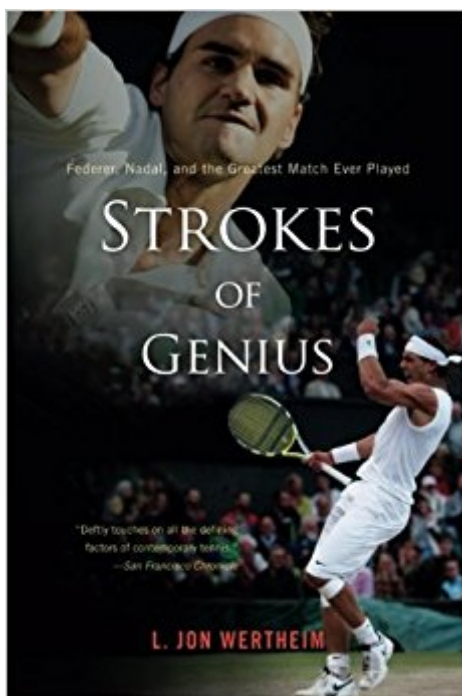


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# Strokes Of Genius: Federer, Nadal, And The Greatest Match Ever Played



## Synopsis

In the 2008 Wimbledon men's final, Centre Court was a stage set worthy of Shakespearean drama. Five-time champion Roger Federer was on track to take his rightful place as the most dominant player in the history of the game. He just needed to cling to his trajectory. So in the last few moments of daylight, Centre Court witnessed a coronation. Only it wasn't a crowning for the Swiss heir apparent but for a swashbuckling Spaniard. Twenty-two-year-old Rafael Nadal prevailed, in five sets, in what was, according to the author, "essentially a four-hour, forty-eight-minute infomercial for everything that is right about tennis—a festival of skill, accuracy, grace, strength, speed, endurance, determination, and sportsmanship." It was also the encapsulation of a fascinating rivalry, hard fought and of historic proportions. In the tradition of John McPhee's classic *Levels of the Game*, *Strokes of Genius* deconstructs this defining moment in sport, using that match as the backbone of a provocative, thoughtful, and entertaining look at the science, art, psychology, technology, strategy, and personality that go into a single tennis match. With vivid, intimate detail, Wertheim re-creates this epic battle in a book that is both a study of the mechanics and art of the game and the portrait of a rivalry as dramatic as that of Ali vs. Frazier, Palmer vs. Nicklaus, and McEnroe vs. Borg.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Exclusive: Blake Bailey Reviews *Strokes of Genius* Blake Bailey is the author of *Cheever: A Life*, which the New York Times called "a definitive, Dickensian rendering of a complete and complicated life, addictively readable and long overdue." His last book, *A Tragic Honesty: The Life and Work of*

Richard Yates, was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award. Read his exclusive guest review of *Strokes of Genius*: If, like me, you regard Roger Federer as one of the three or four most glorious athletes in human history, and an awfully nice guy to boot, then the years 2004 to 2007 were golden years for you. This was the "Federer era" in tennis, when he won 11 of 16 Grand Slam tournaments and amassed an astonishing match record of 315-24. Nor was there much of the nasty tension entailed by hard-fought five-set matches; as a fan of Federer, one had only to sit back and sigh at the artistry--the elegant angles, the impossible retrievals, the bazooka forehands--while Federer rose to the occasion (good-naturedly) again and again, usually in straight sets. This belle Époque might have continued, if not for the rise of the musclebound Spaniard, Rafael Nadal, indisputably the greatest clay-court player of all time. For a while it seemed, at worst, that neither Federer nor anyone else would win the French Open as long as Nadal was healthy; but then Nadal began to dominate on faster surfaces, too. Transcending himself in the fifth set, Federer managed to defeat Nadal in the 2007 Wimbledon final (perhaps the third or fourth greatest match ever played) and thus equal Borg's Open-era record of five straight Wimbledon titles. Borg himself, however, predicted that Nadal would not only win the next Wimbledon, but goad the demoralized Federer out of tennis entirely--reminiscent, that is, of McEnroe's effect on Borg, who retired at age 26 after losing his edge in the rivalry. As L. Jon Wertheim points out in *Strokes of Genius*--his riveting analysis of the 2008 Federer-Nadal Wimbledon final, and an instant classic of tennis literature--the "clashing styles" of the two greats have made theirs the gold standard of sports rivalries: "Feline light versus bovine heavy. Middle European restraint and quiet meticulousness versus Iberian bravado and passion. Dignified power versus an unapologetic, whoomphing brutality. Zeus versus Hercules." A senior writer for *Sports Illustrated*, Wertheim describes the match itself with expertise and élan ("an oil painting of a forehand volley"), while widening and tightening his lens to examine almost every aspect of the modern game: the curious obsolescence of the serve-and-volley approach; the evolution of the racket (natural gut versus polyester, etc.); the vagaries of various players, most notably Nadal and Federer. (Fun fact: Nadal--whose "awkward" left-hand game has given Federer such fits--is actually right-handed.) These digressions, so nicely deployed, helped distract this reader from a very unhappy ending: 6-4, 6-4, 6-7, 6-7, 9-7, which one fan aptly likened to "watching an angel fall." This much we know (and never mind the woe that, Federer-wise, would follow), but did you know that in England, at 9:20 P.M., there was a 1400-megawatt power surge when millions rose as one from their couches to switch the lights on, released at last from the intolerable tension of the greatest match in history? For that detail, and many like it, you need Wertheim's engrossing book. --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

