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Ones to Watch in 2021

Young & improving players to follow in the 2021 season – and beyond...

An exclusive *Ones to Watch* report

By

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The early bird catches the worm...

Since our first annual *Ones to Watch* report was published ahead of the 2017 season, our lists of players to follow have flagged up several youngsters that have gone on to win big tournaments – at big prices...

Last year, we unearthed a couple of star performers in particular:

- Sofia Kenin (Australian Open champion, **50/1**. French Open runner-up, **50/1**)
- Iga Swiatek (French Open champion, **100/1**)

Adding to our list of previous finds, including:

- Jelena Ostapenko (French Open champion, **100/1**)
- Naomi Osaka (US Open champion, **50/1**. WTA Indian Wells champion, **125/1**)
- Alexander Zverev (ATP Rome Masters champion, **25/1**)
- Karen Khachanov (ATP Paris Masters champion, **40/1**)
- Ashleigh Barty (French Open champion, **22/1**)

As well as breakthrough players making finals and finishing runner-up, at huge Each Way prices:

- Borna Coric (ATP Shanghai Masters runner-up, **100/1**)
- Daria Kasatkina (WTA Indian Wells runner-up, **80/1**)
- Daniil Medvedev (US Open runner-up, **100/1**)
- Marketa Vondrousova (French Open runner-up, **40/1**)

Time for change...

In **2019**, six of the eight men's Grand Slam finalists were the long-established big boys. And between them, **Novak Djokovic**, **Roger Federer** & **Rafael Nadal** ultimately took home the four biggest trophies.

The **2020** season was seriously shortened due to the coronavirus pandemic. Three of the four Grand Slams were played, with Wimbledon cancelled. Of those three Slams, three of the six finalists came from outside of the men's Big Three:

Dominic Thiem was a 22/1 runner-up at the Australian Open, and then a 9/1 winner at the US Open, collecting his first Grand Slam crown.

Alexander Zverev was a 25/1 runner-up at the US Open, making his debut appearance in a Grand Slam final.

Djokovic, Federer & Nadal have scooped up 14 of the last 15 Grand Slam titles. But by the end of summer 2021, Djokovic will have turned 34, Federer will be 40, and Nadal will be 35...

The new kids really are arriving on the block now.

And going after underdogs and young up-and-coming players is what we'll all about at *Ones to Watch*...

In the women's game, **2019** saw three first-time Grand Slam finalists, with two first-time winners: **Ashleigh Barty** at the French Open, and **Bianca Andreescu** at the US Open.

The truncated **2020** season produced two first-time Slam finalists and winners, from just three Majors played: **Sofia Kenin** in Australia, and **Iga Swiatek** at Roland Garros.

The future is bright. And we're looking to shine in **2021** with our underdogs-and-youngsters approach once again...

See below for 20 names to watch, split into four different categories.

Big prospects...

Another reason to go after the youngsters is the prices...

When it comes to betting on the big-name players, you certainly won't get any gifts from the bookies.

For example, **Djokovic** was just **6/5** (2.2) for the Australian Open 2020, and the same price in 2019.

Nadal was odds-on for the French Open in 2019, at just **10/11** (1.91). And priced at **11/10** (2.1) when winning it again in 2021.

Compare those prices to some of the 'Ones to Watch' figures mentioned above: **25/1**, **50/1**, even **100/1** shots getting to finals – and winning.

To make money from tennis, you need to know about the stars of the future...

As I said this time last year (and the year before, and the year before that, AND the year before that), I'm not writing the current star names off *just* yet. But it certainly pays to be alert to the newcomers...

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 Djokovic, for example. He was a 33/1 underdog when winning his first Grand Slam title – the Australian Open in 2008 – when just 20 years old
- Naomi Osaka won the US Open aged 20 as a 50/1 outsider

Ones to Watch in 2021

With our *Ones to Watch in 2021* 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.

Some of the names on the list below have already provided payouts on the Men's **ATP** and Women's **WTA** Tours. I expect these players to earn more success and provide more payouts in 2021 and beyond.

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...

Here is my list of young & improving players to follow in the 2021 season...

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 any of them could climb up the rankings and make a significant breakthrough in 2021.

Four categories...

Due to the pandemic, the 2020 season was significantly shorter than usual, with just 45% of tournaments played compared to 2019 (56 events compared to 125). So, for the first time in my annual *Ones to Watch* reports, I'm putting up a handful of players that have been listed here before. As, all being well, we can expect them to get a lot more court time in 2021.

