



Agassi: The Fall and Rise of the Enfant Terrible of Tennis

Robert Philip

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"Image," said Andre Agassi, "is everything". But despite the George Michael designer stubble, the Farrah Fawcett hairstyle, the earrings, the nail varnish and the shocking pink thigh-hugging cycle shorts, the kid from Las Vegas had the image of being a loser. That was until the 'Great White Hype', as his critics were fond of calling him, became Wimbledon Champion in the summer of 1992. As a baby he used a tiny table-tennis bat to swat a balloon tied to his high chair, at four he was knocking up with Jimmy Connors and Bjorn Borg in front of a huge audience in Caesars Palace, and at seven he was winning under 10 tournaments while his father, a former Olympic boxer, battled officialdom and parents of rival players. Andre Agassi is accustomed to rocking the established order of things. A teenage rebel, he dropped out of school at thirteen, drank and smoked marijuana. On court he cursed and smashed rackets, while railing against the army-camp discipline of Nick Bollettieri's Tennis Academy. After turning professional on his sixteenth birthday, his rise was meteoric and, by the age of eighteen, he was ranked third in the world and had 'found God'. His fellow players accused him of gamesmanship and 'tanking' (deliberately losing matches). John McEnroe said, "His act is wearing thin". To keep outsiders at a distance, he surrounded himself with an infamous entourage - his brother Phil, his trainer Gil, and his personal agent Bill (dubbed Dr No because of his attitude towards the media). Agassi was earning millions without ever having won a major championship. Then, in only his thirteenth ever match on a grass court, Agassi beat Croatia's Goran Ivanisevic to win perhaps the greatest prize of all, the Wimbledon men's singles title.

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