

ROGER'S FANLETTER

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Dear tennis fans

It has been a while since my last update. A lot has happened these past months and that has required my full attention. After my terrific success in Australia I would now like to take some time and reflect on the end of the last season as well as the start of 2006.

My diary

My victory in Cincinnati last summer made for a perfect start into the American hard-court season. After that success I was able to travel to New York with a good feeling and begin my preparation for the US Open.

I had used the break after Wimbledon to recover from my foot-injury and felt pretty good again. My performance in the first rounds of the last Grand Slam of the year certainly confirmed my feeling. To my delight I managed to maintain that level during the entire two weeks and only dropped two sets up until the final. I guess everyone would like a tournament to end with a real highlight, and this time everyone was in for just that!



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The question was: would Andre Agassi – the Americans' favourite – end his brilliant career with a Grand Slam victory in front of his New York audience. The atmosphere in Flushing Meadows was overwhelming and put a lot of pressure on me. I was, after all, challenging the local hero. The match began rather well for me, but then suddenly the tide threatened to turn as Andre played a great second set. In the end I would say I was able to take home the title thanks to my strong focus. It was enormously satisfying to win the US Open after a terrific two weeks and it makes me proud to have taken home the title a second time.

The match against Andre ranks amongst the very best in my personal greatest hits-list. It really, really means a lot to me to have defeated one of the greatest players of all time in such a spectacular encounter.

During my stay in New York I had the honour of opening the NASDAQ Stock Market on August 25th. The 'Big Apple' lived up to its reputation as a media metropolis even before the US Open started; I hosted the launch of the new "Men's Vogue" together with Anna Wintour (editor in chief of the American Vogue) and Anthony Shriver (from the Kennedy family). And as expected I found myself right in the middle of a huge storm created by the media after my victory at the Open – from being a guest on the David Letterman Show all the way to the photo-shoot in front of the Rockefeller Center with my two US Open trophies.

I was thankful to be able to spend some time at home since our Davis Cup Tie against England was played in Geneva. The three days on clay were most positive and it was the first time in five years that we reached a victory this convincingly: 5-0. In my opinion Stanislas Wawrinka's excellent performance against Andy Murray on the first day of play was the key to success for the entire team. I feel that Stan has made a big step forward with his



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game and I am convinced that he has the potential to be a top-25 player. He certainly showed that he can do a great job as Switzerland's number one of the team this last weekend against Australia. I would also like to pay Yves Allegro a big compliment; he played a great doubles match.

Straight after the matches in Geneva I was on my way to Asia. Defending the title in Bangkok was next on my schedule. After a long intercontinental flight I practically went right from the runway onto the tennis court. It was a short but most intense week. The matches in Thailand went well and I managed to win my second consecutive title without too much pressure, despite being the top seed.

During a short trip to Shanghai I had the privilege of inaugurating the new Qi Zhong stadium. It was a terrific feeling to be the first player to enter this monumental arena. The architectural concept of this futuristic building – based on the shape of a flower with eight petals – is most fascinating. By the way, eight is a lucky number in China and eight players participate in the Masters Cup! Just take a look at my own birth date and you'll see that this number is also my personal favourite: 08.08.1981. So there are quite a few indications that this stadium will bring me luck, hopefully.

I then returned to Bangkok for a couple of days of relaxation. Mirka and I enjoyed a varied program, with a cultural part that included visiting famous temples and Buddha-statues. The Thai hospitality makes me feel most comfortable and I adore the Thai cuisine – curries, meat or fish – there is simply an incredible diversity of culinary delights to discover.

Just after returning to Switzerland I was forced to change my plans for the rest of the season. On one of the first days of training I sprained my foot during an exercise I am used to. I felt severe pain and I was not even capable of getting up. At first I was afraid that I had broken something. I was driven to the doctor immediately and was rather relieved to hear that it was only a torn ligament. I started therapy right away. My days consisted of massage, drainage and special exercises. It was awkward to be on crutches and I was most limited in my activities – showering, driving a car – everything became a challenge if not impossible. Mirka was an enormous help to me, supporting me in every way she possibly could.



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There was no possible way I could even consider playing tennis now. I was forced to cancel Madrid, my home tournament in Basel, as well as Paris. Only five weeks remained until the Masters Cup in Shanghai. The season finals are one of the most important events of the year. I was therefore profoundly disappointed when the doctor voiced his doubts about my being fit enough for the occasion. I knew that I had to try everything in order to participate in the opening round in Shanghai. After a little more than three weeks, I was glad to resume my work on the tennis court. Even though I didn't know until two days before the start of the tournament whether I would be able to play at all, I left for China early. I worked hard with my supporting team - Tony Roche, Pierre Paganini and Pavel Kovac - the entire time we were there. I had been looking forward to the days in Shanghai the whole year, especially since qualifying for the Masters Cup earlier than any player ever before me.

