



YOU'RE A LEGEND!

Single Ambition

Doubles came naturally to TODD WOODBRIDGE. Singles not so much

Todd Woodbridge's career record is almost indecent. A gusher of doubles and mixed doubles titles including 10 Wimbledon titles in a total of 22 grand slams – 11 with Mark Woodforde. But one thing that plagued him was that he never reached his own expectations as a singles player.

Now part of the Seven Network commentary team for the Australian Open, the baby-faced Woodie has remained heavily involved in the game.

No one really talks about your singles career, do they?

No – and it wasn't that bad, either. I was in the top 50 for a long time.

Do you resent that people forget that? No, but I do pick it out [my singles record] occasionally. I made the semis at Wimbledon, won a couple of tournaments and had some solid results. But I created a niche by my doubles results – that's where I made my name with two good partnerships.

At what point was there a doubles or singles career decision? Never, ever. My entire career [involved doubles] from the moment I played

juniors. It was always an area I excelled in, probably due to the communication part of it. I was always better when talking aloud about what might happen. When I played on my own I got incredibly negative.

Not many sports people admit to being negative.

They're bluffing. You have every single emotion possible when you're an athlete. You have incredible highs and major lows. Then you have this bit in the middle when you're sometimes treading water and trying to get going. You do get periods of your career when you don't think; you've done so much work and there's so much form there that it is automatic, but that's a small percentage.

Behind that mask there's a lot of emotion going on?

Yeah, from match to match. Particularly in our sport – it's head to head. It's not like playing a course or a clock. Mark Woodforde always used to say he knew I was going to play great if I played on a major court at Wimbledon. Because he said I respected that place so much, my behaviour was tidier and more focused.

Did you ever worry that you didn't have your own identity?

No, I'm totally secure in my own skin to understand that if you interviewed Mark and I you would get similar answers but totally different personalities and see totally different traits.

What was it about you and Mark that gelled?

Mark is quite different to me...

Is he an angry redhead?

No, he's not. He's quite a thinker. Mark wasn't the most gifted tennis player in the world. Very skilled in certain areas but didn't have a big serve. But his confidence in his own belief was as good as any player I've ever seen. He had this ability to stand up after being smacked the day before. His ability in our partnership to keep a steady ship was really important.

Were you friends?

Yes. We're an interesting pair because we are friends and we're linked for life no matter what we try to do. But we had our moments. We were very good at understanding the need to separate away from the court because we were running a business and you can't be intruding in each other's lives the whole time.

It's hard to find out who's the No. 1 doubles pair in Australia now. Why are there no new Woodies?

We'd like to have Woodies, a Hewitt, a Rafter and even a Philippoussis. I don't know why. There are so many variables. The realisation is that it's a bit like the Roman Empire.

Once it's gone, it's gone?

Yeah. In all honesty, the game has just gone so far. Tennis was pretty much the dominant sport in Australia in the '50s and '60s and it no longer is. It is for two weeks a year but the culture of my children is we do a bit of everything. I just went to a tennis club three days a week with my parents. That's just one factor.

What can make us great again?

Coaching and development programs. Two years ago the administration changed – Tennis Australia was forced by the Australian Sports Commission to change their structure. Now it's nearly in place, the development structures are back up and running. But the programs have to be in place for five to 10 years to get those players out.

Does it scare you to talk about Bernard Tomic?

Yes and no. What scares me is that he'll believe too much what people say about him and agents – who I think are a detriment to a young player – will promise him too much and make him believe he's better than he is at this stage. I do believe he will be a good player; he's going to have a career but, at that age, to say this guy's going to be a top 10 is unlikely. If he got to 40 that would be great and once you get to that bracket, anything can happen.

How important is Davis Cup?

Of all the matches that you play, with the exception of a couple of grand slam finals, they are the matches that you remember because of the significance of

them. They are usually played in packed houses with roaring fans, tremendous pressure and the results are reflected in the community as opposed to the individual. That is the fascination of the Davis Cup – your country tends to ride it with you.

How do you feel about that 2001 Cup when Hewitt and Rafter played the final doubles match instead of you?

I was the No. 1 player in the world and I'd just won my seventh Wimbledon. In hindsight, it was probably the wrong call but only because Rafter wasn't 100 per cent fit with his shoulder. I would never have let them go on the court that day if I'd believed they couldn't win. I had a major input into the discussions but didn't have the final say. I don't lose any sleep and I'm not bitter about it. But I still feel that they should have won that – they had a point to lead two sets to love.

LEGENDARY STATUS

Born: April 2, 1971

Fame: Most successful doubles

tennis player of all time

Record: 83 doubles titles, 22 grand slams, two singles titles, Olympics

doubles winner, Davis Cup winner.

Notoriety: The 2001 Davis Cup, when the Woodies didn't play a vital doubles rubber. They were replaced by Pat Rafter and Lleyton Hewitt, who lost because of Rafter's longstanding injury.



You did a lot of winning, but were there low moments?

Oh, yeah. Most of the time, to be honest. That's where doubles was brilliant, but singles-wise I would have liked to achieve more. But I hindered my own performance sometimes by my own expectations. If I had my time again I would have not been as hard on myself.

In 1997 I had my best singles year – I made the semis at Wimbledon. In 1998 we were very close friends with [golfer] Payne Stewart and Renee Appleby, Stuart Appleby's wife, and they both died in a very short period. And I really changed as an individual over those two things because I was, at times, very depressed over my singles career and my temperament. And that stopped me in my tracks. I didn't achieve as much individually after that, yet as a person I became far more comfortable.