

THE LAST NEW MATCH PLAY

A WANT.
WANT.
WIN.
MORE.

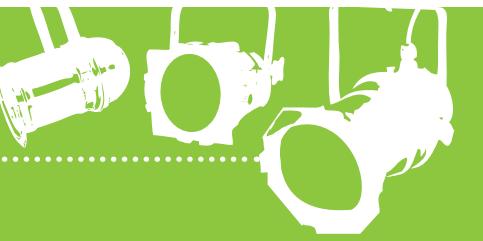
BY
ANNA ZIEGLER
DIRECTED BY
GAYE TAYLOR
UPCHURCH



ROUNDABOUT
THEATRE
COMPANY

UPSTAGE GUIDE
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EDUCATION AT
ROUNDABOUT

UPSTAGE SPOTLIGHT



THE LAST MATCH

By Anna Ziegler

Directed by Gaye Taylor Upchurch

You've given it all to reach the top of your game. Now where do you go from here? That's the question at the heart of Anna Ziegler's new play *The Last Match*. It's the semifinals of the US Open, and two tennis greats are facing off in the match of their lives. Tim Porter, the aging all-American favorite, wants to prove to the world, his wife and himself that he's still a champion. Hot-headed rising star Sergei Sergeyev struggles to believe he truly deserves to beat his lifelong hero.

A NOTE FROM ARTISTIC DIRECTOR TODD HAIMES

The Last Match unpacks the monumental pressures and aspirations that drive each shot on the tennis court, exploring the sacrifices made by some of the world's biggest sports stars in the name of ambition. In a career that, by its short-lived nature, leaves little room for error, the competing demands of family, reputation, and self-actualization can transform a match into a war.

WHEN Present

WHERE US Open

WHO
Tim: mid-30s, a professional tennis player, all-American.
Sergei: mid-20s, a Russian professional tennis player.
Mallory: mid-30s, Tim's wife and a former player.
Galina: mid/late 20s, Sergei's girlfriend, also Russian.

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INTERVIEW WITH PLAYWRIGHT ANNA ZIEGLER

Education Dramaturg Ted Sod spoke with Playwright Anna Ziegler about her play *The Last Match*.

Ted Sod: Where were you born and educated? Why did you want to become a playwright? Did you have any teachers who had a profound influence on you?

AZ: I was born in New York City and grew up there, in Brooklyn. I went to St. Ann's School for 12 years, which as some people probably know, is a bastion of/for the arts. So, it wasn't so much a question of whether I would become an artist, but which kind. I am being a little facetious, but it really was an environment that made a life in the arts seem possible and respectable. Teachers were often working writers and artists, which was incredibly inspiring. At St. Ann's, Marty Skoble, who taught me poetry for many years, had a profound influence on me, as did Beth Bosworth and Elise Meslow. Later, in college, Arthur Kopit saw something in my poetry that made him think I could write plays and suggested I apply to graduate school in playwriting. There I was lucky enough to be mentored by Rinne Groff and Martin Epstein, who showed me that there were so many ways to write a play, and that you didn't have to follow certain rules. You could make up your own rules, and then break your own rules, and a play could also be poetry.

TS: What inspired you to write *The Last Match*? What would you say this play is about?

AZ: The idea for the play took root when Andy Roddick retired from professional tennis in 2012. I was so moved by his goodbye speech at the US Open and by the idea of someone so young (he'd just turned 30) having to change course so entirely, to give up everything he'd known and worked so hard on. Little did I know I was about to undergo my own retirement, in a sense. Within a few weeks, I was pregnant with my first child. And while I can't say that having kids has felt like a retirement in any traditional sense of the word—in many ways, of course, it's the exhausting opposite—I did shift gears, and move beyond the life I had known. And I came face to face with my place in the cycle of things. And I think it was the combination of these two things—along with a love of tennis that began when I was a little kid, and played all the time—that inspired the writing of *The Last Match*.

To me, it's a play about how and why we do things—why we push ourselves to compete, why we have children, find love, grieve—in the face of or in spite of death. Why we keep wanting things throughout our lives, especially given the fact that nothing is ever enough. Or the bravery of wanting things despite nothing ever being enough. It's also about a kind of American denial of mortality, and the feeling—the hope we all harbor—that certain athletes can defy time. Early in the play, one of the characters says that the fans at a tennis match want the newcomer/underdog to defeat the long-time reigning champ—and, also, they don't want that at all. Because somewhere, deep down, we want to believe that that reigning champ can live forever, and that so will we.



TS: How are you collaborating with your director, Gaye Taylor Upchurch—can you give us a sense of what you look for when collaborating with a director on new work?

AZ: GT—as she is often known—is an amazing director, and I've been really lucky to have worked with her on this play for a long time. She directed its first production at The Old Globe in San Diego and brought it to life in a way I never could have imagined, giving the audience powerful access to its poetry and its humor, and finding visual poetry and movement that made everything more vital.

When I collaborate with a director on a new play, I look for someone who is going to embrace the less traditional aspects of my work—the fact that time can be fluid and that we're very often in a memory space as opposed to a literal one—along with the need for a strong dramaturgical hand...and patience! Theatre requires a lot of patience, and I'm not long on that, so it's good for me to work with directors who enjoy the process, who accept that different people will figure things out in different ways, at different times, and that ultimately, despite all these personalities (and often we are not at our best when beset by the terror that what we're making won't work, or will be an embarrassment) the play will find itself.

TS: Will you give us some insight into your process as a writer? What kind of research did you have to do in order to write this play? How active will you be in rehearsals on this particular show?

AZ: Embarrassingly, I don't have much of a process. I work in different ways on every project. *The Last Match* was a lot of fun to write because I felt close to the world I was writing about and it all kind of flowed. I loved writing these characters. And even though I felt I knew the tennis world pretty well, writing this play was a good excuse to read *Open*, Andre Agassi's wonderful memoir, which I couldn't recommend more highly. It really pulls back the curtain on professional sports—and is catnip for a writer because it gives you a sense of what people are really thinking while they're performing, while they're making things look easy. Spoiler alert: things are not as easy as they look and life sucks for everyone. I hope to be really active in the rehearsals for this show—this production is happening in New York, where I live, after all. You have to make the most of that as a playwright because so much of what you do is out of town.

TS: Do you expect there to be any rewriting during the rehearsal and preview periods? If so, how does the rewriting process usually manifest itself on your plays? Is there more rewriting done during the rehearsals or during previews or...?

AZ: I do imagine there will be some rewriting in September. But since this play has already had a production, I don't feel like I'm in a place where I'm still figuring it all out. Now it's about refining. In general, I rewrite a lot in the lead-up to a first production—during workshops and in anticipation of readings—and then when I'm in rehearsals it's often a process of making the thing as lean as possible. Previews are for gauging where the audience drops out and figuring out how to fix that—which can be accomplished through any combination of text changes, acting notes, and shifts in the design.

TS: I'm curious how you understand the relationship of the two couples to each other and how the men and women relate to each other in this play. It seems to me both couples (Tim and Mallory, and Sergei and Galina) are somewhat symbiotic—would you agree?

AZ: Yes, I do. Sergei certainly needs Galina—in a very obvious way, she supports him and motivates him—but she also needs him; it might sound a little anti-feminist, but he and his career give her a purpose, too. She relishes being what he needs, the only one who can truly inspire him—and also, and not least, they really love each other. Tim needs Mallory to keep him grounded, to find humility, and to make sure he doesn't take himself too seriously. She needs him to keep her from going to darker places in her mind. I think they are also deeply in love. This isn't a play about people who shouldn't be together, or people searching in vain for connection. I have written those plays, but this isn't one of them. And in terms of how the couples relate to each other, we've talked a lot in rehearsals for this play about how the trajectory for the Americans is one of coming to accept life's limitations, while for the Russians it's about coming to accept life's possibilities. Sergei and Galina ultimately see that joy and success are achievable, and Tim and



Wilson Bethel and Alex Mickiewicz in *The Last Match*

Mallory see that no matter what our lives are going to be pockmarked by sadness. In some ways, the couples exist in inverse relation to each other.

TS: What traits did you need in casting the actors for the four roles in *The Last Match*?

AZ: I'd say that these four all need to be versatile actors—all of the characters exist in different places on the emotional spectrum at various points in the play. And all four need to be funny, to have a good sense of comic timing and a light touch.

TS: How do you keep yourself inspired as an artist? Do you have any advice for young people who say they want to write for the theatre?

AZ: Seeing and reading plays definitely keeps me inspired. In fact, there's nothing more simultaneously soul-crushing and soul-nourishing than seeing a play you love. Soul-crushing because you fear you will never write something as good, but also here is the bar, now a notch higher. It's incredibly motivating. Also, just living this complicated, full life, juggling kids, parents, and a husband along with this strange, unpredictable job that requires different things each time—all of that is pretty inspiring, too. Which isn't to say I don't periodically endure stretches of panic because I don't feel inspired—I do. But, in general, I find that the fuller and faster life feels the more hungry I am to try to set it down on paper in some way, maybe as a way to slow things down, to think about what's interesting or troubling or gnawing at me.

