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Ones to Watch for 2017

Young & improving players for the notebook...

For the 2017 season – and beyond...

An exclusive *Ones to Watch* report

by

Tom Wilson

The times they are a changin'...

The 2016 tennis season ended with two new names at the top of the world rankings.

In the Men's, **Andy Murray** took the **No.1** spot for the first time, knocking **Novak Djokovic** into second place.

In the Women's standings, **Angelique Kerber** moved up to **No.1**, dislodging **Serena Williams**.

I don't believe that's a flash in the pan.

It's not a glitch in the matrix.

At the top of the tennis tree, things are changing...

Out with the old, in with the new...

Serena will celebrate her **36th** birthday in 2017. How much longer can this great champion keep doing it at the very highest level?

In 2015, Serena won three of the four Grand Slam titles; last year – just the one.

And after a decade of dominance at the top of the Men's game, two of the all-time greats – **Roger Federer** and **Rafel Nadal** – are starting to fade, too...

After an injury-hit 2016 season, **Federer** has dropped out of the Top 10. He didn't win a single trophy on the Tour last season – and hasn't lifted a Grand Slam trophy since Wimbledon 2012.

Nadal has been struggling with injuries for some time. His last Grand Slam success was at the 2014 French Open – and he didn't even reach a quarter final at a Grand Slam last season.

Federer & Nadal are both **over 30 years old** now. **Andy Murray** and **Novak Djokovic** will be hitting the big 3-0 this year, too.

In the Women's game, as well as the ageing **Serena** losing her No.1 crown...

Former Australian Open champion **Victoria Azarenka** has just had a baby.

Multiple Grand Slam title winner **Maria Sharapova** has been out of the game (suspended).

And then we have the sad news that two-time Wimbledon champion **Petra Kvitova** is set to miss six months or more of 2017 through injury.

With all this going on, a long line of talented youngsters are waiting in the wings...

So who will make it big in 2017?

We could see a changing of the guard in the next 12 months or so.

I'm not writing Serena, Federer and Nadal off just yet. But we do need to pay attention to what's going on.

Some of the giants of the game are on their way out. New, young blood will take their place.

There will be gaps in the market.

Presenting in-the-know and early-bird bettors with the chance to cash-in – at BIG prices...

There are young, hungry, new & improving players about to burst through. The household names of the future...

And the sooner you spot them – the more likely you are to win big:

- Take **Novak Djokovic**, for example. He was a **33/1** outsider when winning his first Grand Slam title – the Australian Open in 2008 – when just 20 years old

Some of the name on my *Ones to Watch* list below have already provided payouts on the Men's ATP and Women's WTA Tours – at Outright Winner prices including **20/1**, **33/1**, **66/1** and even **100/1**. I expect these players to earn more success and provide more payouts in 2017.

And one or two of these could even make the big breakthrough at **Grand Slam** level – a headline-grabbing run at the **Australian Open, French Open, Wimbledon** or **US Open** can catapult a player up the rankings and into the spotlight. Let's see if we can pick one or two out beforehand...

The next in line...

For me, betting on tennis tournaments is split into **two** types of event:

The week-by-week **ATP and WTA Tour** events – and the four-times-a-year **Grand Slam** tournaments...

The youngsters on my main *Ones to Watch* list below are players I primarily expect to provide opportunities in the **weekly Tour events** – of which there are well over 100 a year.

Logic says players newly-turned Pro – usually teenagers making their early steps into the Senior game – can make a splash in the smaller events first, rather than simply rocking up at Wimbledon and shocking the world.

It follows, then, that players already on the ladder – players already proven on the weekly Tours and in the rankings – can continue an upward curve by making an impact in the Grand Slams...

Six on the up...

Anyone can look at the current rankings and point out a few Top 10 players. The 'in-between' names who aren't Murray, Djokovic or Serena – but aren't complete unknowns, either. This middle-ground is made up of names like:

- **Milos Raonic** (Canada, aged 25. End-of-2016 world ranking #3). Runner-up at Wimbledon last season
- **Kei Nishikori** (Japan, aged 26. End-of-2016 world ranking #5). Knocked Andy Murray out of the US Open 2016, reaching the semi finals. Runner-up at the US Open 2014
- **Dominic Thiem** (Austria, aged 23. End-of-2016 world ranking #8). Reached the semi finals of the French Open 2016, only losing to eventual champion Novak Djokovic. Won three ATP Tour titles in 2015 – and followed up by winning four titles in 2016

And in the Women's:

- **Karolina Pliskova** (Czech Republic, aged 24. End-of-2016 world ranking #6). Runner-up at the US Open 2016, beating Serena Williams along the way
- **Garbine Muguruza** (Spain, aged 23. End-of-2016 world ranking #7). Won the French Open 2016, beating Serena in the final. And before that, the runner-up at Wimbledon 2015
- **Johanna Konta** (United Kingdom, aged 25. End-of-2016 world ranking #10). Has gone from #150 to #10 in the rankings in just two years. Konta won her first WTA title in 2016, and also reached the semi finals of the Australian Open

In many respects, those six players above have already 'made it.' Four of them have made it to a **Grand Slam** final already – with Muguruza lifting one of the four major trophies.

