

YEAR OF THE BATTLERS

BY ALAN TRENGOVE

Photographs by Roger Gould



Fitzgerald beats Nystrom.



Cash: youngest to win a singles.



Wilander's great value was nullified.

IT WAS a cliché, yet it summed up the mood at Kooyong as well as anything. "A champion team," declared Patrick Cash, quoting his captain, "will beat a team of champions. We're a champion team."

Australia's winning of the Davis Cup for the 25th time (between 1907 and 1919 Australia shared the honor with New Zealand, as Australasia) was a triumph for team spirit. The Swedes were indeed a team of champions. Mats Wilander had won the Australian Open only two weeks before. Joakim Nystrom had been crowned NSW champion even more recently. And Hans Simonsson and Anders Jarryd were the reigning French Open champions.

The Swedes had become the favorites, in the public's mind, at any rate. But on grass at home, and given the pressure that a final always generates, Australia had to have a good chance of capturing two singles and the doubles.

30

Seen in perspective, the 1983 campaign was successful because of astute captaincy, inspired performances by the Australian players, a fair amount of luck — and that good old Aussie team spirit.

First, the luck. The draw gave Australia a succession of home matches — against Britain, Romania, France and Sweden. Under the rules of the competition, the next time we play these countries they will be the hosts (as will be the USA, whom we could play in America this year). We might as well make the most of the luck while we can.

Australia was fortunate, too, in the draw for the final. This permitted the 18-year-old Cash to play first on both the first and last days and saved him from the ordeal of waiting to get on court. It also prevented Swedish ace Mats Wilander from applying maximum pressure on the Australians. He was left to play the fifth match — by which



TENNIS AUSTRALIA/February 1984

Below: flag-waving supporters.

TENNIS AUSTRALIA/February 1984

time the final had been decided.

Wilander beat Cash in a dour opening match, but a hyped-up John Fitzgerald levelled by defeating Nystrom. Then Mark Edmondson and Paul McNamee gave their country a firm grip on the trophy by toppling Simonsson and Jarryd in the crucial doubles.

On the last day, Cash became the youngest player ever to win a singles in a Davis Cup final (or challenge round) when he annihilated Nystrom, thus clinching victory for Australia. His feat rekindled memories of the 1953 challenge round when two 19-year-olds, Lew Hoad and Ken Rosewall, repelled Vic Seixas and Tony Trabert on the same Kooyong centre court. Ironically, Seixas was referee for the 1983 showdown.

As in 1953, the captain's role was vital. The Swedes had dominated the lead-up tournaments, with Nystrom beating Cash



SCORES

AUSTRALIA defeated Sweden 3-2 at Kooyong.

Patrick Cash lost to Mats Wilander 3-6, 6-4, 7-9, 3-6;

John Fitzgerald d. Joakim Nystrom 6-4, 6-2, 4-6, 6-4;

Mark Edmondson-Paul McNamee d. Anders Jarryd-Hans Simonsson 6-4, 6-4, 6-2;

Patrick Cash d. Joakim Nystrom 6-4, 6-1, 6-1;

John Fitzgerald lost to Mats Wilander 8-6, 0-6, 1-6.

The winning team received \$200,000 from NEC, worldwide sponsors of the Davis Cup. Sweden won \$100,000.

on his way to the NSW title. Neale Fraser had to sharpen his players' form and lift their morale.

In retrospect, though, Nystrom's success in Sydney probably boomeranged against the Swedes. It clinched a singles berth for him, but Nystrom wasn't ready to play in a Davis Cup final. He had played only one Davis Cup match previously, a "dead" rubber against Russia's Konstantin Pugaev, which he lost. In the acid test, his newly-acquired grasscourt game fell apart.

Jarryd, who had beaten Davis Cup players of the calibre of Brian Gottfried and Jose-Luis Clerc, should have retained the No. 2 spot. A tough and resourceful fighter, he might have found some of the form he had lacked in the lead-up tournaments once his adrenalin was tapped in the Davis Cup arena. A run in the singles would have got him better prepared for the doubles, too. And don't say the Swedes are unemotional — Jarryd was in tears during the closing ceremony.