I'm calling those players **repeaters**. Names that have been published in my annual *Ones to Watch* list before.

Alongside my usual five **men** and five **women** to watch.

Plus, five **teenagers** that are already making a dent in the in the world rankings.

All adding up to give us **20** names on the list for **2021**...

We'll start with five names to remind ourselves of...

REPEATERS:

Jannik Sinner

Age: 19

Country: Italy

End-of-2020 World Ranking: No.36

In comparison to the women's game, where five teenagers finished 2020 inside the Top 100. The men's ATP 2020 season-end rankings featured just one teenager in the Top 100 – **Jannik Sinner**. He leapt from No.78 to No.36 in the world last year. Impressive

on several occasions with his whip-smart forehand, and cool temperament. Reached the quarter finals at the French Open, giving champion Nadal a very good run for his money. Before ending the year with a first ATP title win, indoors at Sofia.

Felix Auger-Aliassime

Age: 20

Country: Canada

End-of-2020 World Ranking: No.21

In the Juniors, **Felix Auger-Aliassime** won the Boys' US Open 2016, and also came within a whisker of winning the French Open (runner-up 2016). In 2017, Felix won the ATP Lyon Challenger event as a 16-year-old, making him one of the youngest ever players to win a title on the lower-tier Challenger tour. Previous teenage Challenger winners include Rafael Nadal and Juan-Martin del Potro – both of whom went on to win Grand Slam trophies before they had turned 21...

In February 2019, Felix reached his first Senior-level ATP final, finishing a 50/1 runner-up in Rio de Janeiro on clay. He went on to reach two more finals that season – runner-up at both ATP Lyon and Stuttgart.

Three more finals followed in 2020 – and three more runner-up trophies. A first title win is a clear aim for 2021...

The still-young Canadian has left his long-term coach, ready for a fresh start this season. He trained at the Rafael Nadal Academy in the off-season, prompting rumours of a possible link-up with Rafa's famed former coach, Uncle Toni.

Fun fact: Auger-Aliassime has the same birthday as Roger Federer (8th August).

Iga Swiatek

Age: 19

Country: Poland

End-of-2020 World Ranking: No.17

Iga Swiatek was our Big One in 2020, winning the French Open at a top-price 100/1. That was her first ever Senior title win. And she did it without dropping a single set, including a thumping win over the top seed and former champ, Simona Halep.

That stunning Roland Garros triumph was on clay. But Swiatek has the power game to produce on all courts. We might not see 100/1 for her again for some time, but Iga is most definitely one to keep on our side in 2021 and beyond.

Coco Gauff

Age: 16

Country: USA

End-of-2020 World Ranking: No.48

For the second year running, 'teen sensation' **Coco Gauff** starts the year as the youngest woman in the world's Top 100.

Gauff has remarkable poise and confidence for such a young age, and has the fitness and skills to go on and win some very big trophies in her career. Her serve was the main

concern in 2020 – with far, far too many double faults. But there's plenty of time to fix that.

The young American could only play a limited number of tournaments last year because of her age, and then of course came the pandemic, too. Gauff's talent and potential is no secret – so, like Swiatek, big odds might be hard to come by. But we have to keep this young star on the list.

Dayana Yastremska

Age: 20

Country: Ukraine

End-of-2020 World Ranking: No.29

If you'd asked me 18 months ago who would win a Grand Slam first out of **Dayana Yastremska** and Sofia Kenin, I'd have gone for Yastremska to edge it. The 2020 season ended up belonging to Kenin though, with the 22-year-old American 4th in the world, and named WTA Player of the Year.

After a first WTA title win in 2018, followed by two more in 2019, Yastremska didn't collect any titles in 2020. She's still only 20 years of age, so there's plenty of time to make the next step.

Last season saw injury, a split with her coach, getting into trouble on social media, and the year ended with a positive test for coronavirus. Things can improve for the Ukrainian in 2021. If she gets the focus back on the tennis and on court, Dayana has the same win-at-all-costs attitude as Kenin – and some massive shots in her locker.

Now let's move on to a list of fresh names to add to our 2021 *Ones to Watch* list...

MEN:

Casper Ruud

Age: 22

Country: Norway

End-of-2020 World Ranking: No.27

Casper Ruud is making very steady and impressive progress up the rankings. After ending 2018 at No.112, he moved up to No.54 in 2019. Then made another big leap in 2020, climbing to a season-end position of No.27.

Last year also saw the young Norwegian win a first ATP title. He's reached three finals in total so far, all on clay.