All six have already got **ATP/ WTA Tour** titles to their name. And I fully expect them to win more.

All six are already in the **Top 10** of the world rankings, too.

If you're looking for a 'best of the rest' selection when it comes to this year's Grand Slams, following those players could well prove more fruitful than backing some of the bigger names at the very top of the rankings.

But with my specific '**Ones to Watch' list for 2017**, I want to dig a little deeper. To find players who are not yet in the Top 10 – but could be heading there in the not-too-distant future.

The term 'Next Gen' is becoming a big thing to the Tour organisers. An annual 'Next Generation' ATP tournament is due to start in Milan as of November 2017. The game's up-and-coming players will be getting more attention than ever before. So the earlier we can latch onto the emerging talent, the better...

Ones to Watch 2017

Here is my list of young & improving players to follow this season – and beyond.

Not every highly-rated teenager will go on to have a glittering Pro career. Not every Wimbledon Junior winner will go on to shine in the real thing...

But some will. And some can certainly win titles on the weekly ATP & WTA Tours – taking out a few well-known names on the way, too...

The players below are all showing promising signs of progression.

Some are already making a few waves on the Tour. And all could climb up the rankings and make a significant breakthrough in 2017.

We'll start with the **Men's** list:

Alexander Zverev

Age: 19

Country: Germany

End-of-2016 World Ranking: #24

Alexander Zverev is from a tennis family. He's coached by his father – an ex-professional player – his mother is also a coach, and his older brother Mischa has been a regular on the ATP circuit over the past decade.

The 19-year-old Zverev has a lot of credentials on his side. He stands 6'6" tall, and has a big serve and some big shots to go with it. He broke the Top 100 in 2015, earning him the ATP Star of Tomorrow award.

Following that initial step into the big league, Zverev pushed on in leaps & bounds in 2016 – reaching two ATP tournament finals at odds of 10/1 and 33/1, and winning at 20/1 in St Petersburg.

He's had a couple of injury niggles – physically he's perhaps not quite fully developed – but what I like about him is his attitude: he plays to win, with focus as well as fire.

And with victories over Grand Slam winners Roger Federer, Stan Wawarinka and Marin Cilic already under his belt, Zverev looks like he might have the temperament and taste for the big occasion.

Karen Khachanov

Age: 20

Country: Russia

End-of-2016 World Ranking: #53

Karen Khachanov is another 6'6" youngster making a name for himself...

The Russian rising star broke through on the ATP Tour in 2016, winning the Chengdu title from a starting price of 66/1.

He also made the quarter finals of two other ATP events.

Khachanov is now knocking on the door of the Top 50, and having been named as one of the ATP 'Next Gen' stars (to qualify players must be aged under 21 and ranked inside the Top 200), big things are expected of him.

Taylor Fritz

Age: 19
Country: USA
End-of-2016 World Ranking: #76

Taylor Fritz is one of the next big hopes for American tennis...

Another tall young player at 6'4" with a big serve (there's a theme developing here), Fritz is currently the youngest American in the Top 100 of the world rankings.

2016 was his initial breakthrough season – climbing to as high as #53, and reaching the ATP Memphis final at odds of 40/1. Much more is expected of him in 2017 and beyond.

His best results so far have come on the hard courts of North America, so look out for him in particular in those events.

Borna Coric

Age: 20
Country: Croatia
End-of-2016 World Ranking: #48

Borna Coric has long been tipped for great things, and still aged just 20 – this could be the big breakthrough year for the 6'1" Croatian...

He plays with a bit of swagger and confidence – a showmanship style that when it comes off, can produce some spectacular shots. He's already beaten the like of Rafael Nadal (twice) and Andy Murray.

Coric was runner-up in two ATP events in 2016 – at odds of 12/1 and 14/1 – and it's a fair bet that he'll lift his first trophy at some point in 2017.

Kyle Edmund

Age: 21
Country: Great Britain
End-of-2016 World Ranking: #45

Kyle Edmund is flying the flag for Great Britain here...

He's the British No.2 behind Andy Murray, and Andy has spoken highly of him. Edmund gained some vital big match experience in GB's Davis Cup final win over Belgium in 2015, and has shown good temperament under pressure in other matches I've seen him in, too.

Edmund is yet to reach an ATP final, but he's cracked the Top 50 and is making good progress...

