

# 1907

## DAVIS CUP TRIUMPH

Australia won a permanent place in the history of international tennis during 1907, thanks to a slim young left-handed player from Melbourne named Norman Brookes.

At Wimbledon that year he took the mixed doubles (with Mrs Hillyard), beat New Zealander Anthony Wilding to become the first overseas singles champion, then teamed up with him to win the doubles and snatch the Davis Cup for 'Australasia' from a thoroughly-bewildered Great Britain.

It was one of the finest moments in sport for the young nation Down Under.

Brookes was twenty-nine years old, but only at the start of a tennis career which was to take him to the very top both as a player and an administrator. The son of a wealthy paper-mill owner, he first represented Victoria in interstate competitions in 1896 and soon built up an Australia-wide reputation.

Australia and New Zealand combined to enter the Davis Cup for the first time in 1905, selecting as their representatives Brookes and Wilding, a

twenty-two-year-old Cambridge undergraduate who had made his debut at Wimbledon the previous year.

But although Brookes won the all-comers singles titles at Wimbledon in 1905, the David Cup eluded the partnership until two years later.

And what great partners they were! Wilding was younger yet more patient, a blond, and a seemingly tireless mathematician on the court, whose every stroke was perfectly timed and calculated. The swarthy Brookes was more unpredictable and aggressive.

‘He was suspicious and cagey’, his wife, Dame Mabel, recounted later, ‘and these characteristics came out in his tennis. He saw more in the strategy of the game than he did in the strategy of actual living. I think he might have been a very good general.’

The Davis Cup remained in ‘Australasia’ for the next four years, despite valiant attempts by American teams to regain it in Melbourne, Sydney, and Christchurch. These epic battles did much to develop the big following which tennis still enjoys in Australia today.

In 1912, the Davis Cup went back to the British Isles - but not for long. America took the big silver trophy home the following year, while Wilding was consolidating his reputation by winning the World Singles Championships on different types of courts at Wimbledon, Paris, and Stockholm.

In 1914 he forfeited the Wimbledon title to Brookes, but together they took on the United States team that year to recapture the Davis Cup for Australasia with a 3-2 victory in New York.

Then came the first World War and the end to the great Australasian tennis partnership. Wilding, who joined up almost immediately, was killed in Belgium in 1915, while Brookes served with the Red Cross throughout the bloody conflict.

The Davis Cup competition, which had been suspended during the war, resumed in 1919 when the Australasian team, with Brookes now partnered by Gerald Patterson, warded off the British challenge with a 4-1 victory in Sydney.

Again in the same year, Brookes and Patterson won the United States doubles. The following year, however, the Cup went to the United States after a convincing 5-0 victory in Auckland.

Brookes finally retired from playing in 1921, at the age of forty-three, after competing in eight Davis Cup contests and winning twenty-eight of the thirty-nine games he played for the Cup.

But his tennis career was far from over. He continued as Australia's sole Davis Cup selector, a task he had fulfilled since 1907, until a selection panel was formed in 1924. He remained a member of the panel for thirty-one years.

When Australia and New Zealand ended their 'Australasian' partnership in 1923 in favour of fielding separate teams, the Lawn Tennis Association of Australia was founded, with Brookes serving as president from 1926 to 1955.

He was knighted for his services to sport in 1939 - the same year in which Australia won the Davis Cup for the first time - and died at the age of ninety

on 28 September 1968. Sir Robert Menzies remembered him with these words:

*What a player! His long trousers perfectly pressed, on his head a peaked tweed or cloth cap, on his face the inscrutable expression of a pale-faced Red Indian, no sign of sweat or bother, no temperamental outbursts, no word to say except an occasional 'well played'. A slim and not very robust man, he combined an almost diabolical skill with a personal reserve, a dignity (yes, dignity) and a calm maturity of mind and judgment...*

Australian tennis has come a long way since the first competitive matches were played on an asphalt court laid by the Melbourne Cricket Club in 1878, only two years after the Marylebone Cricket Club in London first established the rules of the game, and the All-England Croquet Club set aside one of its lawns at Wimbledon for the new sport.

Harry Hopman, as both playing and non-playing captain of Davis Cup teams for twenty-one years, brought the Cup home to Australia sixteen times.

Jack Crawford, four times winner of the Australian singles title, was the first Australian to win the French singles championships.

Adrian Quist won ten successive Australian doubles titles, partnered eight times by John Bromwich, and twice by Don Turnbull.

The list of top Australian players seems endless: Ken Rosewall and Lew Hoad, Frank Sedgman and Ken McGregor, Roy Emerson, Neale Fraser, Rod Laver, John Newcombe, and many, many others. Australian women, too, have left their mark on international tennis.

Margaret Court, one of only two women to win the Grand Slam singles (the Australian, French, Wimbledon, and United States titles in one year), won a total of eighty-nine championships in the twelve years from 1961.

Evonne Cawley won every Federation Cup (the women's equivalent of the Davis Cup) match in which she played from 1970 to 1974.

Great players all - and worthy successors to the great Australian who beat the world's best at Wimbledon almost three-quarters of a century ago.