With great movement and speed, a fantastic attitude, and a very nice forehand, Ruud has all the tools to go higher in the rankings – and challenge for some big titles. I put him up as a 150/1 shot at the Rome Masters last September (semi final). And again at 150/1 at the French Open, where he reached the 3rd round. He's one to watch for sure, and especially on clay.

Emil Ruusuvuori

Age: 21

Country: Finland

End-of-2020 World Ranking: No.87

Emiil Ruusuvuori cracked the Top 100 in 2020, and the upward curve can continue for him in 2021. Standing 6'2" with a big serve, the Finnish rising star is a particular threat on indoor hard courts. So far, six of his 10 tournament wins on the lower-tier ITF Futures and ATP Challenger circuits have come indoors. All 10 have come at hard-court events overall. A first full-level ATP trophy win is a realistic goal for this season. He ended last year with a first semi-final appearance.

Alejandro Davidovich Fokina

Age: 21

Country: Spain

End-of-2020 World Ranking: No.53

Alejandro Davidovich Fokina ended 2020 ranked No.53, and he looks set to join just a handful of other men aged 21 or under in the world's Top 50. The Spaniard has a dangerous forehand, and plays with a certain swagger and confidence. He can blow hot and cold, but consistency can come with age. A threat on both clay and hard courts, Davidovich Fokina is another young name with an eye on a first ATP final in 2021.

Kwon Soon-Woo

Age: 23

Country: South Korea

End-of-2020 World Ranking: No.95

With former *Ones to Watch* nominee Hyeun Chung struggling with injuries for a couple of years now, **Kwon Soon-Woo** is now South Korea's highest-ranked men's player. He first entered the Top 100 in 2019, and started 2020 well with three ATP quarter-final appearances – before the pandemic brought the tour to a halt. If he can stay fit himself, Kwon Soon-Woo can challenge for a first Senior trophy in 2021.

Sebastian Korda

Age: 20

Country: USA

End-of-2020 World Ranking: No.119

The son of famous tennis parents, **Sebastian Korda** is starting to make a name for himself in the game. The 20-year-old looks sets to move into the Top 100 in 2021, building on a breakthrough season in 2020 that saw him win a first ATP Challenger title, on indoor hard courts in November.

Prior to that, Seb won six matches to come through qualifying at the French Open and reach the 4th round. Clay is his 'most-winningest' surface so far, with a match win-loss record of 60-38 (61%).

Standing 6'5" tall, blonde and rangy, the former Australian Open Junior champion reminds me somewhat of Alexander Zverev – a former *Ones to Watch* name who is now a Top 10 player.

WOMEN:

Marie Bouzkova

Age: 22

Country: Czech Republic

End-of-2020 World Ranking: No.52

Marie Bouzkova has got that slightly enigmatic quality, where on her day she can turn on the style and trouble anyone. A case in point was the Toronto Masters in 2019, where she made the semi finals as a rank outsider. In 2020, Bouzkova reached the final at WTA Monterrey. If she can stay fit (she often appears with her leg taped up), and ramp up the consistency, then Marie can spring a surprise or two in 2021 – and challenge for a couple of trophies. This is a player I like; she plays the game with style, and often with a smile, too.

Fiona Ferro

Age: 22

Country: Czech Republic

End-of-2020 World Ranking: No.52

Fiona Ferro was one of the breakout players of 2020, and she's definitely in our good books, having won the first tournament back after lockdown, lifting the WTA Palermo trophy for us as 25/1 shot. That was Ferro's second career title. Both have come on clay. At the French Open, she showed her underdog potential on the big stage, too, reaching the 4th round – where she pushed eventual runner-up Kenin to a deciding set.

Ferro is another player I like. Full of brains, angles, and smart shots. There's power behind her shots, too. This is a player that can solve problems on court, making her one to watch when facing bigger names. Expect more success to come, and at some decent odds, too.

Nadia Podoroska

Age: 23

Country: Argentina

End-of-2020 World Ranking: No.47

Returning from injury, **Nadia Podoroska** ripped a 45-8 win-loss record in 2020. Capping a superb season by reaching the French Open semi finals in only her second ever Grand Slam main draw appearance. The 23-year-old Argentinean won three lower-tier ITF titles last year, and also made the semis on clay at WTA Prague.

Climbing from No.234 in the world at the end of 2019, to a career-high of No.47 by the end of last season, expect more to come from Podoroska. I don't think that French Open run was a flash in the pan.