Fraser could not believe Hans Olsson would choose Nystrom, but he had his own problems to solve. Fitzgerald, who had been his trump in the semi-final win over France, showed the worst form of all in practice, and the tempestuous Cash was proving hard to handle.

A few days before the final, Cash was in disgrace and Fitzgerald in a high state of anxiety. After one torrid practice match in which he bounced a racquet into the stands, Cash was banished to the dressing-room.

"I went home that night and said, 'We can't have Cash in the team,'" Fraser recalled after the final. "I wasn't happy



The motivator: Australia II skipper John Bertrand with Neale Fraser.

with his form; it appeared to me that he was unhappy with things other than his tennis; he wasn't contributing in the interests of the team and I told him accordingly."

After Fraser's plain speaking, Cash's attitude improved. Fraser believed that in front of his home-town crowd Cash would moderate his behavior and produce his best tennis. He did.

To help build Fitzgerald's confidence, Fraser enlisted the services of sport

psychologist Laurie Hayden, who spent four months at Newport, Rhode Island, in 1983 pumping up the Australia II crew for its America's Cup challenge. On Christmas Eve, Hayden had a 90-minute session alone with the South Australian in the VIP room under the Kooyong stands. He explained to him how to cope with anxiety, how to direct aggression towards his opponents rather than inward towards himself, and how to enjoy the pressure of competition.

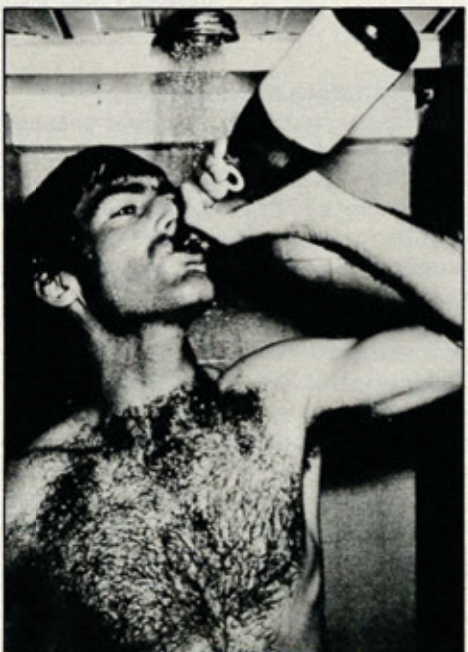
Fraser used another ploy. He invited John Bertrand, the widely admired skipper of Australia II, to visit the Australian dressingroom during the final and talk briefly of his philosophy towards representing Australia.

The psychological priming, along with a super-charged atmosphere of fervent nationalism (which largely owed its genesis to that boat race off Newport) produced a tidal wave that swamped the young Swedes — with the notable exception of Wilander.

Even Mats was affected by the tension of the first day. His returns were not quite as dependable as usual and he lost a bit of the certainty at the net he had displayed at the Open. When he saw eight break-points go by in the key third set, there seemed some vulnerability.

But Wilander, who is nine months older than Cash, was still too solid for the Victorian, who spoilt his chances by serving 16 double-faults and rashly going for too many spectacular winners on his returns. Cash failed to capitalize on his

TENNIS AUSTRALIA/February 1984



Happiness is champers in the shower, with a Davis Cup win behind you.



Of all the ways devised to watch the Davis Cup live, NEC developed the most ingenious.

At the first Davis Cup, in 1900, not everyone could share the excitement of watching it live.

But some people did find their own ingenious ways of viewing it.

At the same time NEC were using their ingenuity to pioneer the technology leading to today's live television broadcast into homes across the world.

Often on to Rank Arena television sets, from NEC.

But NEC's innovative technology is now used to share more than the excitement of the Davis Cup.

NEC satellite ground stations

and submarine cable systems also help maintain Australia's commercial and cultural links with the rest of the world.