As far as advice to aspiring writers goes, I'd go back to reading and seeing lots of plays. These will teach you what you like and want to emulate, and soon enough your voice will be your own. •

THE GAME OF TENNIS



THE SCORE

A tennis **match** is an extended, continuous period of game play, divided into **sets**, which are in turn divided into **games**.

MATCH: A determined, odd number of sets. To win the match, a player must win 2 out of 3, or 3 out of 5 (in men's professionals).

SET: A continuous series of six or more games. To win a set, a player must win at least six games AND at least 2 more games than the opponent. Most professional tournaments now use a **Tie-Breaker** game with a simplified scoring system if the set score is 6-6. A **Set Point** means the player needs only 1 more point to win the set.

GAME: a sequence of **points** played, with the same player serving. To win a game, a player must score at least 4 points total AND at least 2 points more than the opponent. The score is always called with the Server's score first.

When a player needs only 1 more point to win the game, this is called a **Game Point**

A **Match Point** means the player needs only 1 more point to win the match.

POINTS in a game are scored as followed:

No points	=	Love
1st point won	=	"15"
2nd point won	=	"30"
3rd point won	=	"40"**
4th point won	=	Game (signifies the end of the game)

*If both players reach 40 points, the score is **Deuce**. After a Deuce, the next player to win a point has **Advantage**. The player still needs to win the next consecutive point after the Advantage, otherwise they return to Deuce.

THE SERVE

One player serves per game. The server of the first game is decided by a coin toss or spin of the racket. The server starts each game serving behind the baseline of the right hand court. The server must put the ball into the service box diagonally opposite. S/he is allowed 2 attempts to get the ball into the service box.

If any part of the ball touches the line, the ball is **IN**. If the ball lands outside the service box or does not clear the net or the net post, it is called a **Fault**.

If a second serve is not in, this is called a **Double Fault**, and the Receiving player wins the point.

A **Foot Fault** is called against the server if his/her foot touches the baseline, center line, or sideline before the ball is struck.

If the ball clips the net before landing within the legal service box, this is a **Let**, and the server is allowed to try it again.

The server switches to the opposite side of the center line after each point. On the next game, the other player takes over as the server.

WINNING POINTS

An **Ace** is when a serve is not returned by the receiving player. The server wins this point.

A **Break Point** is when the non-serving player needs only one more point to win (at 30-40).

A **Double Break Point** is announced if the receiving player is ahead by two points (15-40), and a **Triple Break Point** is called at 0-40, meaning the receiver is ahead by 3 points and needs just one more to win.

A **Passing Shot** (or, "To Pass") is a forceful shot that goes beyond the opponent's reach.

Points are also won if:

Opponent does not return the ball before it bounces twice.

Opponent hits the ball into the net.

Opponent hits the ball out of bounds.

PLAYING TERMS:

VOLLEY: When a tennis player connects with the tennis ball in midair before it bounces.

DOWN-THE-LINE: Hitting the ball straight across, rather than diagonally into the cross court.

To **DOCK A POINT**: To take a point away for bad behavior. •

THIS THING CALLED LOVE

How zero came to be called "love" is still debated in the tennis world. Some believe it derives from "l'oeuf," which means "the egg," since an egg is shaped like a zero. However, French tennis scores use "zero." "Love" has also been traced to the Flemish/Dutch word "lof," which means honor. Another theory is that calling "love" (at zero) means there is nothing to lose but the love of the game.

BASELINE**CENTER MARK**

THE COURT

Most courts are made of cement or concrete, but some courts are made of clay or grass. The US Open uses a concrete court, known as a "hard" court.

SERVICE LINE**DOUBLES SIDELINE****SINGLES SIDELINE**

**LEFT
SERVICE
BOX**

CENTER LINE

**RIGHT
SERVICE
BOX**

NET

NET: 3 feet high, dividing the court into two halves. Players must hit the ball over the net on each shot.

SERVICE BOXES: The area in which a legal serve must land.

SERVICE LINE: Parallel to the net, marking the farthest end of the two service boxes.

CENTER LINE: The line running perpendicular to the net that divides the two service boxes.

CENTER MARK: The line dividing the service area into two halves.

BASELINE: Parallel to the net, marking the boundary on the length of the court. Servers must stand behind the baseline.

SIDELINES: Perpendicular to the net, marking the boundary on the width of the court. The sidelines vary for singles and doubles play. The ball is called "out" if it bounces outside the sidelines.

CHANGING SIDES: Throughout a set, players switch sides of the court after the 1st, 3rd, 5th game, and so on. In the professionals, players are allowed a 90-second rest between side changes, known as a "change-over". (This is extended to 2 minutes at the end of a set.) If a set ends and the total number of games played was even, then the players stay on their current side and play the 1st game of the new set on the same side before changing sides.

INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR GAYE TAYLOR UPCHURCH

Education Dramaturg Ted Sod spoke with Director Gaye Taylor Upchurch about her work on *The Last Match*.

Ted Sod: Where were you born and educated? Why did you want to become a theatre director? Did you have any teachers who had a profound influence on you?

Gaye Taylor Upchurch: I grew up in Jackson, Mississippi with my mom and visited NYC often to see my dad. I was an English major at Wake Forest University and several years later, after I discovered a love of theatre, earned a BFA in Directing at UNC School of the Arts. I didn't know that I wanted to become a theatre director. I had seen some Broadway musicals, but I didn't realize that theatre work could be an actual job. A few years after college, I was teaching 7th grade English and had just quit dancing in a modern dance company. I ended up in a conversation with Gerald Freedman, the then-dean of Drama at UNC School of the Arts, and he encouraged me to pursue directing as the best way to synthesize the disparate parts of my background (an English major who studied dance and art history). Through Gerald's guidance, I fell in love with directing. He taught by getting his students out into the world to experience different art forms and asking us to articulate what we thought about each encounter we had with art. In this way, he ensured we were forming our own opinions and ideas about art and art-making. He made me think about directing as something larger than each individual project—that it is something that asks us to make connections between the world at large and the individual stories we are telling. I love being a director because each play asks for something different from me. I like living my life in a way that supports my curiosity about the world.

TS: Why did you choose to direct Anna Ziegler's play, *The Last Match*? What do you think this play is about?

GTU: I'm always drawn to plays that could not exist in any other medium, and *The Last Match* is one of those. I love the physicality of the piece—the challenge of bringing the US Open to the stage was something I wanted to take on. Although I'm not a rabid fan of any particular sports team, I love going to games—it's some of the best theatre available. I always think if we can capture in theatre the anticipation and elation or devastation that people feel when watching sports, then we've really accomplished something. I became aware of the play when The Old Globe in San Diego, a theatre I work with as often as possible, sent it to me. We did a production of the play there in January 2016.

The Last Match explores the ongoing questions of what we really want and how are we choosing to spend our time on this earth. It's Mary Oliver's question, "Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life" writ large and examined deeply in story form. What do you want more than anything? What happens once you achieve the thing you say you want? What then? And if you can't achieve it? What then? The play is also a meditation on both parenthood and striving to become accomplished in a career. I love that Anna takes a hard look at the decision between spending time doing the thing you love and spending time with the people you love, and she makes no judgments and offers no easy solutions. Because there aren't any. Anna's writing is so nuanced and layered—it's a real gift to actors and directors. There's



an acknowledgement in the play that life is more complicated than black and white choices. And as I'm answering the questions of this interview while holding one of my 6-week-old twins in my arms, I am finding that Anna's brilliant exploration of the simultaneous pursuits of work and family resonate.

TS: How are you collaborating with your design team—can you give us a sense of how your production will manifest visually? Since the game of tennis is very much a part of the plot, what will the sound design be like? Will there be original music? Will there be a tennis expert working on the show? If so, how will you collaborate with him or her?

GTU: On the page, the play moves seamlessly between the match the men are playing and the memories they are having about their lives off the court. I wanted the physical production to reflect that same swiftness of memory—so the memory scenes can suddenly take over what's happening in the match and be unencumbered by large physical shifts. The designers and I worked to boil the play down to its essence, physically speaking, so we could make big, sweeping gestures to bring us into the world of the play rather than get sidetracked by minutiae that might gum up the works and keep the play from moving swiftly.

I feel really fortunate in this design team we're working with. Tim Mackabee, our set designer, explored basic elements of the US Open to make the audience feel like we're there—the sky, the scoreboard, the court colors—and he and Bradley King, our lighting designer, collaborated so that stadium lighting is both a scenic and lighting

element that will place us at the match. Montana Blanco's costumes will help to reveal character and will be also be especially useful in the memory scenes to give us information about where and when those scenes are taking place. For sound design, Bray Poor has created a soundscape that, through careful crafting, is realistic for the match—it's the element that will ground the production in reality. Since our tennis playing onstage won't be real, we wanted a sound design that would be. So while you won't see a ball bouncing as the players hit it back and forth, you will hear it bounce and hit the non-existent racquet—all of which will be carefully coordinated between the actors and the stage manager, Sam Watson, who will be calling the sound cues. I love relying on the imagination of the audience to meet the skillfulness of the performers and designers to experience the story we are telling.