Despite not having had too much time to prepare for the tournament after my injury I performed surprisingly well. I was expecting tough matches since only the best players qualify for the Masters Cup. It, nevertheless, turned out to be a great success and I am happy with the fact that my recovery went that smoothly.



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If there is something particular that comes to mind thinking of Shanghai it is most certainly the magnificent atmosphere and the enthusiasm of the Chinese fans. You can feel that the whole country is changing and the tennis-hype is overwhelming. I am already looking forward to returning there. I feel that my chances are pretty good, especially after my victory in Australia and the lucky eights.

One thing still on my mind today are the "Roger, Roger!" cries from the fans during the final against Nalbandian. Thanks to their help I came back from 0-4 down in the last set and almost managed a spectacular turnaround.

After a terrific season Mirka and I treated ourselves to two weeks on the beach. We enjoyed having some time to ourselves and unwinding. We were then off to Switzerland where I worked on my physical conditioning. It is great to be at home and I always try to catch up with as many friends as possible during those periods. I was invited to the Swiss Sports Awards, where I had been nominated, that finished off my stay.

It was at this point that the preparations for 2006 entered the hot phase. I trained with Tony Roche in Sydney for ten days, absorbing two sessions per day. I had to find my rhythm again, since I had not been able to play for a whole month. So we gradually raised the intensity after a gentle start, playing for points towards the end. The conditions were perfect and I felt prepared for the first matches of the season lying ahead.



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I was a guest in the sheikdom of Qatar for New Year. We visited horse stables with over 150 animals before the tournament in Doha. These noble stables are home to three of the five most beautiful Arabian horses. Capturing the title at the Qatar Exxon-Mobil Open was definitely the best start into 2006 I could have hoped for.

Tony joined me for the invitational in Kooyong, just outside Melbourne. The most important aspect of this phase was getting used to the conditions in Australia and feeling confident for the upcoming Grand Slam. I was very pleased with my performance, especially because my foot did not cause me any trouble at all.

I tried to practice on the center court, Rod Laver Arena, as much as possible before the beginning of the Australian Open. You have a lot of time to think about the first big event of the year during the long period of preparation, so it's always rather a relief when the tournament finally starts. The intensity was not too high in the beginning, but constantly rose from round to round. Reaching the final was great – but I had gone to Australia for even more. I wanted to win my second title there. My opponent would be the surprise of the tournament, Marcos Baghdatis. It turned out to be a tough battle, but I noticed that the former rounds had cost Marcos a lot of energy and he was now running low. But I must add that it is not easy to stay focused when you can feel that the other player is not at his best.

I felt a tremendous weight falling off my shoulders after the match-ball.

At first it was just a feeling of relief, I only slowly began to realise what I had achieved. It was a most emotional moment when Rod Laver handed me the trophy. He is an absolute tennis-legend and it had been a great honour for me to get to know him a few days before. - I had won it and here I was, amongst all of these great people and the fans – I did not know what to say and tears just started streaming down my cheeks. I felt incredibly happy and most proud to have won my second title at the Australian Open.



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To all you fans out there: I would like to thank you with all my heart for your support. You guys are incredible!

The "Roger Slam"

My next goal is to prepare well for the French Open during the weeks lying ahead. I certainly want to play my best tennis during the next tournaments, which will be a good test for the second Grand Slam of this year. The title in Paris would be the fulfilment of an enormous dream: the "Roger Slam", winning all four Grand Slams in series.

Davis Cup and Rotterdam

I have cancelled my participation in the first round of the Davis Cup 2006, held this past weekend in Geneva. The Swiss Team showed a solid performance in Geneva and I am sure that there are many successful moments still to come. The 2-3 result against Australia certainly deserves my full respect. My triumph at the Australian Open, as well as the successful start this year has cost me a lot of energy. Many challenges lie ahead this season and I feel the need to plan everything carefully and listen to my body. I will use the time to prepare for the upcoming Masters-Series tournaments as well as the French Open. I have also withdrawn from the ABN AMRO World Tennis Tournament in Rotterdam (20.-26, February 2006) for these reasons.

I am looking forward to the next challenges and hopefully I can bring you pleasure with a lot more good tennis.

Take care, bis bald, à bientôt

Yours sincerely,
Roger

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