And in the business world, that moves faster than a Davis Cup final, NEC helps in the rapid transfer of information with computers, including the 1983 Advanced Personal Computer of the Year, high speed facsimile machines for electronic mail and computer based PABX's which have become one of Australia's most popular telephone exchanges.

NEC. Leaders in computer and communications technology.





The picture that says it all: Pat Cash receives serve, with the Davis Cup in the background.



John Fitzgerald: plenty of pent-up energy.



Joakim Nystrom: not ready for the Davis Cup?



Masseur Larry Maddison admires Mark Edmondson's bottle-opening technique.

superior speed and volleying ability. Nevertheless, he held one break-point for a two sets to one lead. It was a greatly relieved Wilander who stole away to a 4-1 lead in the fourth set.

Now, Fitzgerald had to fill the same role as he had done at Sydney when Cash lost to Yannick Noah. Was he up to it? Was he ever!

He went for Nystrom with all the pent-up energy of a greyhound chasing a hare. For all his aplomb, Nystrom was nervous as he tried to adjust to the thunderous applause of the partisan crowd and the rushing tactics of Fitzgerald. Stoking himself along with clenched fists, like a rampant Jimmy Connors, Fitzgerald chipped and charged on Nystrom's second service, putting away volleys with great severity.

To his credit, Nystrom weathered the barrage. He courageously pulled back from 0-2 to win the third set, after a series of broken serves, and went to a 2-0 lead in the fourth.

The frail-looking Swede was on target with enough of his double-handed backhand passes to create Australian doubts. Fitzgerald's serving had fallen away, his game had become ragged, and he was searching for inspiration. Somehow, with the crowd's support (which he unashamedly orchestrated, prompting Nystrom, in mockery, to once wave his fist at the stands also), he found it. He took Nystrom's service in the ninth game, aided by a Swedish double-fault and a gust of wind which produced a mistake on break-point.

The doubles was, as many anticipated, the critical rubber. Nobody, though, expected the Australians to win it so comfortably. Edmondson was the rock on which the Australian success was established, with the effervescent McNamee disconcerting the Swedes by his acrobatic interceptions. The Aussies outclassed their opponents in every department, and gave them very few opportunities to get into the match.

The full burden of saving the tie now descended on Nystrom, and it must have been frustrating for Wilander, in particular, to have to sit on the arena watching, powerless to help, while his friend succumbed to Cash's controlled aggression.

This match demonstrated that Cash has the potential to be a top 10 player and possibly a Wimbledon champion. He was twice the player who lost to Nystrom in the NSW semi-finals, and much better than on the first day of the tie (though, of course, he

TENNIS AUSTRALIA/February 1984



United at last: Prime Minister Bob Hawke and Opposition Leader Andrew Peacock barracked for Australia.

was against a lesser player than Wilander).

Once again, it was Fraser who supplied the tactical edge. He told Cash to play a more disciplined match than he did against Wilander. His brief was to pressure Nystrom — to get his first service in consistently; to stand in on Nystrom's second serve and play deep approach shots; to crowd him and rush him; to not give away points with overly ambitious shots; and to not play too many topspin forehands that would allow Nystrom to hit passing shots.

Cash obeyed. Nystrom's first service evaporated and Cash leapt on his second delivery. He got on top of the net, smashed lethally and volleyed with sure touch. Of the last 20 points in the match the hapless Nystrom gathered two.

It was such an impressive all-round display by Cash that the pressure he was under could have been underestimated. By following his captain's instructions, to the letter, he had proved himself a team man.

John Fitzgerald was thus spared a nerve-racking 23rd birthday duel with Wilander. Who can say for sure what the outcome of their match would have been had the Davis Cup hinged on it? But it is sobering to remind oneself that Wilander is the Grand Prix champion, that he won nine Grand Prix finals in 1983, that he has a tremendous reputation for winning pressure matches, and that in a tight situation the better-class player invariably wins.

