitness. Tsonga's biggest problem seems to be the early rounds where instead of quick easy wins he gets involved in long matches, much like he did at the Olympics, these matches leave him drained when he gets to the latter rounds. Tsonga always appears poised for a big win, he was a finalist in Australia in 2008 and the year-end championship last year; with his good play of late I believe the U.S. Open could be his time.

Juan Martin Del Potro: Contender Del Potro, like Tsonga lost early in Toronto, but he was emotionally and physically drained from his bronze medal triumph at the Olympics. The reason Del Potro falls into the contender category is his recent form. After missing most of the 2010 season with a wrist injury Del Potro appears to have regained the form that helped him win the 2009 U.S. Open. His serve is back to being a weapon, he fires lots of aces and service winners, and his ground strokes once again penetrate through the court for winners. His record this year is 45-12 with two titles. The only player in the top ten that has given him real problems this year is Roger Federer, he has lost to him six times, but he was so close to beating him in the Olympics it is easy to imagine Del Potro beating him should they meet in the Open. Del Potro is hungry to win the Open again and if he stays healthy he should have a real shot at it.

It is early in the hard court season and with the tournament in Cincinnati this week it is likely new contenders will emerge. However, with the way things look now it is quite possible that the winner of the U.S. Open could be someone not named Federer, Djokovic, or Nadal, that hasn't happened Del Potro won the U.S. Open in 2009.