

THE FIRST ANNUAL SPORTS ISSUE

Andy Roddick, Michael Vick, Bode Miller, Kevin Garnett & More

Men's Journal

JUNE 2003 MENSJOURNAL.COM \$3.95

THE 20 BEST ATHLETES IN THE WORLD

COMPLETE GUIDE TO Sports Camps
Surfing, Baseball, Golf, Fishing, Climbing, Tennis



Meet E!'s Hot New Wild On Girl

BELOW THE BELT: Shave My WHAT?!

Dale Earnhardt Jr.

The Hottest Driver in America's Biggest Sport

Rating the New Digital Cameras, Sports Watches, iPod Clones



KID DYNAMITE: In 2001, Roddick (currently ranked sixth in the world) became the first American teenager to win three tournaments in the same season since Pete Sampras did it in 1990.

the hardest- working phenom in tennis

When you're **Andy Roddick**,
a.k.a. the Next Great American, there's no
such thing as a vacation *By Josh Dean*

Some stories sound apocryphal, even when they aren't. Like this one, a favorite of Blanche Roddick's: One Christmas, when he was eight, little Andy Roddick gave each member of his family the same small gift box. Inside was a tennis ball bearing a sloppy signature — the sloppy signature of eight-year-old Andy Roddick. "Keep those somewhere safe," he told his mom, Blanche, his dad, Jerry, and his brothers, John and Lawrence. "They're going to be worth something someday."

ANDY RODDICK, MESSY-HAIRED BOY WONDER OF AMERICAN TENNIS, LIVES just off Interstate 95 in Boca Raton, Florida, the retirement capital of the world. He's around the corner from a golf course and not far past a security booth manned by somebody's grandfather dressed up like a state trooper. From there, it's a few turns — some lefts, a couple rights — to your average split-level stucco with a fence, palm trees, and a one-car garage.

Inside, it's about what you'd expect from a 20-year-old with some cash: L-shaped couch, big-screen TV, air-hockey table, Powerade machine. There's even a roommate, and a homeless friend crashing in the living room.

"What can I get you?" Roddick asks, nodding toward the Powerade machine. He looks tall and sinewy in the John Deere T-shirt he's plucked from his voluminous collection of thrift-store wear. "We're sold out of water. Come to think of it, we're out of everything but fruit punch. Fruit punch okay?"

Behind him, a beautiful barefoot girl in low-rider sweats walks in and opens the retirement-village version of a Sub-Zero fridge. She's cradling a

cockeyed pug about the size of a grapefruit and appears to have just woken up.

"This is Mandy," Roddick says, referring to 18-year-old Mandy Moore, international pop star, actress, MTV host, and, most pertinent to the current situation, his girlfriend. "And that's Dexter." Mandy sets the dog down, and Dexter almost immediately pees on the floor, which gets him banished to the bathroom by his proxy father. "Andy's so hard on him," Mandy says.

Mandy has been Roddick's girlfriend for about six months now, ever since her tennis-adoring mom introduced them during a tournament in

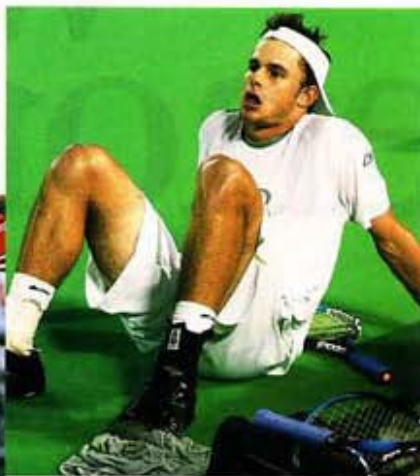
Roddick picks up a plastic doll in his gangly image.

"I don't know how much it looks like me," he says, "but it's cool to be a bobblehead."



Toronto. The two kept things pretty quiet until November, when they officially came out at a charity event in Florida. By December, they'd been in more than a dozen gossip columns, in *People* and *Us Weekly*, among others. Roddick was already one of the more famous tennis players on earth, but his status as Hollywood boyfriend pushed him into pop stardom.

