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Ones to Watch in 2018

Young & improving players for the notebook...

For the 2018 season – and beyond...

An exclusive *Ones to Watch* report

by

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The shock of the new...

The 2017 tennis season was one of contrasts.

On the one hand, three legends of the game collected five of the eight biggest trophies:

Roger Federer, Rafael Nadal and **Serena Williams** accounted for over half of the Grand Slam silverware – all three players into their thirties, all to one extent or another ‘turning back the clock.’

It’s a great story.

But you know what else makes a great story: someone ‘coming from nowhere’ to reach the highest heights. A player on a fairy-tale run to a Grand Slam final – and winning it...

That happened last year, and not once but twice...

Jelena Ostapenko – without any previous senior-level trophies to her name – rocked up in Paris and blasted her way to the French Open title. She celebrated her 20th birthday during the Roland Garros fortnight. She was **100/1** to win the tournament.

Sloane Stephens started the summer recovering from injury and ranked #957 in the world – and ended it holding the US Open trophy aloft in New York. The 24-year-old was priced at **40/1** on the eve of the tournament, and as big as **300/1** in the weeks beforehand.

Great stories, indeed – but these wins were not actually as ‘out of the blue’ as the Hollywood headlines would have you believe...

Both players were on my ‘Ones to Watch’ lists. Ostapenko was flagged up in the *Ones to Watch in 2017* report that I first distributed in December 2016. Stephens was named in my *Wimbledon 2017 – Ones to Watch* report published in June, a week before the tournament began.

The early bird catches the worm, as they say. See below for 10 players that could make some headlines (and win you some money) in 2018.

All things must pass...

As impressive as **Federer, Nadal** and **Serena’s** wins were last year, we can’t ignore the hands of time – and no player, no matter how great, can keep going forever.

All three of them are into their thirties; Federer and Serena are now closer to 40 than 30.

Serena’s older sister **Venus Williams** made it to two of the four Grand Slam finals last year. Venus will be 38 years old by Wimbledon 2018.

Andy Murray and **Novak Djokovic**, who along with Federer & Nadal make up the long-established Big Four in Men’s tennis, are also both now in their thirties. Murray and Djokovic both ended their 2017 seasons prematurely through injury, slipping outside the Top 10. Maybe they’ll come roaring back in 2018 – or maybe they won’t.

Last year ended with several big name players missing from the tour. Grand Slam winners and finalists like **Stan Wawrinka, Kei Nishikori, Milos Raonic** and **Victoria Azarenka** were also absent, along with Murray, Djokovic and Serena.

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

As I said this time last year, I'm not writing the current household names off just yet. But we do need to pay attention to what's going on...

We will see a changing of the guard sooner or later. 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, often 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
- And just last year of course – **Jelena Ostapenko** won the French Open aged 20 as a **100/1** 'surprise' winner

Some of the name on my *Ones to Watch in 2018* list below have already provided payouts on the Men's ATP and Women's WTA Tours – at Outright Winner prices including **18/1, 25/1, 50/1** and even **80/1**. I expect these players to earn more success and provide more payouts in 2018.

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.

Then and now...

Before we look at our players to watch in 2018, let's take a look at how our **2017** 'Ones to Watch' performed...

Men:

ATP Rankings	2016 Year End	2017 Year End	2017 titles
Alexander Zverev	#24	#4	5
Karen Khachanov	#53	#45	0
Taylor Fritz	#76	#105	0
Borna Coric	#48	#48	1
Kyle Edmund	#45	#50	0

Women:

WTA Rankings	2016 Year End	2017 Year End	2017 titles
Belinda Bencic	#43	#98	0
Jelena Ostapenko	#44	#7	2

Daria Kasatkina	#26	#24	1
Naomi Osaka	#48	#68	0
Elina Svitolina	#14	#6	5

Last year, my list consisted of the 10 players above. Five of them went on to bag trophy wins in 2017 and five of them improved on their year-end ranking.

Tournament wins and **rankings** are one way to judge the performance of a 'One to Watch' player.

Match results (eg. season win/ loss record), significant match wins (eg. beating a big name like Roger Federer) or big tournament runs (eg. reaching the quarter final or semi final of a Grand Slam) are others.

Another method to judge performance is to look at **profit & loss**. If you'd backed all 10 players on our 2017 list in the Outright Winner market in every ATP/ WTA tournament and Grand Slam last season, you would have come out on top overall:

- Backed to 1 pt Each Way stakes, our *Ones to Watch in 2017* players produced 11.23 pts profit, for a 3% ROI
- Backed to 1 pt Win Only stakes they produced 49.65 pts profit, for a 23% ROI

The highlights reel includes:

- **Elina Svitolina** – who went on to win five tournaments, three of them at double-figure prices of **10/1**, **14/1** and **14/1**...
- **Alexander Zverev** – who won five titles, with the highlight the ATP Rome Masters at **25/1**...
- **Daria Kasatkina** – who won WTA Charleston at **28/1**...
- And the big one was **Jelena Ostapenko** – who won the French Open at a massive **100/1**, and also came runner-up in Charleston at **50/1**...