At 6'2" he's yet another tall and powerful young player in the Men's game. And with quarter final and semi final runs in two of his last four tournament appearances of 2016, Edmund can go one or two better in 2017.

On to the **Women's** game now, where another five players make the list...

Belinda Bencic

Age: 19

Country: Switzerland

End-of-2016 World Ranking: #43

Belinda Bencic looks set to become a star...

The Swiss teenager won both Wimbledon and the French Open as a Junior, and announced herself on the Senior tour when winning the WTA Toronto and WTA Eastbourne titles in 2015.

In February 2016, Bencic cracked the Top 10 for the first time – reaching #7. The rest of the season was a bit of a comedown, with an injury hampering her progress – but she's ready to go from day one in the 2017 schedule.

Bencic has a fighting spirit and good demeanour on court, and could prove the first name on this list to make the big breakthrough at a Grand Slam.

Jelena Ostapenko

Age: 19

Country: Latvian

End-of-2016 World Ranking: #44

Jelena Ostapenko has been one of the youngest players in the Top 100 for a while now – and can continue her progression in 2017...

The 2016 season saw Ostapenko record very respectable wins over Top-10-level names Petra Kvitova (twice), Caroline Wozniacki and Svetlana Kuznetsova. She's twice been a runner-up in WTA events so far, once in 2015 and once last year – when she was a 100/1 shot in Qatar.

Ostapenko won the Wimbledon Junior title in 2014, and has gone on to climb into the Top 50 on the Senior tour. She's still a teenager until June and could well spring a surprise or two on higher ranked or better known players in 2017.

Daria Kasatkina

Age: 19

Country: Russia

End-of-2016 World Ranking: #26

Daria Kasatkina is already looking like breaking into the Top 20...

The Russian teenager looks set for the big-time to me – she hits the ball hard and true, has raw talent and a great work ethic on court. She also has a great play-to-win attitude – fist-pumping almost every point.

Kasatkina is yet to put a full run together in a WTA tournament, but is showing promise with a semi final run in St Petersburg and two quarter final efforts at 'Premier' (Masters) level events in 2016 – as well as reaching the quarter finals at the Rio Olympics.

And as I mentioned in my Ones to Watch report for the French Open last year, Kasatkina is highly thought of by a lot of people in the know...

"We're looking at a future Grand Slam champion here" were the words of tennis commentator and ex-Pro, Sam Smith...

Smith knows her stuff and would not make such a statement lightly. The Russian newcomer is set to make a name for herself on the main Tour, having won the Junior French Open title in 2014.

It's only a matter of time before Kasatkina reaches her first final on the WTA Tour – one to watch for sure.

Naomi Osaka

Age: 19

Country: Japan

End-of-2016 World Ranking: #48

Naomi Osaka is yet another 19-year-old on a march up the rankings. The Japanese rising star leapt from #203 in 2015 to a career-high of #40 during 2016...

She looks set to camp out in the Top 50 from now on and can go higher once she starts stringing a few more match wins together. Osaka reached her first main WTA level final in the 2016 season, finishing runner-up at the Toray event in Tokyo from a starting price of 28/1.

Osaka has a no-fear approach when she's on song and can genuinely give any of the top names on the Women's tour a real test. Expect Osaka to feature in a few more finals in 2017, and maybe knock a big name or two out in a Grand Slam, too.

Elina Svitolina

Age: 22

Country: Ukraine

End-of-2016 World Ranking: #14

Elina Svitolina is a little older than the others at 22 years of age, but there's still a lot to come...

She's up to a career-high of #14 in the world, and could enter the Top 10 in 2017 if last year's form is anything to go by...

Svitolina reached three WTA finals in 2016, winning one. And she made a name for herself by becoming the first female player in over a decade to beat two World No.1's in one season (Serena Williams and Angelique Kerber).

In 2016 she also beat the likes of French Open winner Garbine Muguruza, former World No.1 Ana Ivanovic and fast-improver Johanna Konta.

That taste for the big-time could see the Ukrainian make the breakthrough at Grand Slam level soon, too. She's already got a French Open quarter final appearance under her belt – and is capable of beating that at one of the Grand Slams in 2017.

More to come throughout the season...

Those 10 names make up my *Ones to Watch for 2017* list. They are 10 young & improving players that I'm earmarking to have a good season.

But the list is by no means exhaustive...

Throughout the season in your **free weekly *Ones to Watch* emails**, I'll be naming my 'Ones to Watch' picks for specific ATP and WTA tournaments. Hunting for big value Each Way opportunities in Outright Winner markets, week by week.

And of course when the four big Grand Slam events come along – Australian Open, Wimbledon, French Open and US Open – I'll be helping you find ways to cash-in, too.

Enjoy the 2017 season. I'll be in touch again soon...

Tom Wilson

Ones to Watch

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