The Association of Tennis Professionals (a.k.a. the ATP men's tour) estimates that Andy Roddick fields ten times more media requests than any player not named Andre. On this day in December, during his off-season "vacation," Roddick is not only entertaining me, he's also awaiting the arrival of a camera crew from the syndicated cable show *Livin' Large*, a slightly low-rent version of MTV's *Cribs* hosted by Carmen Electra. This episode of *Livin' Large* purports to show two sides of a celebrity: his home life and his charity work. This very evening, Roddick and the agency that represents him, SFX, will debut a major charity event, called Rock-n-Racquets, at



AGONY AND ECSTASY: Roddick, after his five-set win over Younes El Aynaoui in Australia (above), and celebrating a Davis Cup victory over Spain last year (left).

Miami's AmericanAirlines Arena. Andre Agassi, another SFX client, will fly in on his private jet to play an exhibition match against Roddick, then fly home to Las Vegas. A concert will follow.

When the *Livin' Large* crew members arrive, Roddick shows them around his house, which was purchased a little more than a year ago, when he moved out of his boyhood home. "Here's a photo of me and former President Bush," he says, before picking up a small plastic bauble in his own gangly image. "I don't

know how much it looks like me, but it's cool to be a bobblehead." As Roddick moves on to the kitchen, the producer, a small blonde wearing Kim Jong Il-magnitude sunglasses, stops him, peering over her frames. "So you're 20, right?" He nods. "How does that work in clubs? I mean, you totally go to clubs, right?"

Surprised at the question, Roddick looks down, then past the camera at his sister-in-law and publicist, Ginger Roddick, who has been traveling the world on his hip since mid-2002 to marshal his frenetic schedule, and to prevent him from answering potentially incriminating questions like this one. She frowns and shakes her head behind the producer's back. "You know," Roddick says, "that's not really my thing. I'm more of a stay-at-home-and-watch-sports guy."

Then, thinking on his feet, he tosses her a carrot. "You wanna see my rabbit?" He's referring to Stifler, a pet named after his favorite character in one of his favorite movies, *American Pie*, whose raunchy lines he quotes eagerly and often. Stifler (sex unknown) lives a lonely life out back in a small cage under a big-leafed palm, where visits from its owners are few and far between. Roddick's mom, Blanche, has suggested auctioning the poor creature for charity, which probably isn't a bad idea. "Shit," Scott the roommate says once the crew is safely outside in the yard, "I hope Stifler's not dead."

JOSH DEAN, a deputy editor at *Men's Journal*, possesses a 77-mph first serve.

PRETTY MUCH FROM THE MINUTE HE BEAT HIS IDOL, Pete Sampras — the man whose poster once graced his bedroom wall — in March 2001, Andy Roddick was ordained as the next Courier/Chang/Sampras/Agassi. Within months, the phenom had fueled his spark-to-flame legend, willing himself to a five-set victory over Michael Chang at the French Open (in which he cramped up and could barely move, hit second-serve aces just to hang on, then ripped his shirt open upon winning), capturing three tournament titles, then extending top-ranked Lleyton Hewitt to five epic sets in the quarterfinals of the U.S. Open before melting down after a bad line call (and calling the umpire a “moron”). Tennis year 2002 brought more successes — two tournament titles, the fourth-most match wins on tour, his debut in the top ten rankings — but Roddick didn’t get past the third round in three of the four majors and was waxed in the U.S. Open quarters by eventual champion Sampras. “I have mixed emotions about last year,” he wrote in November in his journal on andyroddick.com. “I don’t think I played my best tennis and I will still finish in the top ten. That makes me very optimistic for next year.”

Indeed, 2003 has been different. Tennis starts its season with a bang. The Australian Open, a Grand Slam, begins in January, and Roddick was clearly ready for it. He breezed through three rounds before falling two sets and a break behind Russian star Mikhail Youzhny in the round of 16. It was a situation that would have ended in a Roddick loss in previous years, but for the first time, he recovered from a two-set deficit to win.

But that was nothing compared with the quarterfinal that followed two days later, when Roddick and Morocco’s Younes El Aynaoui played one of the greatest Grand Slam matches in tennis history. Roddick prevailed in five sets, winning 21–19 in a fifth set that, at two hours and 29 minutes, was longer than most Grand Slam matches and was the longest set, measured in games, in 126 years of Grand Slam tennis. Just as astounding as Roddick’s endurance, however, was his level of play. In five hours of tennis, he hit 102 winners and a shockingly low 31 unforced errors, with only two double faults. He served 27 aces, four of which topped 140 miles per hour. In previous seasons, Roddick had been practically tethered to the baseline, but against El Aynaoui he showed his commitment to a new weapon: Roddick came to the net 71 times, winning 62 percent of those points.