Elena Rybakina

Age: 21

Country: Kazakhstan

End-of-2020 World Ranking: No.19

Elena Rybakina is another player that posted a blistering win-loss record in 2020. The Russian-born Kazakhstan representative went 29-10 last year, reaching five WTA finals (won one). That's a remarkable achievement, considering 2020 wasn't a full season. Flat-hitting and poker-faced, Rybakina has the physical attributes and work ethic to go even higher than her current Top 20 position. The next step is to make a serious, deep run at a Grand Slam.

Jennifer Brady

Age: 25

Country: USA

End-of-2020 World Ranking: No.24

Talking of deep runs at a Slam, **Jennifer Brady** was one of the breakthrough names of 2020 – reaching the US Open semi final without dropping a set. A serious, hard-working attitude, and an absolute monster forehand, make Brady a real contender at pretty much any hard-court event now.

The former college player trained hard during lockdown last summer, putting in the hard yards in Germany. As well as the big New York run, she also lifted a maiden WTA title. I'm not sure anyone on tour hits the ball as fast or as clean as Brady right now. She is capable of winning a lot of matches again this year.

And last but certainly not least, as well as Sinner, Swiatek & Gauff listed above, here are five 'new' teenagers to add to our *Ones to Watch* list for 2021 – and beyond...

TEENAGERS:

Lorenzo Musetti

Age: 18

Country: Italy

End-of-2020 World Ranking: No.129

Lorenzo Musetti plays with real flair and confidence. He came to prominence in Rome last September, beating three-time Grand Slam winner Stan Wawrinka in straight sets. He followed that up in his very next tournament, lifting the trophy at the ATP Challenger event in Forli, Italy. So far, 55 of his 81 match wins have come on clay. But this kid has been compared to both Roger Federer AND Rafael Nadal – and he can play on any surface. One to watch, for sure. This season, and in the years to come.

Carlos Alcaraz

Age: 17

Country: Spain

End-of-2020 World Ranking: No.141

The youngest man on our list, **Carlos Alcaraz** set out a marker in 2020, winning six titles across the lower-level ITF Futures and ATP Challenger tours. In doing so, he became only the fifth player in Challenger Tour history to win five+ titles before the age of 18. With former World No.1 Juan Carlos Ferrero as his coach, Alcaraz looks to have a lot of good things in place, and a big future ahead of him.

Brandon Nakashima

Age: 19

Country: USA

End-of-2020 World Ranking: No.170

At 19, **Brandon Nakashima** is one of just four teenagers in the men's Top 200 world rankings. The other three also feature in this report – Sinner, Musetti, and Alcaraz.

Nakashima won two titles on the ITF Futures and ATP Challenger breeding grounds last year. The San Diego youngster is a former World No.3 in Juniors. He made the quarter finals on his ATP Tour debut at the start of 2020, at Delray Beach. Hard courts are his best playing surface. A significant move up the rankings is on the cards, as he gets more main-tour experience under his belt.

Leylah Fernandez

Age: 18

Country: Canada

End-of-2020 World Ranking: No.88

Leylah Fernandez ended 2020 at a career-high of No.88, and this talented and driven left-hander is being talked of as a potential future Grand Slam winner.

Last year, Fernandez made the final at WTA Acapulco, as a 100/1 outsider. She has the look to me of a player that likes the challenge of playing the big matches, and isn't afraid to play her own game against higher-ranked opponents. That could make her a serious one to watch this season.

Marta Kostyuk

Age: 18

Country: Ukraine

End-of-2020 World Ranking: No.99

Alongside 16-year-old Gauff (ranked No.48), and 19-year-olds Swiatek (No.17) and Amanda Anisimova (No.30). The two other teenagers inside the women's Top 100 going into the start of the 2021 season are Leylah Fernandez, and **Marta Kostyuk**.

The 18-year-old Ukrainian reached three ITF finals last season, winning one. And Kostyuk showed glimpses of her potential on the main tour. Notably taking US Open winner Naomi Osaka to a deciding set in New York, in the 3rd round. With more WTA and Grand Slam chances to come in 2021, Marta has the power game and fight to pull off a few shocks.

More to come throughout the season...

Those 20 names make up my *Ones to Watch in 2021* list. They are all young & improving players that I'm earmarking to have a good season.

But the list is by no means the end of our work...

Throughout the season, I'll keep you up-to-date with the latest players in form on the weekly ATP and WTA tours – 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 2021 season. I'll be in touch again very soon...

Tom Wilson

Ones to Watch

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