



gallery | p.5
will it be a
messi affair
in spain?

SPORT | P1-5

TRAVEL

canyon country | p.6
a rousing road
trip through the
treasures and
hidden gems
of arizona



monsoon festival | p.7
exploring the
unspoilt gavi



MIND&BODY

yoga | p.8
the wisdom
of sarvagnya
for a better
yogic life

Section 3

SPORT | COVER STORY

week peek: england-australia cricket action p.2

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a tournament like no other

The US Open was originally played on grass until Forest Hills switched to Har-Tru clay courts in 1975. In 1978, the event moved from Forest Hills to its current home at Flushing Meadows, and the surface changed again, to the current DecoTurf. (Jimmy Connors is the only man to have won the US Open on more than one surface. He won it on all three surfaces. Chris Evert won it on two surfaces.)



In 1970, the US Open became the first of the Grand Slam

tournaments to use a tiebreak at the end of a set.

The US Open differs from the other three Grand Slam tournaments in that there are final-set tiebreaks. In the other three tournaments, the fifth set for men and the third set for women continue until someone wins by two games.

In 2006, the US Open became the first Grand Slam tournament to implement instant replay reviews of calls, using the Hawk-Eye computer system.



surface tension:
the deco turf factor

Out of the four Grand Slams, two are played on hard court — the Australian Open and the US Open. Though the courts look similar, there is a technical difference in how the ball bounces. The US Open surface is called DecoTurf, whereas the Australian Open surface is Plexi-cushion Prestige. For the US Open, a hard court surface was introduced in the year 1978. DecoTurf is known for having a slightly lower bounce and does not slow down so much when the ball hits the surface. Players equipped to take advantage of this fare better at the US Open than at other Slams.



past
champions



men			women		
2008	Roger Federer	SUI	2008	Serena Williams	USA
2007	Roger Federer	SUI	2007	Justine Henin	BEL
2006	Roger Federer	SUI	2006	Maria Sharapova	RUS
2005	Roger Federer	SUI	2005	Kim Clijsters	BEL
2004	Roger Federer	SUI	2004	Svetlana Kuznetsova	RUS
2003	Andy Roddick	USA	2003	Justine Henin	BEL
2002	Pete Sampras	USA	2002	Serena Williams	USA
2001	Lleyton Hewitt	AUS	2001	Venus Williams	USA
2000	Marat Safin	RUS	2000	Venus Williams	USA
1999	Andre Agassi	USA	1999	Serena Williams	USA
1998	Patrick Rafter	AUS	1998	Lindsay Davenport	USA

Manju Subhash Chandran previews the last Grand Slam tournament of the tennis season — the US Open (Aug 31-Sep 13)

indian challenge



Sania Mirza, who will be the country's only competitor in the singles, will lead the Indian brigade at the US Open. Ranked World No 71, Sania's game is suited to hard courts and her best results have always come from this part of the season. Once ranked a career best 29, Sania's line of thought will be to gain some important ranking points and launch herself into the top 50.

Sania's best showing in 2009 was in the Pattaya Open, where she was runner-up to Zvonareva. She also won an ATP Challenger event in July — only her second career title.

However, it wouldn't be audacious to expect a Slam title in the doubles. Leander Paes along with his Czech partner Lukas Dlouhy finished runner-up to the Bryans in the US Open last year. And Paes won the mixed doubles title with his Zimbabwean partner Cara Black. Paes has garnered five major titles in men's doubles and another four in mixed doubles. In 2009, he won the French Open doubles and was the runner-up in the mixed doubles at Wimbledon.

Mahesh Bhupathi and his Bahamian mate Mark Knowles had a good run in the hard court season having won the doubles at Montreal Masters. Bhupathi reached the 2009 Australian Open final but lost to the Bryan brothers. Bhupathi has won the US Open doubles title in 2002 and in mixed doubles he showed his worth twice. However, the highlight of this year's showing would be the Australian Open mixed doubles that he won pairing up with compatriot Sania Mirza.

In men's singles, while India's No1 Somdev Devvarman's affinity for the hard courts will always give him a chance of qualifying for the US Open, Prakash Amritraj couldn't make the cut this year.

Australian Open junior champion Yuki Bhambri will be an able contender in the boys' draw. A US Open title would definitely enhance his career graph.

Change is the eternal law of the universe. Never has it been more pronounced than in the fortunes of the world's two best tennis players of the decade.

Flashback year 2008, January, and another tennis milestone was in the making. 2008 would be the year when Roger Federer, a 12-time Grand Slam winner then, would not only equal Pete Sampras' record of 14 but also go one better.

But seldom does sport play by the rules of anticipation. The world had forgotten that another man from Spain, who went by the name of Rafael Nadal, had much more defying designs on the world tennis chart. And belying all expectations, year 2008 saw Nadal ascend to the apogee of tennis excellence, and depose Federer off the throne that had been his for 237 weeks.

Nadal's aggrandising prowess and the apparent waning of Federer's class was a pointer that a change of guard was imminent.

Roger Federer
The World No 1 is a much-relieved man free of all scrutinizing pressures. The signs of resignation have given way to those of unassuming superiority.

Nadal came into the 2008 US Open on a high note. Never a doubt was expressed on his ability to defend the French Open title. But his conquest at Wimbledon, beating the Swiss glider on the greens, and then adding the Olympic gold in Beijing, secured his status as a champion who could rule on grass and hard courts as well.