True to his fiery form, he even butted heads with officials, at one point — after a questionable line call — saying quite clearly to the chair ump, who could’ve overruled the line judge, “Have you heard of that part of the body called a spine? Get one.” But the fatigue and the line calls and the fact that El Aynaoui was nearly flawless himself didn’t dent Roddick, and he held on, collapsing to the court after hitting yet another perfect volley, which El Aynaoui plunked into the net. When the match ended, the two opponents embraced, and Roddick raised El Aynaoui’s hand into the air.

Afterward, Roddick was clear about the implications. “Those are the matches I didn’t win before.” Tarik Benhabiles, his coach, agreed, saying, “This is going to open his mind.” *Sports Illustrated* called the match “tran-



STROKE OF GENIUS

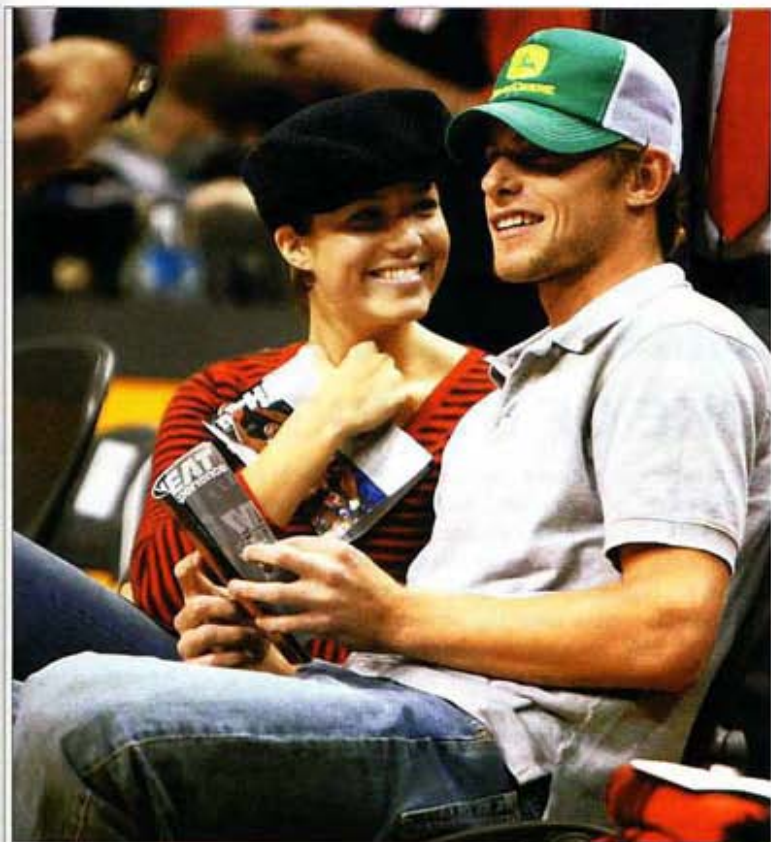
MENTION ANDY RODDICK to a casual sports fan and he’ll likely know one thing: The kid serves the ball hard. But *hard* doesn’t begin to describe what launches from his racket strings, a 140-mile-per-hour cannonball that endangers the future progeny of his opponents. Although the serves of Goran Ivanisevic and Greg Rusedski are probably as powerful, Roddick’s serve is the tour’s most fearsome weapon for two reasons: He’s accurate (unlike most big servers, he rarely double-faults), and he changes speeds drastically, often following an ace with a 105-mph curve or a 95-mph knuckler. Last year, Roddick won 88 percent of his service games (good for second-best on tour) and blasted 658 aces (third on tour), including the fastest ever recorded at Wimbledon (144 mph). Several times, he won games with four consecutive aces. Roddick has cracked the heady 140-mph barrier at nine different tournaments, including three of the four Grand Slams (making him the only player ever to do so), and this past March at the Pacific Life Open, he set a new personal high of 147, just two miles per hour off Rusedski’s all-time record.

