

# JOY AFTER PAIN: ON NADAL AND SWIATEK WIN AT FRENCH OPEN

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[Rafael Nadal's is an immortal presence at Roland-Garros](#). The Spaniard, after all, has a statue of himself at the site that is more than life-size, a rare tribute for a player still active. On Sunday, the 36-year-old showed why his is such a timeless existence by winning his 14th French Open crown that also gave him his [22nd Major, pulling him two clear of Roger Federer and Novak Djokovic](#) in the all-time men's tally. It is unthinkable that 14 was once Pete Sampras' record for overall Grand Slam trophies won. That Nadal has accumulated as many in Paris, in just 18 attempts and with an injury-ravaged body, is testament to his clay-court genius as well as his unparalleled ability to play through pain and extreme physical discomfort. Leading into the tournament, Nadal was pensive and pessimistic after his chronic left-foot injury forced him to limp out of the Rome Masters, a key preparatory event. Once in Paris, his mood turned increasingly valedictory, with the pain-killing injections needed to keep his leg numb perhaps telling him that the end was near. However, the fortnight ended in such euphoria, with a straight-set demolition of Norwegian Casper Ruud, that in the epitaph to Nadal's incredible career, whenever written, his 14th triumph will be more than just a normal data point.

The year has been unlike any for Nadal, both in terms of the success he has had and the physical toll he has had to bear. Never before in his stellar career had he secured the opening two Slams of the year, and the 20 straight matches he won at the start of 2022 — three titles and a final — is a career-best. But he had to fight through a bout of COVID-19 that nearly derailed his Australian Open plans, a stress fracture in the ribs that did not allow him to touch a racquet for six weeks, forcing him to miss vital clay-court warm-up tournaments in Monte Carlo and Barcelona and undercooking him for the return in Madrid, and a relapse of the foot injury. That he could still muster the tennis to overcome four top-10 players in the French capital, including Djokovic in the quarterfinal with a rousing performance, proved yet again that he remains the sport's ultimate competitor. [Iga Swiatek](#) was every bit as authoritative in stamping her authority on the women's side, claiming her second French Open title in three years. It was the sixth straight tournament victory for the Pole, a run that has featured an awe-inspiring 35-match winning streak. If in Ash Barty women's tennis had a stable World No.1 until the Aussie abdicated her throne in March, Swiatek is proving to be a worthy successor.

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