

Sometimes There Are No Losers

by Rick Angus
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Roger Federer wins again in the U.S. Open quarter-finals, 7/6 (5), 7/6(4), 6/2 over Andy Roddick bringing the career head to head record to fourteen to one in favour of the quietly confident man from Switzerland. There is no neutrality in Roger's approach to the game. The crown is his and to take it away, one needs to be a superhuman.

Last night, Andy Roddick played as well as he knew how to and what did he get for his efforts? A nod from his opponent that each match is a new encounter and that past results do not assure future success. Hence, Federer must focus his talents each and every time that they meet.

While everything Roger says is politically correct, his concern over possibly losing in this rivalry is divorced from reality. Andy should be proud of his recent effort, but even when Roddick hit a 140 m.p.h. serve that would be an ace against anyone else, Roger returned the ball at Andy's feet for a winner without appearing to be even slightly rushed in his stroke production.

The Federer returns bear a strong resemblance to a café patron leisurely sipping from a demi-tasse rather than the violent swings of an elite tennis star who is opposing a very capable threat. Time and again, Andy offered his best stuff, it seemed. Following coach Jimmy Connors' advice to the letter, Andy was in fighting spirits for two sets.

Roddick's approach was to keep the points short to avoid, at all costs, the long rallies that percentage wise would not be productive for his cause. When Andy took advantage of his rare openings with his biggest weapons, it merely maintained the status quo as each player held serve repeatedly. Good strategy, however it did not lead to many break point opportunities that he could capitalize on. Well thought out game plan, but still not the answer.

Roddick attempted to approach behind forehands which he often hit by running around the backhand in opportune situations. Each time he would arrive in no man's land as Roger coolly and with little concern stroked one passing shot after another leaving Andy flailing in disgust as the balls were clearly unreachable.

There was tension court side for an hour and a half, the difference in each set being decided by the tiebreaker format with Roger winning both sudden death games with five more points to his credit. The difference in Roddick's mind was much greater. The third set was a roll-over in which Roddick's game slumped and Federer raised the ante to achieve four break point opportunities, converting two for his advantage.

At his post match press conference, Andy enunciated succinctly what every fan present might have also concluded, "I'm not walking off with any questions in my head this time. I'm not walking away with my head down. I played my ass off out there tonight. I played the right way. So it helps, but that doesn't mean I can't be pissed off."

Enough said.