The weird thing is, Roddick’s serve is awkward. There’s no fluidity. He tosses the ball quickly with a wrist snap, then cocks his arm and whips it downward in a violent half swing. But weirdest of all is the story behind it: The most fearsome serve in tennis was an accident. “One day, I got really pissed off in practice and did this half-motion thing and just cranked the serve, and it worked,” Roddick explains. “I did it a couple more times and was like, All right. The rest is history.”

FASTEST SERVE: 147 mph (second-fastest of all time)
NUMBER OF ACES IN 2002: 658 (third-highest on tour)
PERCENTAGE OF SERVICE GAMES WON: 88 (second on tour)
MOST ACES IN A MATCH: 37 (French Open record)

scendent; less tennis contest than five hours of dramaturgy.” Agassi, who went on to win the tournament, pretty much summed it up. “I think we saw,” he said, “that Andy is going to be a champion.”

BUT THE FAIRY TALE HAS ITS SLOW PARTS. THE LIFE OF A PROFESSIONAL athlete in an individual sport is a complicated one. Since you are not a member of a team, every little headache is your headache. You choose when and where to play, then figure out how to get there and where you’ll be eating, training, and staying while you’re on site. Unless you’re Tiger Woods or Andre Agassi, you’re probably flying commercial, and that means you pick a home near a major airport. There’s no team dental plan or health-insurance policy. If you want a trainer, or a publicist, or a weight machine, you buy one yourself. If you want any of these things to travel with you, you pay them and feed them or find a place to plug them in. For his first two seasons, Roddick had just Benhabiles. But the Roddick machine (driven largely by his parents, with direction from his team of agents) is in full growth mode. Late last year, a conditioning coach, Cicero de Castro, joined the effort, and the full-time entourage expanded to three, including Ginger. Because of difficulties with flight schedules, even with three international airports in the area, Team Roddick is considering a time-shared jet. And don’t get them started on scheduling.



HE GOT FAME: Roddick, with Mandy Moore at a Heat game in Miami (above), and at age seven with his brother John (right).

On any given day during his "vacation," he owes time to any number of people, starting with Benhabiles. From there, the remaining hours are doled out in increments by one of his three agents or, more commonly, by Ginger, who has the luxury of being attached to Roddick's side. The complex machinations of Roddick's camp are due to the unspoken assumption that they are creating something unique and very important: the Next Great American.

The question of who this will be is of supreme interest, and not just to domestic tennis fans and ball manufacturers. The sport itself depends on getting the attention of the world's most powerful consumer market. "Without a top American, the U.S. loses interest in tennis," Brazilian Gustavo Kuerten, formerly the number one player in the world, said after losing to Roddick in 2001.

Tennis officials won't admit to this, but it's not hard to sense their excitement over Roddick's potential, especially during what recently seemed to be a fast-approaching fallow period for American tennis. "It's reminiscent of where we were with Connors and McEnroe in their swansong years, and people were saying, 'The sky's falling,'" says Mark Miles, CEO of the ATP. "And then, almost out of nowhere, we had this generation that sustained us in the nineties, with Agassi and Sampras and Courier and Chang. If Andre retired tomorrow, the tennis world wouldn't come to an end, but it is important to have American stars."

Roddick's three agents aren't shy about their lofty goals. "There are



very few players who can disassociate from being just tennis players," says Ken Meyerson, the leader of the team and the head of SFX's tennis group. "Sampras never did. Agassi has. And now Andy is beginning to." What Miles and Meyerson, and all the agents and managers and sponsors (Reebok foremost among them) of Roddick the brand, understand is that in the alchemy of tennis stardom lies an all-too-rare formula for riches. A tennis player is alone on his side of the court, wearing no helmet and enjoying half of the camera time in a given match. He need not share the spotlight with teammates, so the logos on his shirt, shorts, and shoes get more airtime than most foreign wars.

The crucial buzzword for any of sports' superstar endorsers is *transcendence*.

Agassi's endorsements are about charisma. Roddick has it, too. He pumps fists, makes fun of himself, and claps his racket when an opponent hits a good shot.