There will be a tennis expert—Mary Carillo! She is planning to meet with the cast on the grounds of the Open for some tennis tips. We will also ask a tennis pro to not only give lessons to Wilson and Alex, but also to come into rehearsal to see our tennis choreography. We'll happily take any notes they may have about how to make our pretend playing more believable.

TS: Will you give us some insight into your process as a director? What kind of research did you have to do in order to direct this play? How will you use rehearsal time on this particular show?

GTU: Maybe because of my dance background, I'm always excited by the physicality of a piece. How does it move? How does it interact with the space we are playing? I'm very interested in how bodies in space tell a particular story—I'm endlessly fascinated by how the precise distance between two people standing on stage can allow for varying degrees of tension in a scene. In rehearsals, I'm always searching for the best way to bring tension to the work—whether it's a fraught tension or a playful, flirtatious tension, without it, there's nothing happening onstage. When I'm directing, I think a big part of my job is creating a space where we can all bring our best work to the table. Failure has to have a place in the rehearsal room, because the fear of failure is the biggest enemy to getting us all where we need to be. I love to try lots of different failed versions of scenes so we know when we hit on the best version of it. Watching failed versions of scenes can be rough on playwrights, but it's essential for the actors and designers and me to be able to fail to get to where we're heading. Ultimately, the director is the stand-in for the audience, and my job is to make myself obsolete by the time the show opens. For this production in particular, I was intrigued by the question, How can you bring tennis to the stage? How do you keep the frisson of the game alive without actually playing? Research for this play has been a blast—a couple of trips to the US Open and watching lots of classic matches on tape and interviews with players. Also, I read books that Anna was reading as she was thinking about the play and a few books to help me enter the world of tennis, like Andre Agassi's

stellar autobiography *Open* and John McPhee's *Rules of the Game*. We'll use rehearsal time to boil tennis down to a gestural essence so we can create our own physical language for the show. I love that Anna's writing for the match sequences is spare—a verbal expression of the rhythms of the match that I want to meet physically. I'm looking forward to exploring some tennis choreography. We'll also figure out how the play moves fluidly in the Pels from the match to the memory scenes. And I anticipate spending time exploring the relationships of the couples.

TS: I'm curious how you understand the relationship between the tennis pros and the women they have close relationships to? It seems to me both couples are symbiotic—would you agree?

GTU: Anna has created wonderfully complicated relationships for these couples. The tension between maintaining a relationship and going for broke in a chosen field is palpable. In this particular story, the careers of the women did not pan out, and each handles that differently. Galina puts all her faith and efforts into Sergei's career—she has taken on his life as her own—and they both thrive from this arrangement. And while Mallory is always thrilled for Tim's accomplishments, she doesn't view Tim's famed career as the defining feature of their relationship—and this steadies both of them. Anna's textured writing keeps the relationships from being easily parsed, but I agree with you that they're symbiotic in nature.

TS: Do you have any advice for young people who say they want to direct?

GTU: If you want to direct, spend some time learning what turns you on. What kinds of writing or devised work do you like; are you drawn to a particular aesthetic or certain content, etc. What other art do you love besides theatre? Knowing what excites you can guide you both in finding projects and in steering them once you're working on them. Also, don't forget to live your life. Our job is to create life onstage, so if you only think of theatre 24/7 day in and day out, you might be missing the point. •



The Company of *The Last Match*

WHO'S WHO IN TENNIS



ROGER FEDERER

At 36, Federer is professional tennis' grandfather, known for hitting seemingly-impossible shots and good manners on and off the court.

19 Grand Slam Titles

BORN: JULY 8, 1981
BASEL, SWITZERLAND
HT: 6 FT 1 IN WT: 187 LBS

HOME: SWITZERLAND
PLAYS: RIGHT-HANDED
TURNED PRO: 1998

2 Olympic Medals

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

Began playing tennis at the age of eight • Won his first Grand Slam title at Wimbledon in 2003 • Rafael Nadal is Federer's major rival. The two have played each other since 2004. Nadal is ahead in the rivalry, 23-14 • After a long break due to injury in 2016, Federer came back to win the Australian Open and Wimbledon in 2017 • Has two sets of identical twins with his wife Mirka Vavrinec, a former professional tennis player



JIM COURIER

Andre Agassi's high school roommate and lifelong rival, Jim Courier was initially known for his hot temper on the court. He celebrated his 1992 Australian Open victory by jumping in the Yarra River.

4 Grand Slam Titles

BORN: JULY 17, 1970
SANFORD, FLORIDA
HT: 6 FT 1 IN WT: 182 LBS

HOME: ORLANDO, FLORIDA
PLAYS: RIGHT-HANDED
TURNED PRO: 1988 RETIRED: 2000

World No. 1 in 1992

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

Attended the Nick Bollettieri Tennis Academy with Andre Agassi • At 22, he was the youngest man to ever reach the finals of all four Grand Slam singles tournaments • U.S. Davis Cup Captain since 2011 • Has worked as a television tennis commentator since his retirement • Welcomed his first child, Kellen, in 2014



GARBIÑE MUGURUZA

The six-foot-tall Venezuelan-Spanish player is known for being calm on and off the court and loves playing in Spain, where she feels supported by the crowds.

2 Grand Slam Titles

BORN: OCTOBER 8, 1993
CARACAS, VENEZUELA
HT: 6 FT WT: 161 LBS

HOME: SWITZERLAND
PLAYS: RIGHT-HANDED
TURNED PRO: 2012

World No. 1 in 2017

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

Started playing tennis at the age of 3 • Won two of the three Grand Slam finals she has played in • Defeated Venus Williams to win Wimbledon in 2017 • Mother is Venezuelan, father is Spanish • Ambassador for Room to Read, a literacy-focused non-governmental organization



NICK KYRGIOS

Kyrgios, an Australian of Greek and Malaysian descent, rocks a faux-hawk and admits a love for playing Pokemon. The 22-year-old struggles with on-court outbursts and is known to smash racquets in frustration.

0 Grand Slam Titles

BORN: APRIL 27, 1995
CANBERRA, AUSTRALIA
HT: 6 FT 4 IN
WT: 187 LBS

HOME: CANBERRA, AUSTRALIA/
NASSAU, BAHAMAS
PLAYS: RIGHT-HANDED
TURNED PRO: 2013

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

At the 2014 Wimbledon Championships, Kyrgios became the first competitor in ten years to make the quarterfinals on a wild card entry • At one point he was the youngest player in the top 200 • Boston Celtics fan • Has defeated Rafael Nadal, Novak Djokovic, and Roger Federer • Has a reputation for not caring about tennis. He once answered his phone on the court mid-match

SERENA WILLIAMS

BORN: SEPTEMBER 26, 1981
SAGINAW, MICHIGAN
HT: 5 FT 9 IN
WT: 155 LBS

HOME: PALM BEACH
GARDENS, FL
PLAYS: RIGHT-HANDED
TURNED PRO: 1995



Williams and her sister, Venus, have dominated tennis for almost two decades. She's known for her laid-back personality off the court and fierce competitiveness on the court. When asked how she felt about being one of the greatest female athletes of all time, Williams responded, "I prefer the word 'one of the greatest athletes of all time.'"

23 Grand Slam Titles

4 Olympic Medals

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

Her father moved the family to Florida when Serena was nine so that she and her older sister, Venus, could study at a tennis academy • The sisters' father, Richard, recruited people to taunt them during practice to prepare for difficult situations • Serena has faced open racism repeatedly over the course of her career • Was ranked #1 in the world for 186 consecutive weeks, tying Steffi Graf's record • Gives interviews at the French Open in French • Her three major philanthropic causes: The Serena Williams Foundation (which builds and supports schools in Kenya and Jamaica), The Williams' Sisters Fund (which she shares with Venus), The Yetunde Price Resource Center (which provides comprehensive services to those affected by violence) • The center is named for Serena's elder half-sister who was killed in a driveby shooting in 2003 • Engaged to Alexis Ohanian, founder of Reddit, and gave birth to her first child, a girl, on September 1, 2017

NOVAK DJOKOVIC

BORN: MAY 22, 1987
BELGRADE, SERBIA
HT: 6 FT 2 IN
WT: 176 LBS

HOME: MONTE CARLO,
MONACO
PLAYS: RIGHT-HANDED
TURNED PRO: 2003



Djokovic credits Serbian history for his "existential need for battle" and cracks up crowds with his impersonations of Maria Sharapova and other players. His early-career swagger—at 19, he claimed to be "in control" of a match he lost to Rafael Nadal—cost him fans.

