

Let's pause here to consider, as I like to, the people that night attending the very first tennis match of their lives—a sizeable number, it's fair to say. Among professional tennis's four major title tournaments, the United States Open stood out for its night sessions. Where Wimbledon, Roland Garros and the Australian's grass courts at Kooyong all shut down at dark, contestants for the United States' trophies played on. Television obliged with broadcasting from the Stadium court every night the tournament lasted, two weeks on either side of Labor Day. The 7pm scene: hot, smoggy with cigarette smoke, thickened by grilled meat and rubber smells, brimful of alcohol on breath, noisy, echoing, a steep-sided arena loomed over by four banks of high-voltage floodlights. Below, in the center of a green hardcourt, white lines edge and divide a rectangle about eighty feet long that's split across its middle by a white-topped waist-high net. The walls of the arena floor are ringed with sponsoring brand names on dark vinyl drapery. TV and press cameras crowd the edges. From the Stadium's cheap seats up by the lights the view down is dizzying. Those so equipped raise binoculars to scan the courtside rows for beautiful and famous faces. New York abounds in them as it abounds in party scenes—and here is one of late summer's choicest. Party guests look around happily and ask what they're about to see.

Two singles matches, two women then two men; one of each would move on to the tournament's third round—third of seven, the seventh being the final. With this night session featuring a title favorite on both halves of the card, chances were good they'd be seeing at least one eventual champion. The women would play first, best of three sets; the men would follow playing best of five.

First to six games wins the set—but a player must win by two. If both players wind up with six, they play a sudden-death tiebreak. A game is to four points, but again the need to win by two; zero is called Love and the points are called, in order, Fifteen, Thirty, and Forty. The next point after 40 wins the game—unless the other player ties the game at 40-all, better known as Deuce—from which again someone has to win by two, two consecutive points.

They hit hollow rubber balls wrapped in clipped fluorescent yellow felt back and forth at one another, one at a time, careful to keep inside the proper painted lines. The first shot in a point is the serve. She or he who hits it is the server, the other receives, the players alternating games. With two chances to serve the ball (one miss makes a fault, the second makes a double-fault and loss of point), the server stands just behind the baseline, tosses the ball in the air and strikes it hard with a racquet trying to send it diagonally across the net into the opponent's territory. The point from here can continue for any length of time, until a shot lands in the net or entirely outside the lines—an error—or otherwise, with one player hitting an unreturnable shot—a winner. A winning serve is called an ace. Winning a game, the server is said to have held serve. Otherwise the receiver has broken.

Tennis racquets in 1987 could be made of all kinds of things but rarely anymore of wood alone. When producing groundstrokes, players could hold them in one hand or two; they reach forward to hit forehands, and across their bodies to hit backhands. The ball can only bounce once so they have to run fast. A ball taken in the air, often from close to the net, is called a volley. Other shots include the overhead, the lob, and the somewhat unpopular moonball.

For fairness, players switch ends on the court after the first,

third, and every two subsequent games, and again between sets. At these times they're also allowed to sit down to refresh themselves. Placed up high between them on the sideline and directly above the net towers the chair umpire, licensed and proudly so, who'll announce the score after every point. Audible "*out*" calls during play can be expected from the individuals stationed as line judges at key spots around the court, well-trained stoics, mostly local—as are the girls and boys in shorts who dash around retrieving balls and bearing towels to the players. Night matches tend to run a little slow and late as sitting changeovers get prolonged to accommodate the commercials being broadcast then. The concession stands print money all the way through the national anthem as sung by a past Tony winner.

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