If a player can become a person whose life off the court is a draw, a person who influences trends and attracts swarms of paparazzi, then his value goes up. His house is a story; his car is a story; his brands of jeans and shirts and shoes are all stories. His girlfriend is a story. Tennis pundits will tell you that the reason Andre Agassi (whose wedding to Brooke Shields made the cover of *People* magazine) far surpassed Pete Sampras's endorsement earnings, despite winning far fewer Slams, has to do with his surplus of charisma. Roddick has it, too. He pumps fists, tears shirts, makes fun of himself, and claps his racket when the guy across the net hits a good shot. During a match against Russian Marat Safin in which nothing was going right, Roddick turned to the crowd and said, "I've got ground strokes for sale." At a tournament in Houston, Roddick was so impressed when a few hundred fans stuck around through a four-hour

rain delay that he grabbed the umpire's mike and offered to buy a ticket to the final for anyone who didn't have one. Two hundred and fifty took him up on it. "You should've seen my credit card bill," he said.

A FEW MILES FROM THEIR SON'S PLACE IN BOCA RATON, BLANCHE AND Jerry Roddick maintain the family home, a sprawling four-bedroom ranch with a cavernous living room and a two-acre backyard that holds the house's main attraction: the tennis court, recently resurfaced, where Andy Roddick metamorphosed from amateur to pro; it is where he still practices in the off-season, twice a day, under the gruff tutelage of Benhabiles.

Roddick's coach is a stubby, no-nonsense French-Algerian who, according to Roddick, looks like "a cross between Yoda and [continued on page 120]

Greg Brady." Benhabiles won over Roddick's mother during a rain delay in a junior tournament in 1999 by telling her that "this Andy hits the ball okay, but he has no clue how to play tennis." Once hired, Benhabiles undertook Project Roddick like a Zen master, correcting swing flaws but mostly imparting what had allowed him — a five-foot-eight, 142-pound lightweight — to crack the world's top 25 in the early 1990s: a well-rounded game that's adaptable to all surfaces. Benhabiles's voodoo is heavy on mind games; at the highest levels of pro tennis, he believes, winner and loser are separated by brain cells.

He is also a first-rate curmudgeon. Ask him about his charge and he rarely appears satisfied, countering questions with elliptical koans like, "As a coach, you've got to go slowly on the mind of the player. You've got to go step by step. You can't jump ten steps, thinking you're gonna jump ten steps. Whatever happens, you're gonna have to go through the first, the second, the third, and the fourth." Roddick calls him Mr. Miyagi.

Practice today consists of Roddick pounding ground strokes with (or, more accurately, *at*) a fledgling French pro named Julian, who's staying with Benhabiles to train during the off-season. Roddick's strokes sound like the crack of ball on bat. You can almost feel the concussion of the ball, the displaced air. He pounds serves, pounds forehands, pounds everything. Especially his serves.

Jerry Roddick walks out to the court to take in his son's practice alongside Mandy, her parents (who are in town for a visit), Julian's girlfriend, and three teenage players of indeterminate European origin. Blanche and Jerry remain involved in their son's career — Blanche runs his charity, hires staff, and helps manage his schedule; Jerry, an entrepreneur who made his money on Jiffy Lube franchises, handles the finances — but they don't do the tennis. Neither parent travels with Andy with any regularity; they trust Benhabiles and the rest of Team Roddick completely, especially since their presence on the road is making a difference.

Too many times during his first two seasons, Roddick faded late in matches or retired with injuries. (The list spans an anatomy textbook: groin, ankle, back, knee, hamstring, wrist.) He's admitted to not caring much about what he ate before matches — he downed a cheeseburger and fries before his epic 2001 French Open win over Chang and could barely walk after the match — and had nothing approaching the killer regimen of Agassi, whose off-season desert workout is famously grueling. But after his poor 2002 Grand Slam

showing, Roddick had had enough. The newly installed de Castro, whom Roddick had met during a tournament in Memphis, was brought in to combat Roddick's most apparent flaw, poor fitness, and its attendant partner, injury. He stepped up Roddick's running and weight training and added fitness drills to his on-court practices. (Even Roddick's diet was overhauled, after he was sent to a specialist for a battery of tests to determine any weaknesses. Alerted to allergies to wheat and lactose, de Castro removed dairy and wheat flour from Roddick's menu.) Roddick now finishes each practice at the net, facing Benhabiles and a shopping cart full of balls. The coach then fires away at his student — forehand volley, backhand volley, overhead, drop shot, and so on — launching another ball before Roddick has even begun to sprint back to the ready position. The drill typically ends with Roddick collapsed on the court, sucking wind but also smiling. "I love that drill," he told me. "If Tarik forgets, I remind him."