12 Grand Slam Titles

1 Olympic Medal

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

Admired Pete Sampras as a child • Began playing tennis at four • Won his first ATP tournament in Amersfoort, Holland in 2006 • His family later purchased the ATP license from the Amersfoort organizers and established the Serbia Open, the first major professional tennis event in Serbia • Won a bronze medal for Serbia in the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing • Member of the Serbian Orthodox Church and was awarded the Order of St. Sava of the First Degree, the church's highest honor • Owns a vegan restaurant • Married his childhood sweetheart, Jelena, in 2014. They have two children

MARIA SHARAPOVA

BORN: APRIL 19, 1987
NYAGAN, RUSSIA
HT: 6 FT 2 IN
WT: 130 LBS

HOME: MANHATTAN BEACH,
CALIFORNIA
PLAYS: RIGHT-HANDED
TURNED PRO: 2001



Sharapova was pushed to success by her Father, Yuri, who moved her from Russia to Florida to train when she was just six years old. She's known for being curt and sullen around crowds, and hangs out with celebrities like Chelsea Handler. Her stereotypical good looks made her the world's highest-paid female athlete until she was suspended from tennis for doping. She returned from the suspension in summer 2017.

5 Grand Slam Titles

1 Olympic Medal

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

Has lived in the U.S. since 1994 • Turned pro on her 14th birthday • Beat Serena Williams to win Wimbledon in 2004 when she was just 17 • Tenth player ever to capture a "Career Grand Slam" after winning all four Grand Slam tournaments • Was the highest paid female athlete in the world for eleven consecutive years • Created a candy line called Sugarpova • Was suspended for fifteen months for testing positive for a banned substance

INTERVIEW WITH ACTOR ALEX MICKIEWICZ

Education Dramaturg Ted Sod spoke with actor Alex Mickiewicz about his role as Sergei in *The Last Match*.

Ted Sod: Where were you born, and what made you decide to become an actor? Where did you get your training? Did you have any teachers who profoundly influenced you?

Alex Mickiewicz: I was born in Worcester, MA, but I'd say that I grew up in southern Pennsylvania. When I was about four years old, my family left Massachusetts and moved to Littlestown, PA, a town that definitely lived up to its name. After a few years, we moved to the neighboring town of Hanover, and I stayed there until I graduated high school. I can credit my parents for my introduction into the world of acting. As a young kid, I attempted to follow in my brother's footsteps and try my hand at every sport imaginable, but unlike him, I was terrible at all of them. Trust me, the irony is not lost in the fact that I now find myself playing a professional athlete. Aside from my lack of athletic promise, one thing my parents noticed was my knack for entertaining my teammates at all costs. So, when I was about six years old, they asked me if I'd like to attend open auditions for the local production of *The Nutcracker*. In the most cliché fashion, the rest is history. I landed the role of "child" or something, and even though I barely remember much from the experience, I do remember that I instantly fell in love with being onstage and the chaos backstage and the costumes and the sets and the rush of performing in front of an audience. I knew what I wanted to do for the rest of my life. All the way through High School I performed in school productions, community theatre, and even some dinner theatre when I was really young, sitting backstage garnishing cocktails made by one of the actors serving double duty as a bartender during intermission. After High School, I went to Boston University, where I earned my BFA in Acting. After spending some time struggling in NYC, I decided to study at the William Esper Studio with Barbara Marchant. Barbara has been an amazing influence on me. Not only did she teach me so much of the technique I now use and helped me to develop a strong sense of discipline in my work, but she also helped rebuild my confidence as an actor.

TS: Why did you choose to do the role of Sergei in Anna Ziegler's play *The Last Match*? What do you think the play is about?

AM: Every once in a while, you read a play or come across a character and think, "I have to play this." When I first read *The Last Match*, Sergei was the character I immediately related to. Having never even played tennis, I still felt like I understood what Sergei was grappling with. Anna Ziegler wrote such a beautifully vivid and complicated character that I felt like I just immediately had a clear picture of who he was in my mind, and I was drawn to that. I love his temper and his sense of humor and also his sensitivity and pain. I also love how universal tennis can be. It's the perfect vehicle for tackling huge life questions.

For me, the play is about so much. It asks what we are willing to risk and sacrifice in the pursuit of being the best and what happens if "the best," or rather the outcome of that pursuit, is not enough. It's about the ways in which we grapple with our own mortality and race to find meaning in our lives before time runs out.



Alex Mickiewicz

TS: What kind of preparation or research do you have to do before rehearsals begin in order to play this role?

AM: I've been reading a lot about tennis. Anything I can get my hands on: essays by David Foster Wallace, *The Inner Game of Tennis* by W. Timothy Gallwey, and biographies of professional tennis players (Open by Andre Agassi is a must-read for anyone), just to name a few. I also watch a lot of tennis. Luckily, it's played year-round, so I can almost always find a match either online or on TV. When working on the Russian dialect, I spend a lot of time listening to recordings of authentic Russian accents, absorbing the sounds and rhythms, and I'll also spend time meticulously going through my lines and breaking down each syllable and phonetic sound. I'm reading about Russian culture and looking at images from the area of Russia where Sergei comes from. Since the staging of the play can be physical at times, I've also been trying to stay in shape so that I can not only look like a tennis player, but also have the endurance for the physical demands of the play. I've taken some tennis lessons as well, so I work on my form and technique.

TS: How is this character relevant to you? I realize the rehearsal process hasn't begun yet, but can you share some of your initial thoughts about who your character is with us? What do you find most challenging/exciting about this role?

AM: As an actor, I relate to a lot of Sergei's experience in this play. Like Sergei, I decided what I wanted to do with my life at a very early age, and that decision came with a lot of consequences and sacrifices. Also

like Sergei, I am often faced with periods of extreme self-doubt and self-sabotage. I wonder if I'll ever reach a place in my career where I'm truly content, and, if not, why even bother? At the same time, this is all I've really known my whole life. Sergei is a naturally competitive person. He'll stop at nothing to make it to #1. He puts so much pressure on himself to get there so that he can justify all the sacrifices and hard work, but he's crippled by the fear that being #1 might not provide the justification he's after and that all the work and sacrifice was for nothing.

The most challenging part about playing Sergei is probably also one of the most exciting parts, and that is the physicality. I guess the second best thing to actually being a professional athlete is playing one onstage. I'm really trying my hardest not to look like an actor attempting to be an athlete.

TS: At this early stage in your work, how do you understand Sergei's relationship to his girlfriend, Galina, and his idol/nemesis Tim?

AM: I love Galina and Sergei's relationship. Due to their common Russian roots and history, they have a deep understanding of one another. Sergei finds that he can open up to Galina in ways that he hasn't been able to open up to anyone else. In one way, she is the maternal comfort that has been missing in his life since the death of his parents. Likewise, Galina can open up to Sergei. Simply put, they see each other for who they truly are. Sergei's relationship to Tim is complicated. Growing up idolizing Tim, Sergei is now faced with the opportunity to beat his idol. In a way, Tim is so much a part of Sergei's identity (he is everything Sergei wants to be) that Sergei feels that if he defeats Tim, he defeats a part of himself. By exposing Tim's mortality, Sergei is faced with his own.

TS: What do you look for from a director when working on a play?

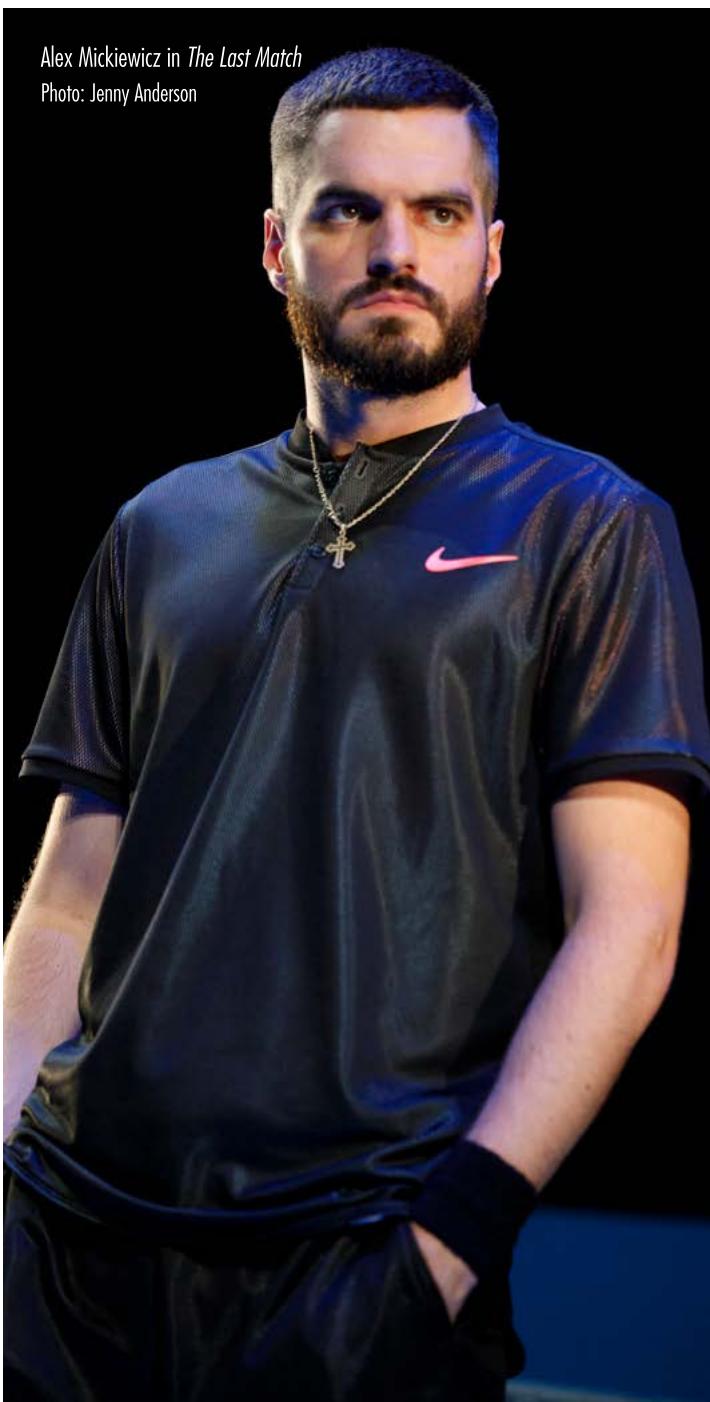
AM: I look for a director to be collaborative. I would hate to enter a rehearsal process with a director who claims to already have the answers to everything. I hope that the rehearsal room is a place for open dialogue and somewhere we can feel safe to disagree. Every play has its own set of rules by which the characters exist. When working on a new play, it's such an exciting experience to get to explore and establish those rules for the first time. This means trying out a lot of things and then deciding what works and what doesn't work. Having worked with GT Upchurch before, I know that she has a brilliant eye for what works and is open to exploring many different options.