TENNIS AUSTRALIA/February 1984

The doubles

REX HARTWIG, who played the doubles with Lew Hoad in the 1953 challenge round, picked the fatal flaw in the Swedish combination at Kooyong. "They played too deep," said Hartwig.

Both Simonsson and Jarryd possess brilliant groundstrokes, but their returns were poor against Edmondson and McNamee. The reason was partly because they received service so far back. Edmondson in particular was able to serve effectively at three-quarter pace; he served wide to Simonsson's forehand, and time after time Simonsson stretched and put the ball into the net.

If the Swedes had taken the Australian serves closer in, and abbreviated their backswings, they might have nullified much of the Australians' spin and slice.

While Simonsson and Jarryd were flummoxed by McNamee's net-play, it was Edmondson's steady and penetrating serving and returning that gave McNamee the latitude to go daringly for the kill.

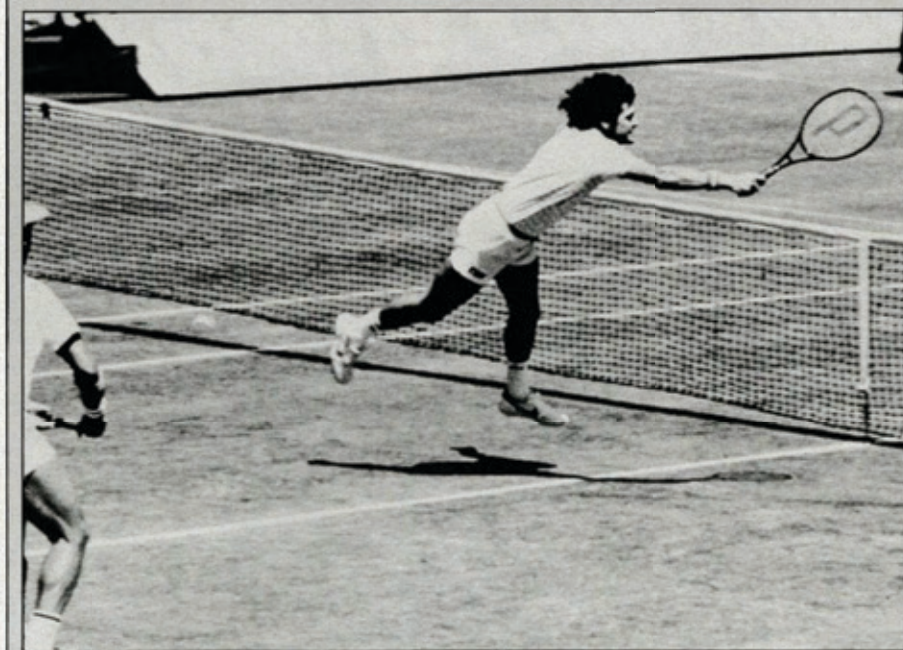
Recalling his long partnership with Peter McNamara, McNamee said: "Peter also was a very steadying influence on me. They (McNamara and Edmondson) both have to play that role because I play the other role. But they are different individuals entirely. Peter was more flashy and played some unbelievable shots. Probably, I am a bit like that too, and sometimes we didn't play much percentage tennis."

The Australians had all the momentum, and most of the lucky breaks. A number of doubtful calls went against the Swedes early in the second set, and later, to rub salt into their wounds, Edmondson flukily saved a break-point by hitting a ball behind his back.

Finally, when Edmondson was serving for the match, he saved another break-point by getting the rim of his racquet to a lob. The ball spun down sharply, just over the net, for an unplayable winner.

McNamee was especially keen to avoid any lapses. He had lost three long doubles to the Swedes, twice after winning the first two sets. "I had," he admitted, "a healthy respect for them."

A behind-the-scenes factor in the doubles was a phone call Fraser made to California to his old mate, Roy Emerson, who was asked by the Swedish Federation three years ago to help Simonsson and Jarryd become good doubles players. "Emmo gave me pointers to some of the things they don't do as well as the Australians," said Fraser.



A typical McNamee interception.