The players on our **2017** list should still very much be on our radar for **2018**. They remain 'Ones to Watch.'

A special mention needs to go to **Belinda Bencic**, who missed most of the 2017 season through injury...

Bencic played just eight main-level events – compared to an average of 23 tournaments each played by the other nine players on the list.

The Swiss starlet is still only 20 years of age, and ended 2017 on an encouraging 10-match winning streak that brought her back-to-back titles on the lower-tier WTA \$125k Series tour in Asia. If she stays fits, Bencic can be expected to make a big leap up the rankings in 2018.

Looking to the future...

With our *Ones to Watch in 2018* list, the intention is to look beyond the players at the top of the current rankings. To find players who are not yet in the Top 10 – but could be heading there in the not-too-distant future.

Ones to Watch 2018

Here is my list of young & improving players to follow in the 2018 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 2018.

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

Andrey Rublev

Age: 20

Country: Russia

End-of-2017 World Ranking: #39

Of all the youngsters on the Men's tour, **Andrey Rublev** looks one of the most likely to follow up on his early-years promise.

The 6'2" Russian plays with power and style, going for (and making) winners from all over the court; it's a brand of attacking tennis that's exciting to watch – and tough for his opponents to deal with.

Rublev doesn't seem to fear anyone and the early signs are that he has the mental toughness for the big occasion.

He won his first Senior title last season, lifting the ATP Umag trophy at odds of 50/1. There should be more final appearances to come in 2018.

Denis Shapovalov

Age: 18

Country: Canada

End-of-2017 World Ranking: #51

The teenager **Denis Shapovalov** is another exciting youngster who plays aggressive 'no fear' tennis. He caught the eye big-time in summer 2017 with a run to the Masters semi final in Montreal – beating Rafael Nadal on the way.

He followed that up with a run to the US Open 4th Round, playing some scintillating stuff.

Shapovalov hasn't got any senior-level trophies in his cabinet yet; reaching an ATP final will be his next goal and he looks more than capable of that. It's only a matter of time before we start hearing a lot more about this talented young man.

Hyeon Chung

Age: 21

Country: South Korea

End-of-2017 World Ranking: #58

Hyeon Chung is tipped to be one of the biggest sporting stars to ever come out of Asia. That's a lot of pressure, but he's making good progress with an assault on the Top 50 set to pick up pace from now on – and a first trophy in the bag with the accolade of winning the inaugural ATP 'Next Gen' Finals (for players aged 21 and under) in autumn 2017.

He's another player in the current crop of exciting youngsters who play with an attacking style. It doesn't always come off, but consistency can come with experience and Chung is a name we can expect to see in the latter stages of many tournaments in the years ahead – starting from now.

Damir Dzumhur

Age: 25

Country: Bosnia

End-of-2017 World Ranking: #30

Damir Dzumhur started the 2017 season ranked #380 in the world – and ended it by cracking the Top 30...

Aged 25, he might not at first seem an obvious 'One to Watch' candidate. However, in the Men's game in particular where physicality is so important, we're seeing a trend in recent years for players making the big breakthrough later in their careers. See Stan Wawrinka, who was regarded for much of his twenties as a talented but flawed player – and now in his thirties find himself with three Grand Slam trophies on his shelf.

Dzumhur will be aiming to put Bosnia on the map for tennis in the same way that Djokovic has for Serbia. He made great strides in 2017, reaching the ATP Winston-Salem final at 100/1 before going on to win the St Petersburg and Moscow titles at odds of 25/1 and 12/1 respectively.

He plays with spirit and fight and can continue his progress in 2018.

Lucas Pouille

Age: 23

Country: France

End-of-2017 World Ranking: #18

Lucas Pouille is a player that long-time *Ones to Watch* readers will be familiar with. We had a 10/1 winner on him at the ATP Metz event in 2016, and a 25/1 winner in Vienna last season.

The talented Frenchman has four ATP titles and six finals to his name already with 5/1 and 18/1 tournament wins and two 20/1 runner-up appearances sitting alongside those 10/1 and 25/1 payouts.