TS: How do you keep yourself inspired as an artist?

AM: I try to go see theatre and watch movies and TV, seeking out performances that make me want to be a better actor. My family and friends are a huge source of inspiration for me. Watching those close to me work hard and achieve great things makes me want to do the same. My mom works harder than anyone I've ever known. I draw on her for inspiration all the time. I think it's important to know that inspiration can be found anywhere. My source of inspiration changes all the time. One day I'm feeling inspired by an article I read in the paper, and another day I'm inspired by a new band I've discovered.

TS: Public school students reading this interview will want to know what it takes to be a successful actor. What advice can you give young people who say they want to act?

AM: Some advice I would give is to be patient. If you really want to be an actor, that (hopefully) means you want a career as an actor, and building a career takes time and a lot of hard work. Also, try not to compare your career to others. Everyone has their own path. Just worry about yours. •



Alex Mickiewicz in *The Last Match*

Photo: Jenny Anderson

LIFE ON THE COURT



Professional athletes, including tennis players, retire from sport while they are still in their twenties or thirties.

"Since I was a kid I've been coming to this tournament," professional tennis player Andy Roddick said to the crowd after his final match. "I felt lucky just to sit where all of you are today and see the champions that have come and gone. I've loved every minute of it...It's been a road, a lot of ups, lot of downs, lot of great moments."

Retirement changes an athlete's sense of identity, how they spend their time, and how they earn a living. Tennis players like Roddick, who retired at 30, build their entire lives around the pursuit of athletic glory, often from a very young age.

CHILDHOOD TENNIS

Professional tennis is an intensely individual athletic pursuit. Most players take up the sport as children and begin competing in tournaments at the age of six or seven. Official "juniors tournaments" are open to those ages 12-18. Tournaments are held locally, regionally, and nationally. Players accumulate points for each game they win and are ranked based on those points.

Rankings are then used to determine who can play in higher-level competition. Rankings also make players eligible for recruitment to college tennis programs and scholarships. Nationally-ranked players may go on to play on the International Tennis Federation (ITF) Junior Circuit, a series of international tournaments.

There is no restriction beyond age for participation in the first level of these tournaments, making the path to a tennis career clear. Entry fees, equipment, coaching, and travel costs can deter those from lower-income households. Some scholarship money is available through tennis associations.

TURNING PRO

Tennis players can choose to "turn pro" and begin competing for prize money at any time after they turn 14. For standout junior American

tennis players, the choice is often between a college scholarship and joining the ITF Futures Circuit, the lowest-level professional tournament series. Female players may also compete in Women's Tennis Association (WTA) tournaments.

Futures Tournaments, held at locations across the globe, last a week and offer a total of either \$15,000 or \$25,000 in prize money, divided between 32 winners. Winners of early round matches may only win \$100 or \$200.

Like the juniors circuits, players in the Futures Circuit and WTA Tournaments compete for points, which translate into world rankings. Top male players progress to the Association for Tennis Professionals (ATP) Challenger Tour, then the ATP World Tour. Female champions join the WTA World Tour.



Martina Navratilova

LIFE ON THE CIRCUIT

Players on the Futures Circuit rarely have sponsorship and are responsible for all their own costs and working out their travel details, including international visas. Players play 25 to 30 tournaments a year. To save money, six or seven players will share one hotel room, live off of cold cereal, stay with local families, take day-long bus rides to save the cost of airfare, and string their own rackets. Most travel alone, but some are able to take their coaches with them, doubling their travel costs.

In 2010, the cost of playing professional tennis was estimated at \$143,000 per year. To earn back that much prize money, a male player needs to be ranked above approximately 165 in the world, and a female around 120 or higher. It takes players an average of three to four years on the circuit to break into the top 100. A typical professional tennis career lasts seven years.

The average age of elite tennis players has risen in the past twenty years. In 1992 the average age of a men's top 10 player was 23.2; in 2015 it was 28.6. In 2017, all five of the top men's players were 30 or older. Roger Federer, 36, continues to dominate and has no plans to retire.

For women, the average age jumped from 21.7 to 25.9. In January 2017, 35-year-old Serena Williams defeated her 36-year-old sister, Venus, to claim her seventh Australian Open victory. Williams later revealed that she was pregnant at the time of her victory.

RETIREMENT

Tennis players decide to retire from sport for any number of reasons. Some are forced out when their rankings fall. Ana Ivanovic, formerly ranked #1 in the world, retired in 2016 at the age of 29 due to injury. Martina Navratilova, who won 168 singles titles and 187 doubles titles in her career, retired at the age of 49, saying, "Now I feel like I can't play any better unless I just give my life up and just play tennis...I want to have more of my life back together."

Regardless of why they retire, athletes face the same post-sports challenges. They are no longer training 8-12 hours a day, nor getting the brain-boosting chemicals that come along with intense physical activity. They've lost part of their community: they no longer spend time with their teammates, coaches, and support staff, often the people they were closest to. They must decide what career to pursue, when

they feel like nothing will give them the satisfaction and high of sports. Some, like Olympic swimmer Ian Thorpe and boxing great Sugar Ray Leonard, fall into depression. Both men spoke publicly about seeking the mental health help they needed after retirement.

Retired NBA player Kobe Bryant now counsels young athletes about how to create a life after the game. "The question needs to be 'What is my next passion?' When you find that passion, everything else will make sense." Many retired tennis players turn to broadcasting or directing tournaments. Some go on to coach the next generation of stars: Andre Agassi is Novak Djokovic's current coach. Others, like Steffi Graf (who happens to be married to Agassi), step away from the sport in a bid to lead a more private life.

Athletes who decide to retire, like Navratilova, generally adjust more easily than those who are forced to retire. Those with broad social networks and strong family ties are more likely to thrive, as are those who have an empathetic confidant to discuss their retirement with. Some, like Andy Roddick, who has thrived in retirement, had these supports in place. "One thing I'm not scared of about retirement is the people I go home to," he said. "They're great." •

LATE CAREER GLORY

OKSANA CHUSOVITINA, a gymnast, has competed in the last seven Olympic games. She won a team gold in 1992 and a silver medal in the vault in 2008 at the age of 33. In the 2016 Olympic games she placed 7th in the vault—at the age of 41.

MEB KEFLEZIGHI, an American marathoner, won silver in the 2004 Olympics with a time of 2:11.42. Ten years later, two weeks before his 39th birthday, he won the 2014 Boston Marathon with a personal best of 2:08.37. He placed second at the U.S. Olympic Marathon trials in 2016 at the age of 40.

NOLAN RYAN, a Major League Baseball pitcher, played from 1966 through 1993, retiring at the age of 46 with a record high 5,714 strikeouts. In the course of his career he struck out seven pairs of fathers and sons.

THE PSYCHE OF CHAMPIONS

The Last Match brings the audience into the minds of two top tennis players engaged in intense competition. According to sports psychologist David Fletcher, professional athletes differ from most people. "Winning in sport isn't normal; so being psychologically different in certain ways is not just advantageous, it's necessity." Fletcher notes a tendency towards positive characteristics like resilience and extroversion in pro athletes, but also towards negative traits, like obsession and selfishness. An understanding of how the mind impacts athletic performance has led to a profession called sports psychology, which can help explain the drive to compete.

COMPARISON AND RIVALRY

Since the 19th century, psychologists have seen that athletes perform better in head-to-head competition versus practicing alone. Competition improves performance, such as speed or hitting a ball, and it also impacts physiology, such as endurance, heart rate, and the ability to withstand pain. Social comparison—the tendency to compare ourselves to others—helps drive competition. Athletes or not, most humans rank ourselves to determine if we are "ahead" or "behind" others. Comparison usually raises our competitive edge; however, if we sense too many competitors in the field, the desire to compare and compete may actually decrease.

