



DUBAI TENNIS OPEN 1994

The quiet Fitzgerald makes quite a racquet in doubles

Concedes defeat came against two great doubles players - Woodforde and Woodbridge

By A Sports Reporter

Dubai
By all accounts, this was one of the finest doubles matches to be played in the Middle East. When it was all over, John Fitzgerald, 33, one of the greatest doubles players of all time, said: "We lost to two great doubles players." As indeed, he and Darren Cahill did.

The two Woodies, Mark Woodforde and Todd Woodbridge logged up another 220 computer points and \$ 63,000 in prize money.

The four Australians on court, three of them former No. 1 in the world, had 124 finals and 83 titles among them, so the standard of play was obviously going to be very high. When Fitzgerald and Cahill took the first set on a tie-breaker, the game plan seemed to suggest itself.

The two righthanders tried to find no-man's land between the left hander Woodforde and the right hander Woodbridge, while the Woodies' best bet was to go for the lines. The play at the net was of the highest order, but even, and so any error would have to come from the length of the returns.

No other match in the whole tournament had so many players of such distinct, individual styles. The bustle and energy of Woodbridge meshed well with the calm decisiveness of Woodforde. Likewise the mobility of Cahill with the intelligence and control of Fitzgerald.

Woodbridge might have thrilled with his groundstrokes, and youthful vitality, but to many it was Fitzgerald who gave a glimpse of the classic doubles player, unhurried, calculating, in total control of the racquet head. The manner in which he volleyed down to Woodbridge's feet to wrap up the first set tie-breaker was merely a glimpse into the shape of things to come.

Fitzgerald displayed a lovely touch, and a deeper knowledge of the angles, a tribute to his experience, than any of the others. For the connoisseur, that was the highlight of the game, the manner in which Fitzgerald got the maximum results from the minimum of effort. In the elimination of the inessential, the 'vet-



John Fitzgerald ... amazing racquet control

eran' Fitzgerald handed out a lesson to the youngsters. "I like playing with the younger players, who can chase the ball, and Darren is a good example of a player like that," Fitzgerald said later.

With Sweden's Anders Jarryd, Fitzgerald had set up a partnership that had won all the Grand Slam titles.

Cahill, at 27 no spring chicken himself, but he lost three crucial years owing to a knee injury, and is only now back on the circuit. "I am happy just to be back on court," he says.

Across the net it was Mark Woodforde who was the touch player, relying on placements and leaving the aggressive ground-

strokes to Woodbridge who seldom disappointed.

Although it was Fitzgerald who was broken in the decider, there was a lesson in his style for the student of the game. His manipulation of the racquet head gave his shots a last-minute change of direction that even the fit pair on the other side found hard to cope with.

At one point in the second set, Fitzgerald thought his shot was in, and his opponents seemed to agree. But the umpire did not budge, and that might well have been the turning point of the doubles. After a point, the scores didn't matter, and that is a stage all tennis matches aspire to reach

but few do.

In the end the Woodies had too much fire power, and Cahill seemed just that bit out of sorts when it really mattered. Fitzgerald too was beginning to hit the drop volleys into the net, and with the Woodies quickly realising that they were home and dry if they did not make any silly mistakes, sheer efficiency overrode all other strategy in the decider.

There was enough of that to excite the result-oriented spectator, just as there was enough of the touch to please those who just want a good game. Perhaps that was the secret of the popularity of the doubles on the final day of the Dubai Tennis Open.

OPEN QUOTES

Once you get the confidence, you start to play well. That's the secret. I am lucky not to carry any injury and to be returning so well. You play a match like that five or maybe eight times in a whole life.
Magnus Gustafsson, after beating Sergi Bruguera in the final.

Gustafsson had an unbelievable forehand. I played better and better until the final; then somebody else played better than me.
Sergi Bruguera

I lost too early last year so I didn't get a chance to say what I felt about Dubai. It sure is a wonderful place and I'll be glad to be back soon.
Todd Woodbridge, winner of the doubles with Mark Woodforde.

I'm not getting any younger and neither are my legs.
John Fitzgerald, veteran player and losing doubles finalist.

I just closed my eyes and everything went right.
Magnus Gustafsson

We lost to two great doubles players.
John Fitzgerald

I am happy just to be back on court.
Darren Cahill, on his return after a long layoff due to injury.

There will be a lot of great players here. This tournament has earned a lot of respect on the tour.
Todd Woodbridge, on image of the Dubai Tennis Open.



Todd Woodbridge and Mark Woodforde ... bag \$63,000 in prize money

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