



FANLETTER SEPTEMBER 2004

Dear Tennis fans

Flushing Meadows, September 13, 2004, just after 7 p.m.: Lying flat on Centre Court I look up to the darkening sky for a brief moment when a thought suddenly strikes my mind: Now the world is yours! If you can make it in New York you can make it anywhere. Next thing I know my emotions are overwhelming and I am fighting back my tears. I see clearly again and get up for the shake-hands with Lleyton.

I have just achieved the third Grand Slam victory this year a few seconds ago! Amazing, unreal. I suppose I would have laughed at anyone having predicted such a success beginning of this year. I had definitely set the goal of confirming my great performance in 2003 and maybe even celebrating the one or other victory in addition to that. But now this! I certainly would never had imagined this to ever become reality, not even in my wildest dreams. Coming to think of it: every single one of the Grand Slams has its very own history. The victory at the Australian Open was incredibly important to me as I was not quite certain how the separation from my coach Peter Lundgren just two months earlier would affect my game. Taking home the cup in Melbourne was then proof to me that it can also be done without the support of a coach. Repeating the victory in Wimbledon this year confirmed that I am able to handle the enormous pressure of being the number one favourite out there. And now the title in the vibrant arena of Flushing Meadows, the highest of blessings in the American world of tennis. Obviously I am now constantly being asked by the media when I am planning to conquer Roland Garros. Well, that is certainly one of my main goals and I will give all I've got to get there. But I will not put myself under pressure.

I was highly motivated to make up for the disappointing performance at the Olympic Games. I had arrived in New York early in order to prepare intensely for the US Open. The week before the tournament I gave a few interviews for CNN, USA Networks, New York Times, USA Today and Sports Illustrated which had been arranged beforehand. The reason for giving these interviews is not only because working with the media is just part of the job, it is much more my desire to contribute to the promotion of tennis in the US. I also took part in sponsor's events by Wilson, Nike and Maurice Lacroix, my watch-sponsor. Participating in the Nike-Kids Day on the Saturday before the Open was great fun. Of course Mirka and I also wanted some entertainment on our own, so we enjoyed the musicals "The Beauty and the Beast" as well as "The Boy from Oz" on Broadway.

Well, this might sound like I did not train at all before the US Open! That was definitely not the case, as you can imagine. I still had more than enough time to practice on a daily basis and get used to the specific conditions in Flushing Meadows. Having this time at my disposition gave me a lot of confidence for the challenges yet to come. And my feeling was confirmed right from the beginning of the tournament, starting with a clear victory over the experienced Albert Costa. And it continued in a smooth way round after round. You know me: As soon as I am really into a tournament I start feeling more and more confident. The match against Agassi then

certainly was a key to my further success. Winning the match was not just a victory against one of the greatest tennis players of all times, it was also a victory against my former weakness of getting distracted by difficult conditions. Rain delay on the first day, strong winds on the second. The quarter final at the US Open 2004 is one of the matches I will never ever forget; a milestone for my development as a tennis player. Believe me, just five years ago I would have gone crazy with a wind like that, I would probably never have managed to get my game together properly. Anyway, I managed to put all this aside and was able to defeat Andre in five sets. That gave me an enormous amount of mental strength for the final weekend. With all due respect for Tim Henman's game I was now able to approach the semi-final in a much more confident way. But then the evening before the final my throat started aching. Going to bed I hoped that it would not get any worse. Unfortunately I got up the next morning with a rather bad cold. But what a relief when I noticed that it was not all that bad after all. There was one further thing that was different: I had always had at least one day off between the matches during the entire tournament – except for the final! So I also felt a bit tired and had a strange feeling, not having had enough time to prepare for Lleyton's game mentally. It was clear that I needed to play a perfect match and I was also aware of the fact that my name would appear in the hall of fame should I manage to take home the title. I suppose it was the strong confidence as well as the looseness I had gained from the match against Agassi which helped me right from the start. I played like I very rarely do and managed to hit the balls in an almost perfect way in the first set. This gave me the certainty of being able to win the tournament already this year. The key to my victory was then the tie-break in the second set.

And then I experienced the toughest after-match of my career: The Monday after the final I – who love nothing more than sleeping in! - was invited to three morning TV-shows. I was on "Cold Pizza" at ESPN, visited the "Early Show" in the CBS Studios and was already in "Regis and Kelly" at 9.30 a.m. I dashed off to a photo shooting at Times Square at 11 a.m., then had lunch with media in the Hard Rock Café, enjoyed a chat with John McEnroe, which I had been looking forward to very much. John's wittiness and competence in tennis is just amazing and he is so much fun talking to. To finish off my amazing tour I starred in the Charlie Rose TV-Show. I must say that the whole media circus, the American way, was a most interesting experience and somehow different to anything I had experienced before. In other cities the celebrities from the show-business come to visit you. Here in New York you tour around yourself and I found it extremely exciting to compare the shows with the ones I know from different countries all over the world.

My diary

After the victory in Wimbledon and my first ATP-title on Swiss soil in Gstaad I enjoyed my holidays in Dubai to the fullest. I do love warm climates, but at 47 degrees Celcius air temperature and 37 degrees water temperature it was almost too hot for my liking. I relaxed on the beach with Mirka, enjoyed plenty of wellness and indulged in doing nothing at all. I slept for long hours, sometimes even during the day. Pure relaxation, as you can see! My most sportily activity in Dubai was in a car – on the new Formula 1 track they are building.

