

FEB BLOG **THE AUSTRALIAN OPEN**



After travelling thousands of miles to the other side of the world and enduring 14 days quarantine in hotel rooms The players are nearly ready !

You have to admire their ingenuity <https://youtu.be/uXXbxfxfegQ> Beds and walls and even windows as hitting partners; and in some cases mice ! It's probably been the most interesting preparation they have ever had and it will be intriguing to see how it all translates onto the courts !
<https://youtu.be/3xRUnCWeqQM>



The Australian Open started in 1905 ... it has come a long way since its first makeshift grass courts at the 'Warehouseman's Cricket Ground' to the spectacular Melbourne Park. It is the only Grand Slam that has moved to 7 different cities in its existence Having been played in Sydney, Adelaide, Brisbane and Perth; and even moved to New Zealand for 2 years !

In the early years playing there was challenging in fact between 1905 and 1980 the tournament was only won by a non-Australian 16 times and even Bjorn Borg only played there once as a 17 year old ! The main reason has been travel time ... in the 20s it took 45 days to get there from Europe; The first players to travel were Davis Cup competitors in 1946 !

Today (in normal times) is much different 22 hours of flight time and a quantum leap 10 hours into the future and you are there !

There are 33 courts in play at the Australian Open and in 2020 over 800,000 people attended making the most attended Grand Slam event ! However the final's court, the Rod Laver Stadium only has a capacity of 14820-which is actually the smallest of all of the Grand Slam Final Courts. Rod Laver is Australia's most famous tennis player having won 11 Grand Slams and being World No 1 between 1964 and 1970 ... he is also one of only 17 players to have won the Grand Slam having become champion on all surfaces !

This year the tournament starts on 8th February, total prize money is \$71 million (Aus Dollars) with the champions receiving \$4.1 million each !

It is one of two hard court grand slams-the other being the US open; however the court surfaces play very different in these two tournaments ... the Australian Open surface is 'Plexicushion' which is a medium paced surface creating a lower bounce and less spin.

In the mens' competition 2 players have dominated the last 16 years ... Djokovic winning 8 times and Federer 6 ... only Nadal and Wawrinka have interrupted this amazing run ! Andy Murray has been a finalist 4 times .

The womens' is slightly harder to read Serena Williams has won 7 times and Azarenka twice; outside of this there has been a different champion each year, including last years champion Sofia Kenin who beat Garbine Muguruza in 3 sets, became the youngest Grand Slam winner since Serena Williams won the French Open in 2002.

So what about this year the preparation has been unique and this may level the playing field a little Although it's difficult to see past Djokovic in the mens draw-Thiem maybe a strong contender given his huge win in the US open and his current form. In the women's draw I think Victoria Azarenka is a possibility ... she has been returning to form and came close against Naomi Osaka in the US Open; Sofia Kenin could also repeat last year ... again she is on form, world number 4 and less likely to be phased by quarantine than Osaka .

Whatever happens While we can't play, it will be great to watch 2 weeks of world class tennis; Melbourne is 11 hours ahead of us and play starts each day at 11am-midnight our time; evening sessions start at 7pm or 8am in UK ... so set those alarms or stay up a little later ... and make the most of what should be an intriguing and entertaining 2 weeks !!