

How the Court Surface Affects Tennis Player Rankings, Titles and Prize Money

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Djokovic in 2015 won a record 21.6 million in prize winning (throughout the year). Djokovic won 83 matches and lost only 6 matches in singles. He won the Australian Open, Wimbledon, US Open, World Tour Finals, Paris Masters, Shanghai Masters, China Open, Rome, Monte-Carlo Masters, Miami Open and Indian Wells.

Djokovic only lost to Ivo Karlovic in the quarter finals of Doha, Roger Federer in the finals of Dubai, Stan Wawrinka in the finals of the French Open, Andy Murray in the finals of Montreal, Roger Federer in the finals on Cincinnati and Roger Federer in a round robin match in the World Tour Finals.

Out of the 11 tournaments that Djokovic won - 8 were on hard court, 1 on grass and 2 on clay. Even further, the matches that Djokovic lost to Karlovic at Doha in the quarter finals, to Federer at Dubai in the finals, to Murray at Montreal in the finals, to Federer at Cincinnati in the finals and to Federer at the World Tour Finals in a round robin match were all on hard court. Djokovic performs best on hard court as represented by his total grand slam singles record of 16 - winning 7 grand slams at the Australian Open on hard court, 3 grand slams at the US Open on hard court, 5 grand slams at Wimbledon on grass and 1 grand slam at the French Open on clay. Federer performs best on grass with a total of 20 singles grand slams – 8 at Wimbledon on hard court, 6 at the Australian Open on hard court, 5 at the US Open on hard court and 1 at the French Open on clay. Also note that as of the 23/09/2019 Djokovic is leading in total prize money with \$135 million, Federer with \$126 million and Nadal with \$111 million; despite Federer winning more grand slams overall with 20 (compared to Djokovic on 16).

Table 1 gives the number of tournaments played on different surfaces for the 2006 ATP and WTA tour in 2007. Since a player can only compete at one tournament at a time, these figures are reduced and represented in brackets in the table. For example, for the 2006 ATP, 6 tournaments were played on grass, and any one man could have competed in only 4 tournaments.

	Grass	Hard	Clay
ATP	6 (4)	30 (21)	25 (18)
WTA	4 (3)	37 (26)	15 (11)

Table 1: Number of tournaments played on different surfaces for the 2006 ATP and WTA tour in 2007

Note that from 2015 an extra week had been extended between the finish of the French Open and the start of Wimbledon (a total of 3 weeks compared to 2 weeks previous to 2015) allowing an extra tournament to be played on grass leading up to Wimbledon.

https://www.espn.com/tennis/wimbledon15/story/_/id/13155018/wimbledon-2015-pros-cons-extended-gap-french-open-wimbledon

The lack of grass tournaments available on the tour is unfair to players that perform best on grass (such as Federer) since they have to play on other surfaces such as hard court and clay in order to win titles and obtain prize money (whereas players such as Djokovic can just focus on playing tournaments on hard court that they are best suited to). The ranking system is a rolling 52-week, cumulative system. A player's ranking is determined by their results at a maximum of 18 tournaments and points are awarded based on how far a player advances in a tournament. The lack of grass court tournaments implies that the ranking system is biased towards players that best perform well on hard court or clay (thus Federer is disadvantaged in the ranking system).

Table 2 lists the total number of weeks for a player holding the number 1 world ranking as of 23/09/2019. Note that Roger Federer has been on the tour longer than Djokovic (Federer currently aged 38 compared to Djokovic aged 32). Djokovic is currently ranked number 1 with Federer currently ranked number 3 and Djokovic could potentially end up with more weeks with the number 1 ranking due to playing the majority of tournaments on hard court that Djokovic is best suited to (and the lack of grass court tournaments available on the tour means that Federer has to play on the surfaces of hard court and clay, where Federer is best suited to playing on grass). Also, Pete Sampras was disadvantaged on the tour due to performing best on grass.

Player	Total weeks
Roger Federer	310
Pete Sampras	286
Ivan Lendl	270
Novak Djokovic	270
Jimmy Connors	268
Rafael Nafal	196

Table 2: The total number of weeks of a player holding the number 1 world ranking as of 23/09/2019.

If all surfaces are equally important to the game of tennis, the lack of grass tournaments could be considered unfair to the players who are best suited to the faster courts (grass is the fastest surface, followed by hard court and clay being the slowest surface). The earnings of such players, number of titles won and their world rankings are at present potentially less than they would be if there were more grass courts. It would be possible to have world rankings for each of grass, hard and clay surfaces. These rankings could be used for seeding players when playing on the respective surfaces. Also, if the surfaces were considered to be of equal importance to the game of tennis, the rankings on the three surfaces could be combined with an equal weighting to give an appropriate overall ranking. Further, there would appear to be a case for adding some additional grass court tournaments to the ATP and WTA calendar so that players who wish to play more than just 4 ATP or 3 WTA tournaments in the year, could do so.