Rivalry, the focused comparison directed at one individual that we see between Tim and Sergei, plays a greater role in single-player games like tennis. NYU researcher Gavin Kilduff has shown that athletes compete more intensely against individuals or teams they view as rivals. Kilduff explains that rivals "are motivated to outperform each other

not just because of what is at stake in the competition, but also because of their history with one another and the implications that future competitions between them have for this competitive relationship."

MOTIVATION: EXTRINSIC VS INTRINSIC

Comparison and rivalry both serve as motivation, but people compete for a variety of reasons. Sports psychologists look at distinctions between extrinsic motivation (external goals) and intrinsic motivation (internal reasons). Sports offer many external rewards: money, scholarships, fame, and glory. However, intrinsically motivated athletes find a sense of success through their own improvement and growth, and in the pure enjoyment of the game. For pros like Tim and Sergei, long-term dependence on extrinsic rewards can actually diminish internal motivation over time. Coaches and sports psychologists now see the benefits of stronger intrinsic motivation to support a long sports career.



THOUGHTS: FOCUS VS. DISTRACTION

Thoughts during the game have significant impact on performance—especially in tennis, a game played with no teammates or coaches. Maintaining focus is crucial in a match that can last a long time, with no pauses. Under pressure, the player who keeps their attention on the game and does not allow distractions to break their focus has a competitive edge. Additionally, self-talk (how an athlete speaks to her/himself during the game) can affect performance either for better or worse. Ziegler allows us to hear the "self-talk" of two highly competitive athletes. Even if we can't hit a ball, we can understand how competition informs our own lives, be it in school, work, or at home.♦

SPORTS AS THEATRE

There sometimes can seem to be a stark divide between two of our country's most popular pastimes—sporting events and theatrical performances. A tennis match, some may argue, has nothing in common with, say, a Shakespeare play, and the two events necessarily attract different types of fans. But closer inspection reveals that sports and theatre are actually rooted in the same traditions of storytelling and performance and that the distance between the two forms of entertainment is not nearly as wide as it may seem.

In 1974, theatre scholar Richard Schechner proposed the idea that all forms of performance—from plays to wedding ceremonies to Olympic races to music concerts—exist on a spectrum that spans from pure “entertainment” to pure “efficacy.” A performance that takes place for pure “entertainment” value is just that—an event whose goal is only to entertain its viewers, with zero tangible impact on “real life.” An improv show, for instance, which often strives for pure comedy, might land near this end of the spectrum. On the other hand, a performance that is purely “efficacious,” in Schechner’s view, is one whose only purpose is to effect a distinct change in the world—in other words, a ritual. A Presidential inauguration, for instance, officially bestows to a new elected official all the powers of the Chief Executive of the United States. Without an inauguration, there is no new President; the effects of this event, therefore, are very real. All types of performance land somewhere in between these two extremes. There are elements of every ritual that exist purely for entertainment value, and there are elements of every piece of theatre that aim to change the world around it. But all types of performance are joined by a collection of similar elements—namely, a performer, an audience, a space, and a visual and aural design.

Indeed, sporting events and theatre events share many of these “production elements.” Players take the place of actors, and teams take the place of casts. Uniforms might serve as the “costumes” of sports, while fields, courts, tracks, and pools may

stand in for the “scenic design.” And, perhaps most fundamentally, the game, race, or match serves as the “story” of a sporting event and shares similar elements of plot with a play or musical: two conflicting forces, each with equal and opposite goals, compete with each other until time runs out or a certain score is reached. The stakes generally rise as the end of the game nears, and the event reaches its “resolution” once a winner is determined. In any sporting event, then, we have an inciting incident, a rising action, a climax, and a denouement, just like any scripted play or musical.

These two types of events, then, may only differ in where they fall on Schechner’s spectrum between “entertainment” and “efficacy.” Sporting events, for the most part, are minimally efficacious; they might further the narrative of any given team or league, but not much actually changes outside of the sports industry based on the outcome of a game. Plays and musicals, though not as efficacious as rituals, often specifically intend to impact the thinking of their audience members and influence the social and cultural zeitgeist. Of course, each individual sporting or theatre event varies in its degree of efficacy. The last match of the US Open, which eventually bestows a very meaningful title to one player, is much more efficacious than most matches. And certain interactive theatre pieces, which take their audience members on a specific experience with each other, may create bonds between viewers that don’t normally form in a proscenium-style performance.

None of this analysis into entertainment and efficacy is to imply that one sort of performance is more “useful” or “important” than the other. All types of performance are necessary for a healthy and balanced society. It is interesting, though, to consider Schechner’s spectrum the next time you sit in an audience. What, if anything, is any given performance trying to accomplish? Is it entirely for the purpose of entertainment...or will something have changed by the end?•

Arthur Ashe Stadium

SPORTS TAKE THE STAGE



The Last Match brings the passion and pace of professional sports to the stage in what may seem like an unlikely marriage between the world of athletics and the world of theatre. But this pairing isn't quite as uncommon as it might appear. Sports have been a source of inspiration for playwrights for decades—from Clifford Odets's 1937 boxing drama *Golden Boy* to George Abbott, Douglass Wallop, Richard Adler, and Jerry Ross's 1955 baseball musical *Damn Yankees* to Andrew Lloyd Webber and Ben Elton's 2000 football musical *The Beautiful Game*. Bringing a sporting event to the stage, however, is not quite the same as the more ubiquitous trend of bringing it to the screen—and "sports plays" often take a much different shape than do "sports films." The fact that sports and theatre are both live entertainment often makes the combination of the two events a more complicated and nuanced endeavor than it may seem.

Many a theatre practitioner has bemoaned the theatre's inability to mimic the heightened spontaneity of sports. For all the similarities between theatre events and sporting events (see "Sport as Theatre"), sports do generally have the theatre beat in terms of the sheer unpredictability of outcome. What's the benefit, then, in putting sports onstage in a "scripted" environment? Much recent commentary on "sports theatre" has criticized shows for attempting to capture the moment-to-moment excitement of actual gameplay and falling short. Indeed, it's difficult to fake the excitement of a sporting event authentically when the final outcome is predetermined. Plays and musicals about sports, then, tend to have their best moments when they resist the temptation to stage the actual games in full and instead do what theatre does best: focus on the people.

The mechanics of what makes a good "sports play" aside, sports are certainly getting their share of time in the spotlight in today's theatrical landscape. *The Last Match* is only one of several major recent productions that have brought the drama of sports onstage and explored the nature of competition and the often invisible and controversial intricacies of the athletics industry. The following are a few notable examples of recent plays that join *The Last Match* in the genre of "sports theatre."



The Wolves at New York Stage and Film
Photo by Buck Lewis

THE WOLVES BY SARAH DELAPPE

A Finalist for the 2017 Pulitzer Prize, Sarah DeLappe's *The Wolves* dramatizes the dynamics of a teenage girls' soccer team as their competing desires for success, social status, and validation boil to the surface over the course of a pre-game warmup. Fueled by all the energy and competition of an actual soccer game, the team's frenetic conversation escalates from casual schoolyard gossip to a place of very real danger.

