

Rusedski losing mind game

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Greg Rusedski's outburst at Wimbledon highlighted one fatal flaw in his make-up. He must conquer it to become a winner. **By Nick Pitt**

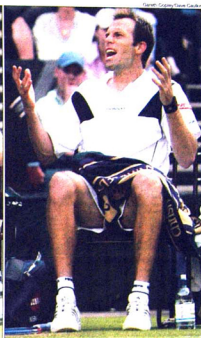
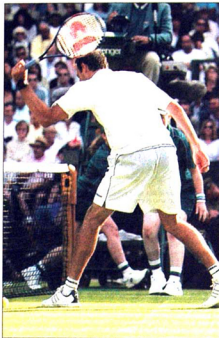
Dependent about his place among the legions of those who are not quite champions as well as highly strung and given to self-advertisement, our case study, a Mr Rusedski, recently drew attention to himself with a spectacular episode of self-destruction.

His notes should be placed in the bulging file on tennis along with those relating to Goran Ivanisevic, who once broke all his rackets, and Martina Hingis, who threw away the French Open singles title in 1999 in a red mist of rage and tears. In passing, since it may amuse you, take a glance at the poll file, where the Colin Montgomerie and Tommy Bolt material can be found.

Money and his tantrums, of course, you know. But you may not be so familiar with "Thunder Bolt," the finest club-breaker and thrower of all time. In one US Tour event, he asked his caddy how far he had to the pin on the 18th hole — 163 yards. Bolt called for his six iron. No sir, the caddy said, it's either a one iron or a two iron. What do you mean? Give me the six iron. No sir, nine iron or two iron — those are the only clubs we have left.

Certain features commonly present among every member of this club are an exaggerated sense of injustice leading to persecution complex, accompanied by self-digust, even self-hated. But the Rusedski case is distinctive in that what we might call the red mist descended after he lost a point that he badly wanted.

True, he had lost the first two sets to tie-breaks and could consider himself unfortunate. But he had at last broken Andy Roddick's serve and the third set was his for the taking, whether or not the point of dispute was replayed or allowed to stand. So he didn't succumb to blind rage because



Losing the plot: Greg Rusedski explodes in fury after an 'out' call from the crowd leads to a lost point in his duel with Andy Roddick. Rusedski went on to lose the match and his histrionics landed him with a fine of £1,500

he had been cheated of his chance of winning. Some deeper demon emerged to undermine his rationality.

Rusedski came close to admitting as much in his press conference. "It's emotional and just wanting it so badly," he said in explanation. "I was desperate to go as far as I could in these championships."

"You're fighting out there, you're trying everything you possibly can. I could have served for it and still been in a fourth set. It's what you can't control. You just have to let go sometimes and I couldn't do that."

According to Pat Cash, who knows Rusedski well, and knows such problems from his own experience, it was a crash that was wanting to happen.

"Greg has an ability to sabotage his career and this was the final straw," Cash said.

"No normal-behaving tennis player does that over one line call — not John McEnroe, not Ilije Nastase, not anybody. It was very, very strange behaviour."

"In my own career, I only ever lost one match because I lost my temper. That was in the US Open when I was 18. I learnt my lesson."

But Greg is 29 now. When I coached him, I knew that he tended to get very tense when Wimbledon came around and I recommended that he get help from a sports psychologist, which didn't happen. But this year, when he was coming back from injury, there was no pressure on him at all."

The key, of course, is whether next time Rusedski will destroy himself once more, or learn to keep control, as Cash, Ivanisevic and Hingis, who all became champions,

snowaker, Rusedski urgently needs help in finding a way to deal with such episodes.

"It will happen again and it is likely to get worse," Macpherson said. "As Greg

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managed to do. According to Dan Macpherson, a sports psychologist who has worked with Cash and other tennis players as well as leading performers in motor racing and

grid-oh and his opportunities to win grand slam titles grow fewer, the pressure on him will increase."

The remedy, according to Macpherson, who is trained in

clinical hypnotherapy and prefers to be styled a mind coach, is that Rusedski needs to get in touch with his subconscious and bypass his conscious mind to cope with crisis.

"I would sit Greg down and ask him how he would like to feel and act when such events occur. Then I would use hypnosis to bring out his talents and self-belief. He has the game to be a champion. But that game has to be allowed to work, with help and not interference from the mind."

"What happened to Greg was that he felt a sense of injustice and implied. He had fought back onto the match and an external event threatened to deny him his due. He completely lost perspective. So under hypnosis, and to use a

computing metaphor, I would rewire the programme in his mind that malfunctioned in such circumstances. I would give him a trigger word, 'calm' perhaps, which he could use to allow his subconscious to take over, and his conscious self to move on to concentrate on the next point."

If such therapy were successful, Rusedski might even be able to employ anger to advantage, in the way of McEnroe, who remains a unique psychological subject. Of course, McEnroe often behaved badly, but he never whiffs, just control.

"McEnroe's incidents were his way of expelling frustration," said Macpherson. "They used to happen when he wasn't playing well. He used to look

puzzled as if he couldn't understand why he was playing so poorly. Then he would use an external event, such as a bad line call, as a way of explanation. People were against him, he was being cheated. So he would explode, releasing all his problems, and when he resumed, he marvellously played better. Of course, he had also spent the rhythm of his opponent, but I don't think that was conscious gamemanship. It was very tricky from which Cash suffered and learnt. "McEnroe was very difficult to play," he said. "He seemed to lose his temper and then he would come back and win the very next point. I learnt how to do that from him. How to win the next point. How to feel better immediately, how to go on to win."