

## Top 10 Shuffle

SIX SWINGERS HAVE THEIR EYES ON A SWEET SPOT IN THE RANKINGS.

By Lindsay Berra

**THE USUAL SUSPECTS**—Nadal, Federer, Jankovic—are favored entering the U.S. hard court season. But Top 10 heavyweights beware. Novak Djokovic vaulted from No. 13 to No. 7 with 2007 finals appearances at Indian Wells and Miami, and with Venus and Serena skipping the desert (see Drop Shots) and Maria Sharapova's shoulder still a question, the women's field is set for similar jumps. Look for these six to make a rankings dash.

**TOMMY ROBREDO** COUNTRY SPAIN RANK 15 AGE 26

Robredo shot to No. 5 in 2006 and reached the quarters at both the French and Aussie opens in 2007, but last season he fell to No. 22, citing fatigue. **WHY THE RACKET?** This season he's off to an 18-4 start, including titles on the clay at Costa do Sauípe and Buenos Aires. "When you don't start a year well, you put a lot of kilos on your back," Robredo says. "When you start well, everything is easier." **TECHNIQUE** Robredo is a speedy counterpuncher with a mean forehand.

**RADEK STEPANEK** COUNTRY CZECH REPUBLIC RANK 18 AGE 30

Until now, Stepanek has gained more fame for dating tennis darlings Martina Hingis and Nicole Pietrangeli than for his game, winning just two titles in his first 152 tournaments. **WHY THE RACKET?** The oldest player in the Top 20, Stepanek has won at Brisbane and San Jose this season and is off to a 16-3 start. **TECHNIQUE** Stepanek has a tricky serve-and-volley game, slugs from the baseline and uncorks on-court antics (check out his celebratory "worm" dance) that drive opponents batty.

**MARIN CILIC** COUNTRY CROATIA RANK 19 AGE 20

It's a running joke that players who can't serve aces are kicked out of tennis schools in Croatia. Cilic must have aced the acing course: He is tied for eighth in the ATP this season with 138. **WHY THE RACKET?** Cilic has won titles on the hard courts of Chennai and Zagreb this season. He also is fourth in service games won (88%) and eighth in first-serve points won (78%). **TECHNIQUE** His serve and stroke have earned him comparisons to countryman Goran Ivanisevic—without the temper.

**VICTORIA AZARENKA** COUNTRY BELARUS RANK 11 AGE 19

At the Australian Open, Azarenka took the first set, 6-3, from No. 2 seed Serena Williams before illness forced her to retire midway through the fourth-round match. "She was punch-drunk," says ESPN analyst Pam Shriver. "But she can really crack the ball."

**WHY THE RACKET?** The forfeit against Serena is Azarenka's only loss in 2009. She earned her first Tour title at Brisbane in early January and won her second weeks later in Memphis, moving up four spots in the rankings since the start of the year.

**TECHNIQUE** She's a heady baseliner who strikes the ball well from both sides.

**CAROLINE WOZNIACKI** COUNTRY DENMARK RANK 12 AGE 18

With a mom who played for the Polish national volleyball team and a pro soccer player for a dad, Wozniacki certainly has genetic cred. She's developing the game to go with it, and her countrymen are taking notice. At Stockholm last year, she became the first Danish woman to win a Tour singles title. Danish fans responded by showing up at a hockey arena in Copenhagen to watch her Olympic matches on the big screen, including a third-round loss to Elena Dementieva. **WHY THE RACKET?** She's 12-5 this season and in Sydney lost to Serena in a third-set tie-break in the quarters.

**TECHNIQUE** The 5'10" baseline slugger's best shot is a high, two-handed backhand that has deceptive trajectory.

**ALIZE CORNET** COUNTRY FRANCE RANK 14 AGE 19

Though one of the smaller top players (5'8", 132 pounds), Cornet had a big 2008. She climbed from No. 57 to No. 16 thanks to her first Tour victory (Budapest), third-round appearances at the French and U.S. opens and wins over Top 10ers Anna Chakvetadze and Svetlana Kuznetsova. **WHY THE RACKET?** This winter, Cornet put herself through a rigorous training regimen to improve her net game. "The future of women's tennis is at the net," she says. "If I want to get into the Top 10, I have to be more aggressive." **TECHNIQUE** Cornet makes up for a lack of power with shot variety and quickness.

THE NUMBER

# 154

Win your first Challenger Tour title, jump 154 spots. That's what Bernard Tomic pulled off when he beat fellow Aussie Marinko Matosevic in Melbourne on March 1. At 16 years 4 months, Tomic is the third-youngest Challenger champ in the past 25 years, and he bolted from 536 to 382 on the ATP list. Who's listed as the sixth-youngest winner? Some guy named Nadal.

## DROP SHOTS

BY DALE BRAUNER

How severely will the WTA punish the **WILLIAMS SISTERS** for skipping Indian Wells? As it turns out, not at all. A wrinkle in the WTA's new Road Map policy says a player can make amends for skipping a tourney by doing a promo appearance within 125 miles of the event. Venus and

Serena's hometown of LA is—surprise—125 miles from the event site in Palm Springs ... Speaking of Americans at Indian Wells, could **MARDY FISH** snap the U.S. men's seven-year drought in the desert? The world No. 20 looked strong on March 1, when he became the first top seed to win Delray Beach ... **ROGER FEDERER** says he will play a whopping seven or eight more seasons. But will the 27-year-old need all that time to pocket two more Slam titles and surpass **PETE SAMPRAS'** record of

14? Good question. The last player older than 27 to win a Slam was **ANDRE AGASSI**, who was 32 when he aced the 2003 Australian Open ... Wimbledon will debut its new retractable roof at "A Centre Court Celebration" on May 17. Agassi, **STEFFI GRAF**, **KIM CLIJSTERS** and **TIM HENMAN** will play exhibitions ... **NOVAK DJOKOVIC'S** move from Wilson to Head rackets at the end of last year is starting to pay off. Djokovic exited Brisbane in the first round with the new ax but rallied to win Dubai. "It's

a big switch," he says. "The Head has more power. Maybe too much power in some moments" ... Is **JELENA DOKIC'S** comeback for real? The former No. 4, who fell to 178 at year-end 2008, made a two-week stop at Nick Bollettieri's in Florida. "I worked with Jelena on hitting more offensive balls," says Bollettieri. "Don't be surprised to see her play deep in big tournaments" ... Can you say au revoir, **MARAT SAFIN**? The 29-year-old Russian says his November stop in Paris will be his last.

**ALL NEWS** David Nalbandian, Andy Murray drop Davis Cup ... ATP withdraws investments from sponsor Stanford Financial ... Boris Becker proposes to girlfriend on TV, jumps through "heart of fire" ...