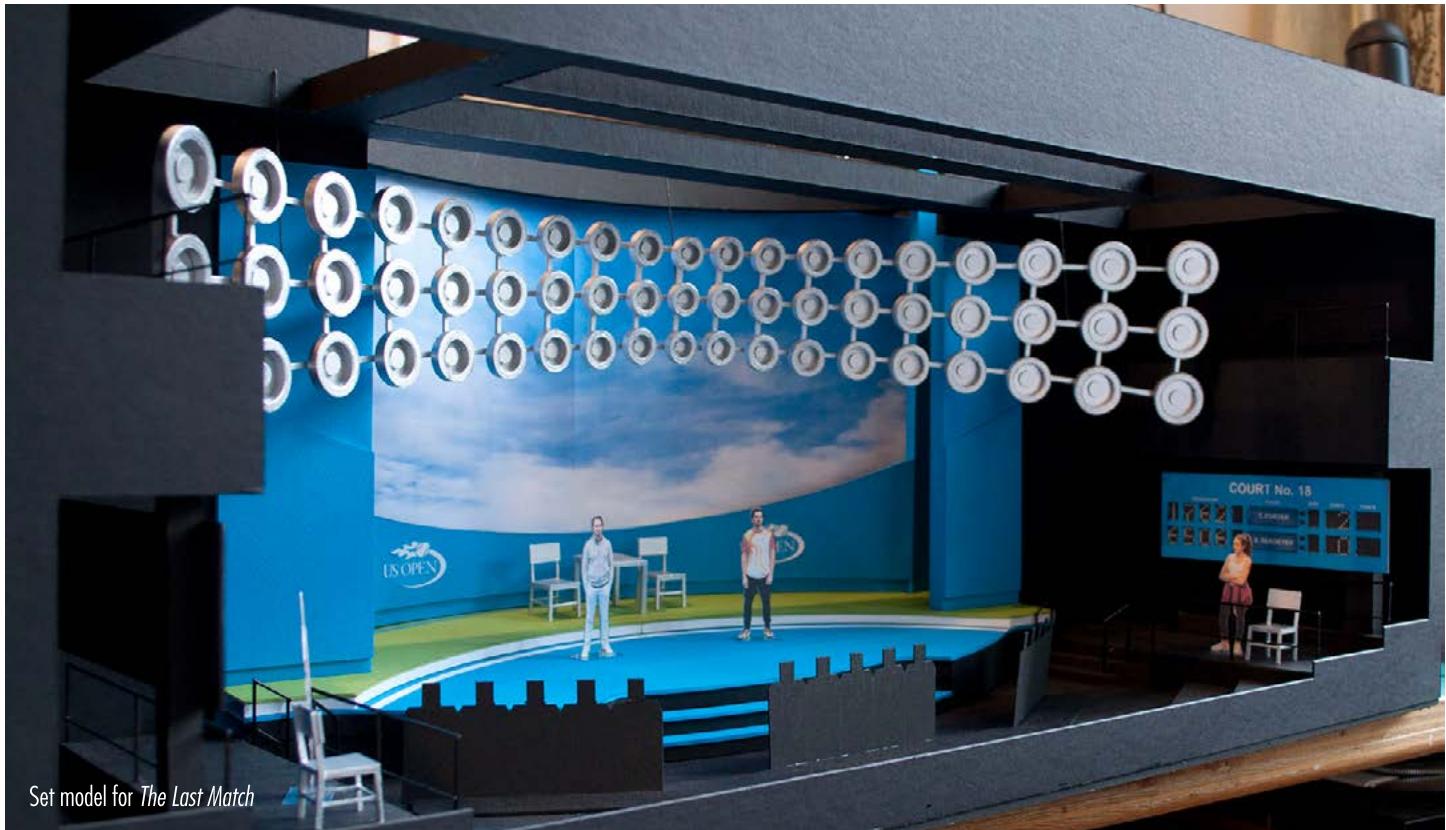
COLOSSAL BY ANDREW HINDERAKER

Andrew Hinderaker's *Colossal* brings all the adrenaline of a football game to the stage. Featuring full football uniforms, a live drumline, a working scoreboard, and precise choreography that transforms the chaos of a play on the field into an elaborate dance, *Colossal* follows a gay college football player who suffers irreparable damage to his spinal cord during a game. Through the eyes of a gay man in a culture of hypermasculinity, *Colossal* explores the more drastic prices we pay in the name of career.

X'S AND O'S (A FOOTBALL LOVE STORY) BY KJ SANCHEZ AND JENNY MERCEIN

KJ Sanchez and Jenny Mercein's *X's and O's (A Football Love Story)* investigates stories of degenerative brain diseases in former professional football players. Through the real-life stories of former players and their friends and families, many of whom formed the cast of the production at Berkeley Repertory Theatre, *X's and O's* ruminates on the often invisible costs of America's most popular form of entertainment.

DESIGNER STATEMENTS



Set model for *The Last Match*

TIM MACKABEE—SET DESIGN

Plays about sports are problematic. Every one I've seen in New York in recent years has been, well, boring. Sports matches are so inherently theatrical to begin with, you're rooting for characters who've met to battle other characters, and there's something big to win. How can that not be theatrical?

What I think Anna Ziegler has done brilliantly in *The Last Match* is frame a great, universal story about life around a tennis game. A game of tennis is played, but it's truly, to me, not about tennis. Because of that, the director, GT Upchurch, has physically abstracted the game so well that you think you're watching a real tennis game, but in fact you aren't. We said very early on in the design process that we could never treat this literally, throwing balls around—we'd give black eyes to half the audience (although if our actors had good enough aim to hit the ringing phone lady or candy wrapper man, I wouldn't be upset). This problem became the springboard for the ideas that exist now.

The same is true about the physical set. The goal is to have you recognize all the elements: the scoreboards, lights, chairs, table, etc. as components of a real tennis court, but

we've abstracted them to let the play flow from the timeline of the tennis match to the various other locations we go in the play. You sit back and say, "I accept this as a tennis court," and (hopefully) never think about it again. I hope it's not boring.

MONTANA BLANCO—COSTUME DESIGN

In *The Last Match* we are introduced to four very real people. These four people happen to be in an extraordinary circumstance, but this does not negate that plays' request for us, the audience, to meet them on a human level. Usually, my approach for a play that navigates relatability, is for the clothes to disappear. The goal is to etch characters with subtlety and depth, while also striking a truth that allows the audience to assume these people could, and do, exist. Anna Ziegler's text requires a taller order from the costume design, in that the people are real, but the comparative structure of the play—American vs. Russian, young vs. old, spouse vs. spouse—imbues the narrative with the gravitas of an epic story. The challenge of designing this play is identifying the alchemy of representation that can articulate both levels simultaneously. The characterizations must be distinct enough to function on a larger metaphorical level, while never distracting from the intimacy of the story at hand.

DESIGNER STATEMENTS

BRADLEY KING—LIGHTING DESIGN

Few sports are as inherently "theatrical" as tennis. Center Court becomes Center Stage. Players become Actors. A hush falls over the crowd/audience as they erect a porous fourth-wall at the serve and then destroy it with waves of raucous applause after each point. Few sports are also as solitary, with competitors not even able to speak to a coach for a friendly word or modicum of encouragement. A tennis match can be about so much more than tennis: loneliness, psychological warfare, injury, personal demons – all things that make such a perfect container for Anna Ziegler's compelling narratives. And what GT, the director, does so brilliantly is to use the game of tennis not as an end, but as the singular means to tell a compelling story about four humans at very different places in their lives.

The Last Match isn't, I don't think, really about tennis. For me, it's about all those thoughts that come rushing into your head while contemplating your own mortality at the hands of a competitor trying to crush you. So, while the scoreboards may display games and sets, and while there might in fact be a giant bank of stadium lights over your head, the world we're trying to build is about so much more than a recreation of Arthur Ashe. It's about remembering the color of the sky on the best day of your life, the iciness of a hospital exam room on your worst, and every moment in between.

BRAY POOR—SOUND DESIGN

When I began working on *The Last Match*, I made a point of making recordings of a real US Open Match at Arthur Ashe Stadium. But although there is a great deal of tennis in this play, it is not a truthful representation of a tennis match. The production is using plenty of realistic components—the set, the stadium lights, the sounds of balls being hit and crowds cheering—to allow an audience to track an event with a timeline that we all understand. However, it is also clearly not an actual tennis game. The set is not exactly a court. There are no rackets. There are scenes and dialogue that begin in the middle of the "game" that have nothing to do with a sporting event. These cracks in realism are what make the play interesting. To me, it is a meditation that just so happens to occur during a tennis match.

There are two loops running in the play. The characters at the center are playing a game in front of millions of people. At the same time, they slide into very private memories, fears, hopes, self-talk. Athletes often say that keeping their mind focused and calm is as hard or harder than training their bodies. We use the recordings of Arthur Ashe Stadium to ground us to the court. By fading out the sound of the match or bringing it back, we can orient the audience. Like a meditation, the play bounces around between here and now—the Match—and deeply personal ruminations that span years in the past. The play oscillates back and forth between these two spaces. The interior lives of the two main characters come to the surface during a very public spectacle. I love that contrast. •



Stadium lights that inspired the lighting and set design for *The Last Match*



PRE- & POST-SHOW ACTIVITIES

PRE-SHOW ACTIVITY

HOW DOES A SET DESIGNER REPRESENT A SPORTS EVENT ON A STAGE?

(Common Core Code: CCSS SL.11-12.1.C)

Before seeing *The Last Match*, students explore the design challenges of representing a sporting event on a theatrical stage.

MATERIALS Paper, pencils/marking pens. Sample proscenium stage image (printed or on smartboard)

DISCUSS Read the Designer Statement by Tim Mackabee/Set Designer on page 19. (Note: We recommend not to show the images of *The Last Match* set design to students before this activity). Discuss Mackabee's stated goal with the set. Why do we think he and the director chose to create an abstract tennis court rather than a realistic one?

DESIGN Challenge students to draw a set design for a play about any sport of their choice. Show this image of a proscenium stage and point out that most sports occur in arenas where the spectators are on all sides of the action, but for the stage, the audience will just be on one side. Encourage students to follow Mackabee's guidelines (include all the recognizable elements of the field, but abstracted to work on the proscenium).

PRESENT & REFLECT Allow students to present their designs as a professional designer might present to her/his director. Explain how the actors will move on the set, and how they imagine the sport would be represented on stage. Ask what challenges they had translating the sport onto a set, and how they solved them.

POST-SHOW ACTIVITY

HOW DO SPORTS WRITERS ANALYZE AN ATHLETE OR THEIR FAMILIES?

(Common Core Code: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1)

After seeing *The Last Match*, students write and present analyses of characters' behavior and psychology, using the lens of sports journalism.