Because I am on the road so often I wanted to spend some time at home and also deal with some business matters after my holidays. That was the reason for my rather late arrival in Toronto, making my victory at the Canadian Open just the more surprising! It had been a perfect week right from the beginning. I focussed entirely on the matches and hardly did anything next to playing tennis, merely going to the cinema twice („Spiderman 2“ and „The Bourne Supremacy“) and enjoying the excellent food in a variety of Japanese restaurants in Toronto.

Unfortunately Cincinnati did not work out at all. Given the fact that Hrbaty played a really good match the defeat was not too hard to deal with.

The Olympic Games in Athens were a wonderful event. Being able to march into the stadium with the Swiss delegation and carrying the flag for my home country was one of the most impressive experiences in my life. It was also extremely moving to see all the other delegations, proudly representing their countries in such a colourful way. I had the strong feeling of belonging to one huge, international family in just that moment. The atmosphere in Athens was very relaxed and it was a great occasion to meet sportsmen and –women from all kinds of countries and disciplines. I was able to meet Carl Lewis, amongst many others. Unfortunately my experiences on the tennis court were not quite as encouraging. The bitter defeat against unleashed Tomas Berdych was not easy to take at first. But with a couple of weeks of distance and my triumph at the US Open I am now able to look back and consider the early out at the Olympics as a good experience which I can learn from. I am already looking forward to the next Games in Beijing in four years time.

A flying visit to California and on tour in Asia

After the marathon with the media in New York I took a week off in California. It was my first visit to Los Angeles and Hollywood. Thanks to my excellent contacts to Arthur Cohn, a film producer from my home city Basel and six-time Oscar winner, Mirka and I had the opportunity to meet movie legend Kirk Douglas and the magician David Copperfield. And we even coincidentally met Danny de Vito in the street. I don't admire all these people just because they are celebrities but because they have come all this way and are strong personalities.

The week in the Sunshine State was perfect to loosen the tension after the US Open and also take my mind off tennis. I am now really looking forward to playing tennis again and also travelling around in Asia a bit. The Masters in Shanghai three years ago has been my first real tournament in Asia. I don't know these areas of the world all that well yet but the impressions I have had until now have only been positive. I admire their enthusiastic way as well as their warmth and hospitality. And of course I love the Asian cuisine, especially the light Japanese way of cooking. I am looking forward to learning a lot more

about this fascinating continent. I will certainly keep you updated on all the details of my trip and the tournament in Bangkok in my next newsletter.

My first steps

At the age of 6, I played for the fun of it. I could never really get enough. I played with my parents, friends and whoever wanted to play with me at the tennis club. If there was no one to play with I would spend hours smacking tennis balls against the tennis wall. Already then I was told to have excellent coordination skills, not only in tennis. As a matter of fact I had a flair for all different kinds of sports and tried skateboarding, basketball, table-tennis, badminton, football, wrestling, skiing, swimming and I spent hours playing softball tennis on the street. But my favourite game next to tennis definitely was football. My parents considered football a perfect balance for team sport and fitness. So I practiced both sports for a long time, not able to decide which one of the two I wanted to focus on. But then, at the age of twelve, I chose tennis.

I started having tennis group practice at the age of 9, i.e. three times a week (2 x 2 hours and 1 x one and a half hours), and an occasional private lesson. Fixed private coaching started at the age of 10, one lesson of 40 minutes weekly. I regularly played tournaments over the weekends. At the age of 12 I had one hour of fitness training weekly.

I became Junior Champion in all age groups in Switzerland and was selected to join the Swiss National Tennis Center in the French-speaking Ecublens (at the time) run by the Swiss Tennis Federation in order to fully concentrate on tennis at the age of 14. I had tennis training or fitness/coordination training about 2 hours daily.

This continued until I finished school and became a professional at the age of 16. From then on I started playing more and more international junior tournaments and was away quite often. Blocks of fitness and tennis training were arranged according to my annual tennis tournament schedule. Until I became a professional the tennis, fitness and tournament planning was done in coordination with the Swiss Tennis Federation, the coaches, fitness trainers and my parents.

I was already told at an early age that I had great talent. However, talent alone does not make good tennis player. Once I made it successfully to the ATP tour in 1998 I began working even harder on specific aspects of my game. I continually improved my technique, optimised my footwork and developed more strength. This process of constant technical and physical development still continues today. There is still room for improvement in different areas.

Your suggestions for the improvement of my website

In my last newsletter I had asked you for your comments on my website. I would like to thank you for the large number of comments, compliments and critical remarks! The variety of suggestions is large: more pictures, an improved photo gallery, more interviews and newspaper-articles on me, live-results, easier navigation, more information and pictures on my youth, a French version of the website additionally to the English and German one etc.

We have taken them all into account and have started implementing a few all ready, as you most probably have noticed. Our aim is clearly to offer all of you a platform meeting your needs. One thing is certain: There are a lot of exciting changes to come!

Take care, bis bald, à bientôt

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Roger', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Your Roger