LIKE MANY PEOPLE FORCED TO GROW UP IN front of the world, Andy Roddick often acts older than his years. Which is not to say that the kid in him is gone. After practice, he leads a small parade inside, calling out, "Hey, Grandma, is it okay if we watch a video in your room?"

"Whatever you want, honey," Grandma says.

Grandma's room is actually Roddick's old room, dark and small and heavy on University of Nebraska memorabilia. (He was born in Omaha, and his obsession with things Cornhusker, down to the red-and-white wallpaper in his childhood bathroom, is well documented.) Roddick, grinning hugely, pops a tape into the VCR and sits down on the edge of the bed, about two feet from the TV. It sputters to life, revealing six people in white jumpsuits, helmets, and goggles, clinging to the inside of a small plane. Roddick points himself out, as well as Mandy and her mother. On the video, Mrs. Moore yelps and drops out the side of the plane, attached to a sky-diving instructor. Mandy, beaming, goes next, and then Roddick bails out the side, followed by a cameraman. "Hey, hey!" Roddick says. "Check out this part. Right . . . now!" He points at the screen as the cameraman zooms in on Roddick opening his mouth to allow the air to bulge his cheeks out like a chipmunk's. Roddick doubles over with laughter. It was his second jump, and he already has another scheduled for Sunday. "Six times and I can solo."

Later, in the kitchen, he's still talking about his next dive, needing his mother to come along. Blanche puts down a dish towel and looks at him, a very serious expression on her face. "That can't get out," she tells him, meaning the sky diving.

"It already is out," says Ginger, who has posted photos of the adrenalized event on his website.

"Yeah," Roddick says, "it's out, Mom."

The more time I spend around Roddick, the more I notice that the Next Great American is overtaking the Regular American Kid. I can't imagine that at, say, Taylor Dent's house (Dent is a top young contender for the tennis world's Second-Best Young American), Mom thinks that the perception that he takes unnecessary risks might send the wrong message to, say, a potential sponsor. Or that he requires a person (say, a sister-in-law) to spend the majority of her days plugged into a cellphone, managing his life.

During the half-hour ride from Boca Raton to Miami, where tonight Roddick and Agassi will play in the charity exhibition, Ginger Roddick fields a barrage of calls — from Blanche, wondering if the PA announcement about Roddick's next charity match has been proofread; from agent Meyerson, asking if Roddick will arrive on time; and from Roddick himself, asking exactly what it is he has to do. The answer: drive to Miami, park his car, board a yacht preloaded with sponsors, chat and chew for an hour, then deboard, change, practice, eat, do interviews, play tennis against Andre Agassi, introduce the band playing after the match, meet his friends, then have a few hours of free time before he has to go to bed, sleep, and wake up to attend a brunch for sponsors downstairs in the Hotel Inter-Continental ballroom.

In the car, Ginger hangs up her cellphone and finally gets to complete a thought. "His schedule is in 15-minute increments. This is a day off. This is vacation time.

"He really never has a day off," she continues. "But the great thing about Andy is that he doesn't mind. I'll call him pretty much every day." She stops. "But sometimes I call just to say hi, to keep him off guard so that he won't have a Pavlovian response to seeing my name on caller ID."

And then, of course, the phone rings again. It's Roddick, halfheartedly trying to get himself out of the boat trip so that he can spend the afternoon with his girlfriend. It's a rare glimpse of a situation that has to be somewhat common. Here's a 20-year-old with a hot girlfriend who for most of the year is thousands of miles away from him. Would you rather kiss her on the cheek and board a boat to shake hands with smarmy strangers or check in to your suite at the waterfront hotel?

"Andy," Ginger says, glancing sideways at me, "this really isn't the time." She listens to his response, then measures her own very carefully. "Andy," she says, talking in a whisper, "I don't know what else to tell you. It's in your contract." 