December 29, 2014

**Is Rafael Nadal the Greatest of All Time?**

Like women’s tennis with Serena Williams, the men’s game currently has a player who still chasing other legends but, while already doing enough to put themselves in the debate, still has a chance to lay further claim to the title of greatest of all time. The Rafael Nadal currently playing on the ATP tour is a drastic evolution of the player who started kicking up dirt ten years ago. No player has dominated a single the surface the way Nadal has dominated clay over the last decade. But his success hasn’t been limited to clay, as Rafa evolved into an all-surface champion who could win anywhere on any surface.

Rafael Nadal played and won his first pro match in 2001 at the age of fifteen. He announced himself to the tennis world in 2004 when he upset world number one Roger Federer in the third round of the Miami Masters. He would lose his first Masters 1000 final to Federer in Miami a year later. In late 2004, Nadal upset Andy Roddick in the Davis Cup final, helping Spain to the title. Nadal really emerged as a threat during the clay season when he won his first Masters 1000 title in Monte Carlo. He wouldn’t lose at that event until 2013. Nadal went undefeated through the clay season, culminating in his first grand slam title at the French Open, winning the final two days after his nineteenth birthday. He would reach the number two ranking later that summer. He went undefeated again on clay in 2006, defending his French Open title. He also reached his first Wimbledon title in 2006, losing to Roger Federer. His clay winning streak would be stretched to eighty-one wins, the longest on a single surface in the history of men’s tennis, before Federer broke it in Hamburg 2007. However, Nadal would defeat Federer again at the French Open before losing a five-set epic at Wimbledon. In 2008, Nadal finally broke Federer’s dominance, first by crushing the Swiss maestro in the final of the French Open, Nadal’s record-tying fourth straight French Open. He then defeated Federer in the 2008 Wimbledon final 9-7 in the fifth set. The match is widely considered to be the greatest match ever played. Nadal would go on to win the Olympic Gold medal in Beijing which resulted in him finally passing Federer in the ATP rankings. In 2009, Nadal had his hard court breakthrough when he won the Australian Open. However, his season would be derailed by injuries which saw him finally defeated at the French Open and then withdraw from Wimbledon, where he was defending champion. Because of this, Nadal lost his number one ranking. Nadal would bounce back in a big way in 2010. Firstly, he became the first player in history to complete the clay slam (winning all three clay Masters 1000 events and the French Open). He followed it up by winning his second Wimbledon title. In September, Nadal became the seventh man (and youngest) to complete the career grand slam by winning the US Open. He was also only the second man, third player and first not in the Graf-Agassi family to complete the golden slam. His bid to hold all four grand slams simultaneously was ended in the quarter-finals of the Australian Open when he suffered a hamstring injury. Starting with the 2011 French Open, Nadal reached five straight grand slam finals, winning both the 2011 and 2012 French Opens. At the 2012 French Open, he ended Novak Djokovic’s bid to hold all four grand slam titles. Injuries would end Nadal’s 2012 early, but he bounced back again in 2013, winning his fourth consecutive French Open. It was also his eighth title at Roland Garros, the most of any man at any slam. That summer, he became the third player to complete the Summer Slam (Roger’s Cup, Cincinnati Masters and US Open). He would tie Pete Sampras for second on the all-time men’s singles title list when he won his fourteenth grand slam title at the 2014 French Open. It was also his fifth straight French Open, a record.