On the other hand, Federer began his title defence on a wavering note. His self-assured finesse was no longer daunting. The 'aura of invincibility' had been breached. Even the not so fancied had become intrepid. At these times of low morale, Federer won the US Open 2008, his 13th Grand Slam, a reminder to his critics that he still had the Slam lust in him.

Year 2009, the US Open, and once again the outcome could heave the balance of power.

The year began on an ominous note for Federer: Having lost the Australian Open final to Nadal, and with Andy Murray snapping at his heels, tongues were quick to flap. Was the Federer era over?

But the dynamics changed

again. Not only did he reclaim his lost No 1 ranking, he did it in style, winning the one trophy that had tantalisingly evaded his grasp for the last three years. The French Open title was a tribute to the champion.

He also reclaimed his Wimbledon crown and surpassed Pete Sampras' record of 14 Grand Slams.

sweet 16 for federer?

If winning 15 Grand slams could make you a tad complacent, it could also put right all that had gone wrong. The World No 1 is a much-relieved man free of all scrutinizing pressures. The signs of resignation have given way to those of unassuming superiority.

A win would mean a 16th Grand Slam and a sixth consecutive US Open title. A week ago, his then poor record of 2-6 against Murray may have rankled him, but now after beating the Brit in Cincinnati, he has allayed those seeds of queasiness. Federer won the Cincinnati Masters beating Novak Djokovic, another player to whom he had lost their last two meetings. Federer emerges favourite.

off. While last year Nadal came in to the US Open as the top seed, this year he will begin his campaign as the World No 3.

Nadal's quarterfinal and semifinal showing at Montreal and the Cincinnati Masters respectively has been encouraging, though not without streaks of vulnerability.

If Nadal were to win the US Open, he would complete a Career Slam and establish himself creditably as a player to be feared on all courts. Two players completing the Career Slam in the same year (Federer has already achieved the feat) would be eventful!

Last year, Nadal reached the semi-final and a final call could be on the cards unless he meets an unusually inspired Juan Martin del Potro or Jo-Wilfried Tsonga, who have the weapons necessary to battle him.

first triumph for murray?

World No 2 Murray has inched his way — first replacing Djokovic as the World No 3 — where no other has ventured in the last four years. The last time a player other

dick, who have sneaked in many a hair-raising, heart-thumping moments this year.

The gap between those huddled at the top and the rest has narrowed and, rather than the technique and skill, reaching a Grand Slam final after two weeks of rigorous strenuous tennis has become more a test of fortitude and stamina.

Andy Roddick though no neophyte to the Slam summit, had a revealing, reinventing year and proved he still has the pluck to go all the way.

Others, who could upset the apple cart, and elicit a few disappointed groans, are Gilles Simon, Fernando Verdasco, Nikolay Davydenko, Gael Monfils and Robin Soderling.

The grind of the season's last Grand Slam, boisterous New York in terms of atmosphere, could outline a clear-cut ATP map.

time to take charge

When Justine Henin retired in May 2008, little did she realise that it would spark a salvo of successors but none to stay put for long. More than a year after having passing hands between Maria Sharapova, Ana Ivanovic, Serena Williams, Jelena Jankovic and finally Dinara Safina, the World No 1 baton stands unsteady at the top. A new winner at the US Open could ripple the waters further.

Again all eyes would be on the Williams sisters — especially the younger version — who, playing in their home country, will have that extra intent. If Serena were to win the crown, it would be her fourth US Open title and third Grand Slam of the year. At the same time, a win for her would also assuage concerns of lack of dominance on the WTA circuit.

By current form, Jankovic, who won in Cincinnati, and Elena Dementieva, who lifted the Rogers Cup, are clear contenders. But the duo has been found wanting at crucial junctures in big events.

To go strictly by rankings and consistent display, Safina should have lifted a couple of Grand Slams by now. If the World No 1 could muster enough reserves of resolve to fight her 11th hour disintegration, a Grand Slam title would be a redeeming reality.

Besides the Williams sisters, Russians Svetlana Kuznetsova and Sharapova, Belgian Kim Clijsters and Serbian Ana Ivanovic are the other Grand Slam winners. Kuznetsova has won the US Open in 2004, and was runner-up in 2007. This year she was the French Open champion. Kuznetsova could be a potent challenger on a bright sunny day.

Sharapova's full-fledged return to the circuit has shaped up well. Though her double faults, often lurking into two digits, are a cause of concern, her results have improved with every tournament.

Another player who has made an impactful comeback is Kim Clijsters. She beat some top 20 players — Kuznetsova, Marion Bartoli, Victoria Azarenka — in Cincinnati and Toronto.

Those who could inflict an upset or two are Vera Zvonareva, Caroline Wozniacki, Bartoli and Azarenka.

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Jelena Jankovic
On current form, she is a clear contender. But she has been found wanting at crucial junctures.

Rafael Nadal
He has a chance to complete a Career Slam and establish himself as a player to be feared on all courts.

Andy Murray
A win would mean he would get his first Grand Slam. Last year Murray was the finalist and he could go one better this time.

One of the best volleyers around, the fast DecoTurf surface at the US Open — conducive to serve-and-volley play — should favour him as seen in the last five years.

career slam for nadal?

If the 2008 US Open was all about Federer salvaging his 'substandard' year, then 2009 could have the same purport for Nadal.

An injury-stricken Nadal gave Wimbledon a miss and had a 10-week lay

Serena Williams
If she wins, it will be her fourth US Open title and third Grand Slam of the year.

GRAPHIC: K S GUNASEKHAR