BRAINSTORM Facilitate a discussion about each character. Start with a list of character traits. Then, discuss what each character wants. What obstacles did s/he face? How did s/he behave throughout the match? What feelings did s/he express through words or behavior? Note: You may wish to discuss the open-ended nature of the play and how we might interpret it.

WRITE Using the focus of sports journalism, have students write commentary about 1 of the 4 characters, based on what they saw in the play. Their written piece should:

- Begin with a strong introduction that expresses a clear point-of-view about the character
- Describe what happened to the character during the match
- Analyze the character's behavior, both in the match and in flashback scenes
- Assess the character's emotional responses (Provide evidence based on their words or behavior)
- Predict what the character will do (professionally or personally), as a result of what happened during the match
- Provide a piece of advice for the character

ACTIVATE Allow students to present their character analyses in the form of a live "Sports Center" broadcast. Students take on the role of anchors, delivering their analyses of the athletes and their wives to a "home audience."

For more pre-show and post-show activities for *The Last Match* please visit this link [HERE](#)

GLOSSARY AND RESOURCES



HERALDED:

to be declared as something

Tim comments that Sergei was heralded as the second coming of Christ when he was a junior.

THE GRAND SLAM:

a series of four tennis competitions (The Australian Open, The French Open, Wimbledon, and The US Open) that are considered the most important in the world

When the play begins, Tim and Sergei are preparing to compete in Sergei's first US Open semifinal, after Tim performed poorly in the rest of the Grand Slam season.

CROSS-EXAMINATION:

the interrogation of a witness in court by opposing lawyers, who aim to challenge the witness's testimony

Galina asks Sergei if he is cross-examining her about her acting career.

ADRENALINE:

a hormone released when someone is stressed, which increases their blood flow and breathing rate, preparing their muscles to work harder than normal

Tim's adrenaline kicks in after Sergei wins a point against him.

SPORTSMANSHIP:

treating your opponents fairly during a sports game

Tim and Mallory met when she received a sportsmanship award.

CORTISONE SHOT:

treats inflammation of small areas of the body such as a joint or tendon

Tim receives a cortisone shot to treat his sore back.

IN VITRO FERTILIZATION:

a method of becoming pregnant where an egg is fertilized outside a woman's body and then implanted in her; in vitro children are often referred to as "test tube babies"

Tim and Mallory try in vitro fertilization after multiple miscarriages.

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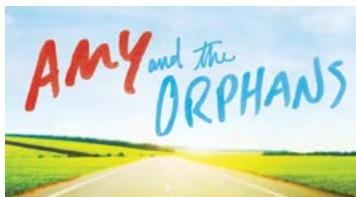
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ABOUT ROUNDABOUT

ROUNDABOUT THEATRE COMPANY

Roundabout Theatre Company (Todd Haimes, Artistic Director) is committed to producing the highest-quality theatre with the finest artists, sharing stories that endure and providing accessibility to all audiences. A not-for-profit company founded in 1965, Roundabout fulfills its mission each season through the production of classic plays and musicals; development and production of new works by established and emerging writers; educational initiatives that enrich the lives of children and adults; and a subscription model and audience outreach programs that cultivate and engage all audiences. Roundabout presents this work on its five stages and across the country through national tours. Roundabout has been recognized with 36 Tonys®, 51 Drama Desks, 62 Outer Critics Circle, 12 Obie and 18 Lucille Lortel Awards. More information on Roundabout's mission, history and programs can be found by visiting roundabouttheatre.org.

2017-2018 SEASON



STAFF SPOTLIGHT: INTERVIEW WITH JILL RAFSON, DIRECTOR OF NEW PLAY DEVELOPMENT

Ted Sod: Tell us about yourself. Where were you born and educated? How and when did you become the Director of New Play Development?

Jill Rafson: I grew up in New City, New York and attended Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, which isn't the obvious choice for someone in this field. But Hopkins has a fantastic Writing Seminars program, and I majored in that and in Film & Media Studies. I studied abroad at Royal Holloway, just East of London, and that's where I solidified my love of theatre. I came to Roundabout as an intern in 2004 and returned to the Artistic Department in 2005 as Todd Haimes's assistant. I've done pretty much everything you can do in that office, creating new positions along the way. I've been an Assistant, an Associate, a Literary Manager, and for the past few years, the Director of New Play Development.

TS: Describe your job at RTC. What are your responsibilities?

JR: My job is primarily focused on finding great new plays and setting them up for successful productions. That means plenty of script-reading and searching for the best new work that's out there. I also spend my time getting to know playwrights, agents, directors, designers—anyone who can help bring me strong material and then bring that material to life. I work very closely with our playwrights as the work develops, doing everything from detailed script discussions, to choosing an idea to write as a commission, to hand holding while they wait for reviews to come in on opening night.

TS: What is the best part of your job? What is the hardest part?

JR: There's nothing better than telling a playwright that you're going to produce their play. Especially with Roundabout Underground, where it's always the writer's first major production in New York, that's a life-changing moment. The hardest part is the opposite side of that same coin—having to turn plays down. We read hundreds of new plays every year and produce five at most in a season, and sometimes you have to say no to a play or a playwright you wish you could be saying yes to. I have so much respect for what playwrights do, and it's never easy to turn them away.

TS: Why do you choose to work at Roundabout?

JR: Roundabout offers quality and variety you can't get anywhere else. While my focus is on new plays, I get to be a part of developing work for all of our theatres, which means collaborating with the best artists in the business. My position allows me to work with every department at Roundabout and to engage with our audience. Every day is different. I can go from a notes session with a writer, to meeting a director, to working on a diversity initiative, to editing this very Upstage Guide. It never gets boring. Sometimes I get to be one of the first people to ever lay eyes on a play like Stephen Karam's *The Humans*. It doesn't get much better than that. •

Learn more at roundabouttheatre.org. Find us on:



WHEN YOU GET TO THE THEATRE

FOR
EDUCATORS

TICKET POLICY

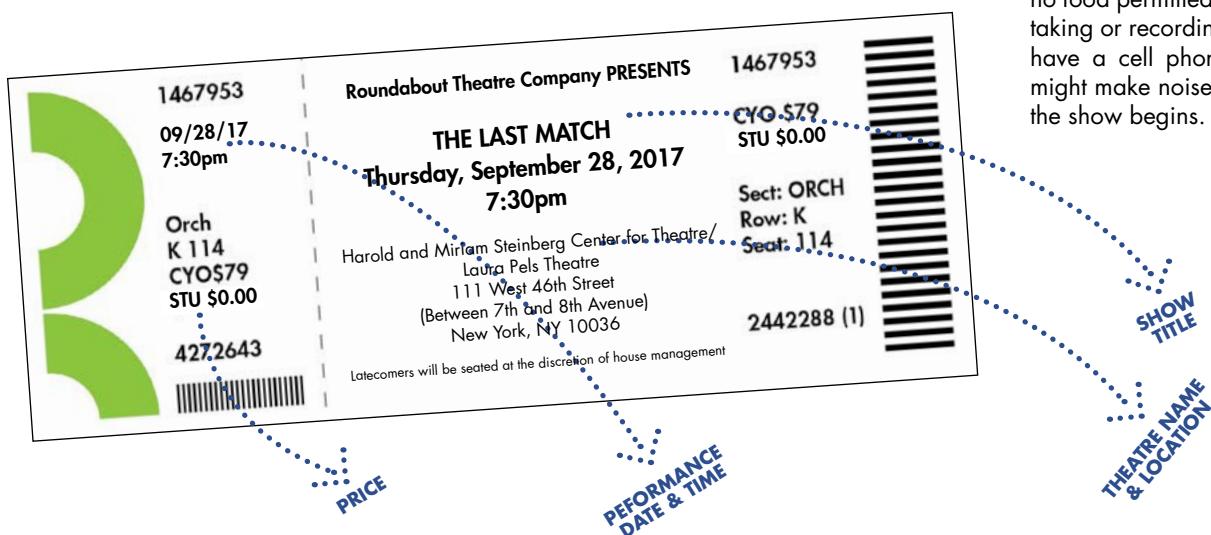
As a student, you will receive a discounted ticket to the show from your teacher on the day of the performance. You will notice that the ticket indicates the section, row, and number of your assigned seat. When you show your ticket to the usher inside the theatre, he or she will show you where your seat is located. These tickets are not transferable and you must sit in the seat assigned to you.

PROGRAMS

All the theatre patrons are provided with a program that includes information about the people who put the production together. In the "Who's Who" section, for example, you can read about the actors' roles in other plays and films, perhaps some you have already seen.

AUDIENCE ETIQUETTE

As you watch the show please remember that the biggest difference between live theatre and a film is that the actors can see you and hear you and your behavior can affect their performance. They appreciate your applause and laughter, but can be easily distracted by people talking or getting up in the middle of the show. So please save your comments or need to use the restroom for intermission. Also, there is no food permitted in the theatre, no picture taking or recording of any kind, and if you have a cell phone or anything else that might make noise, please turn it off before the show begins.



Roundabout's work with new and emerging playwrights and directors, as well as development of new work, is made possible by Katheryn Patterson and Tom Kempner.

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