

Rafael Nadal: The Humble Champion

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ATPWorldTour.com pays tribute to Nadal on his return to No. 1

A tennis champion is one who doesn't just win matches, collects trophies or plays in an aesthetically pleasing way, but in the eyes of fans globally embodies professionalism, commitment and sportsmanship on and off the court. In an era when superlatives are thrown around, when players are categorised and all-time lists are compiled, there are those gilded few, in living memory, from [Ken Rosewall](#) and [Rod Laver](#) to [Roger Federer](#) and [Rafael Nadal](#), who are lionised. Not just for who they are, but what they represent.

Nadal has sat on a pedestal, living in the spotlight for much of the past 17 years – from the tennis prodigy who practised three times a week from the age of 14 with fellow Mallorcan [Carlos Moya](#), to the winner of 73 tour-level crowns on all surfaces today. His every move, match (and injury) is scrutinised.

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Today, in privacy, surrounded by his family and friends, Nadal could be forgiven to shed a tear upon his return to [No. 1 in the Emirates ATP Rankings](#), but the hard-working, humble and passionate Spanish champion won't allow time for such emotion. He'll be found on a practice court, wearing down his

training partner with match-quality focus, under the gaze of Toni Nadal, [Francisco Roig](#) or Moya.

Omnipresent in the Top 10 since 25 April 2005, aged 18, the past 13 seasons have illustrated Nadal's qualities as a fighter on and off the court. In overcoming elbow, ankle, knee and wrist injuries along the way, Nadal has returned to peak form time and again – striking through the ball with depth and great power, and competing with a clear mind when it comes to the crunch in pressure situations.

Few who witnessed, will ever forget, a crestfallen Nadal walk into a press conference to announce his withdrawal from [Roland Garros](#) last year, prior to his third-round match, with strapping on his left wrist. After three years of injuries, had Nadal's battered body succumbed?

No, there was soon a familiar defiance. In compiling an ATP World Tour best 49-9 match record on the 2017 season, including four titles from seven finals, an injury-free Nadal has made a comeback to peak form. The older you get as a tennis player, the more complex and amazing such a return becomes.

At 31 years of age, Nadal now adds to his 141 weeks at No. 1 in the Emirates ATP Rankings, since his last period in top spot ended on 6 July 2014. It is Nadal's terrific dedication and resilient nature that has ensured today, 21 August 2017, almost nine years to the day since he first attained the top spot, he begins his fourth stint at the summit of men's professional tennis.

A tennis champion should never be written off. Nadal has been on countless occasions, since he first missed seven months of the 2012/13 season due to a knee injury, but he refused to listen to the critics of his dynamic and physical game. He has always known what is required to be the best, the sacrifices he has needed to make so not to bury any hunger, which, in turn, has allowed his talent to flourish.

While coaches globally may be unable to replicate the characteristics of Nadal's game in their young charges, they can learn of the Spaniard's spirit and humility. He is an example of everything that is good about the sport - a superstar player, who continually looks to master his craft in spite of his achievements, untouched by his stardom.