Pouille won the deciding match in the Davis Cup final between France and Belgium in November, lapping up the big-match atmosphere and prompting French captain Yannick Noah to say of Lucas: *"This is when his career is really going to start, he was fantastic."*

Pouille is making a name for himself but isn't in the big league yet, and that means we're still likely to get some attractive prices for him in 2018.

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

Ashleigh Barty

Age: 21

Country: Australia

End-of-2016 World Ranking: #17

Aged 21, **Ashleigh Barty** finished last season as the youngest player in the Top 30 bar Ostapenko and Kasatkina – players that we've already referred to from our 2017 list.

Barty has already had time to retire from tennis – and then return. As a teenager she won the Wimbledon Junior title, and was widely regarded as the Next Big Thing in Australian Women's tennis. Injury and disillusionment with the sport saw her quit the pro Tour and briefly take up a cricket career in the Women's Big Bash League.

Barty is now back with a tennis racket in hand, and has been chalking up some strong form in the last year or so. She got a first WTA trophy win in Kuala Lumpur (4/1), followed up with a 66/1 runner-up appearance at WTA Birmingham and a 16/1 runner-up result in Tashkent.

Ash is a no frills player who tends to keep her head down and let her tennis do the talking. She's genuinely capable of beating the best players on her day, and can continue her eye-catching 'comeback' in 2018.

Anett Kontaveit

Age: 21

Country: Estonia

End-of-2016 World Ranking: #34

Anett Kontaveit looks ready to fly the flag for Estonia, following in the footsteps of the now 32-year-old Kaia Kanepi.

She broke the Top 30 for the first time in 2017, with a win over then World No.1 Angelique Kerber going on her CV too.

Kontaveit ended the year ranked #34 and having reached three WTA finals, including a 10/1 tournament win and a 20/1 runner-up run.

She looks ready to progress up the rankings again in 2018, and can prove a dangerous opponent for some of the better-known players as she continues to make a name for herself.

Katerina Siniakova

Age: 21
Country: Czech Republic
End-of-2016 World Ranking: #48

Katerina Siniakova is another big-hitting 21-year-old making good progress in her young career...

She was a massive 80/1 winner at the WTA Shenzhen event in early 2017. In 2016 she was an 80/1 runner-up in Bastad – returning last year to go one better and win the title at 20/1 (where we backed her as *One to Watch* that week).

Siniakova plays with a similar all-or-nothing game style to last year's breakthrough player Ostapenko – firing winners from all over the place when it goes to plan, and sticking with that 'hit big' mentality in most situations. The Czech youngster has the tools to go much higher up the rankings and feature in plenty more finals.

Catherine Bellis

Age: 18
Country: USA
End-of-2016 World Ranking: #61

Aged 18, the American teenager **Catherine Cartan Bellis** (or 'CiCi' as she is known) is a genuine one-for-the-future selection...

Bellis featured on our *Ones to Watch* list for the US Open 2017, where I said at the time:

She has announced herself to the world at the US Open – twice... Back in 2015, aged 15, Bellis became the youngest player in 10 years to win a match at the US Open, stunning Dominika Cibulkova in the 1st Round. Then, last summer [2016], a 17-year-old CiCi went on a 5-match winning streak that took her through Qualifying and to a 3rd Round meeting with Angelique Kerber (the German went on to lift the trophy and become the World No.1).

The signs are certainly there: Bellis has beaten former Grand Slam winners and current Top 15 players Petra Kvitova and Svetlana Kuznetsova this summer [2017] ... A youngster with plenty of improvement to come, for sure.

Bellis might lack a bit of power compared to other youngsters coming through but she looks to have an all-round game that will stand her in good stead once a bit of experience is on her side. A potential household name and serial winner of the future – and one to start following in 2018.

Marketa Vondrousova

Age: 18
Country: Czech Republic
End-of-2016 World Ranking: #67

Last but not least, the youngest of the lot...

Marketa Vondrousova ended 2017 as the youngest player in the Women's Top 100 (she's a couple of months younger than Bellis), and this 18-year-old is another rising star from the Czech Republic...

Vondrousova made a splash when winning the WTA Biel title in 2017 as a 50/1 outsider.

She won four of eight lower-tier ITF tournaments last season, and was a finalist in a further two. Expect her to make the step up to more regular appearances on the main WTA Tour in 2018 – and to continue to enhance her already growing reputation.

More to come throughout the season...

Those 10 names make up my *Ones to Watch for 2018* 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 *Ones to Watch* emails**, I'll keep you up-to-date with the latest players in form on the weekly ATP and WTA tours – with 'Ones to Watch' lists helping you hunt out big value Each Way opportunities in Outright Winner markets and players to profit from in the individual match markets, too.

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 2018 season. I'll be in touch again soon...

Tom Wilson

Ones to Watch

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