**\*Starred Review\*** Like the singular match that inspired it, this account of the 2008 Wimbledon final between Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal is compelling from the get-go. Senior Sports Illustrated writer Wertheim begins with this observation: "Bracketed together as they are, most rivals have the good sense to know that, finally, they are better for the existence of their nemesis." And so Federer and Nadal were each better in the grueling yet brilliant five-set match that Nadal won in twilight. Wertheim sets the stage well, putting the rivalry into context and discussing each man's playing style ("Relentless genius Federer versus unbending will Nadal"), then launches into crisp and colorful play-by-play, freezing the action throughout with intriguing discourses on such issues as the preponderance of champion lefties, the (thankfully) slower Wimbledon grass in recent years, each of the two players' development, and the mostly charming peculiarities of the Wimbledon tournament (no play on the middle Sunday, for instance). Hardcore tennis fans will revel in Wertheim's expertise and his proximity to the players and their event; others can't help but be attracted to a vision of two champions and a rivalry in their prime. --Alan Moores --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

Even if you are not a regular Tennis fan, you can get an insider's look at the little nuances that occur during every Tennis match, and The most descriptive account of The greatest match ever played. Roger Federer lost this game, but everyone who witnessed it knew that his defeat was a minor glitch in his resume, for he fought hard until The end to pull almost The impossible comeback, with his trademark genius and artistry, which by The way, his rival sorely lacked. Tremendous tale by mr. Wertheim!!

Jon Wertheim had an advantage in writing "Strokes of Genius," in that he was describing one of the best and most exciting tennis matches in the sport's history. Yet in less capable hands, this book could have dragged on endlessly with repetitive descriptions of forehands and backhands. Instead, Wertheim wrote one of the best sports books I've read in the past few years. The book is not just the story of the one match, but also the story of Roger Federer, Rafael Nadal, Wimbledon, and tennis itself. Wertheim looks at the match from what seems like every possible angle, even telling the story of the chair umpire. I was amazed at Wertheim's ability to sustain interest over a full book on a single tennis match. No matter how great the match was, and it was one of the best ever, an account of any tennis match can only remain interesting for a thousand words or so. Because Wertheim uses the match as a springboard to tell many related stories, the narrative remains

compelling throughout.

A great account of a fascinating rivalry. The book is even more interesting given the paths that each of these players has taken since this memorable clash. Great background information on each player as well as on the match itself. This needs to come with a DVD of the match!

I liked Jon's easy writing style. Lots of interesting factoids come out about pro circuit tennis during description of the 2009 Wimbledon final. I had already read other biography's on both players, this book went into less depth on childhood development. Look forward to an official biography by either star.

Solid read if you enjoy the Rafa Nadal and Federer rivalry. It weaves in their background and upbringing which I thought was the most interesting part of the book, not necessarily the play by play of the sets. Good read if you're a tennis fan.

A great book! I started reading and I finished it the same day !

This is a very good book that tells the story of the infamous 2008 Wimbledon final between Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal. Not only does the author go into details of each set of this historic match but provides insightful information regarding the traditions of Wimbledon and the player's family/team. I would advise potential readers that this book is geared for the hard core tennis fan, not a casual fan of the sport.

You do not have to be a tennis fan to truly enjoy this superbly written book. I stayed up all night to finish this book. It greatly details the lives of both Nadal and Federer as it parallels the greatest sporting event I have ever witnessed. I grew up with Montana's 49ers, Jordan's Bulls, Tyson's knock outs and the Sampras vs Agasi classics and this match tops them all in my opinion. This book puts a heart and soul to the greatest tennis match that history will ever see.

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