



THE LAST MATCH

BY ANNA ZIEGLER



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THE LAST MATCH had its world premiere at the Old Globe Theatre in San Diego, California (Barry Edelstein, Artistic Director; Michael G. Murphy, Managing Director) on February 13, 2016. It was directed by Gaye Taylor Upchurch, the set design was by Tim Mackabee, the costume design was by Denitsa Bliznakova, the lighting design was by Bradley King, the sound design was by Bray Poor, and the production stage manager was Diana Moser. The cast was as follows:

TIM	Patrick J. Adams
SERGEI	Alex Mickiewicz
MALLORY	Troian Bellisario
GALINA	Natalia Payne

THE LAST MATCH was originally produced in New York City by Roundabout Theatre Company (Todd Haimes, Artistic Director; Julia C. Levy, Executive Director; Sydney Beers, General Manager) at the Harold and Miriam Steinberg Center for Theatre/Laura Pels Theatre on October 24, 2017. It was directed by Gaye Taylor Upchurch, the set design was by Tim Mackabee, the costume design was by Montana Blanco, the lighting design was by Bradley King, the sound design was by Bray Poor, and the production stage manager was Samantha Watson. The cast was as follows:

TIM	Wilson Bethel
SERGEI	Alex Mickiewicz
MALLORY	Zoë Winters
GALINA	Natalia Payne

A workshop production of THE LAST MATCH was presented at New York Stage and Film & Vassar at Powerhouse Theater in July 2015. It was directed by Gaye Taylor Upchurch. The cast was as follows:

TIM	Lorenzo Pisoni
SERGEI	Alex Mickiewicz
MALLORY	Pascale Armand
GALINA	Natalia Payne

CHARACTERS

TIM—mid-30s, a professional tennis player. An all-American golden boy. Effortlessly charming. Faux-humble. Polite in a Midwestern kind of way, with a façade that's difficult to crack.

SERGEI—mid-20s, a Russian professional tennis player. He's fiery, funny, sarcastic, with a short fuse. Whatever he feels, he feels deeply. A lover and a hater, in extremes. A wounded soul.

MALLORY—mid-30s, Tim's wife and a former player. She's tough and spunky and driven, with a mischievous streak and a joyful temperament. Easily frustrated by anything remotely irritating.

GALINA—mid/late 20s, Sergei's girlfriend, also Russian. The definition of no-nonsense; she's hot-tempered and means business. She is also devoted and serious, loveable and loving, in her way.

NOTE

The play is made up of scenes inside a tennis match and memories that take place outside of it. As much as possible, transitions from one to the other should seamlessly blur these boundaries, so that, for instance, the line of dialogue that serves as the bridge from one kind of scene to the other feels that it applies to both worlds.

When I want something—that to me is not youth exactly, but the opposite of death. That to me is a way to always feel like I am nowhere near the end.

—Heidi Julavits, *The Folded Clock*

Let me put it another way: when I am with my son I feel the bracing speed of the one-way journey that guides human experience.

—Sarah Manguso, *Ongoingness*

The slow-motion euthanasia that time inflicts on athletic talent is, for me, the hardest thing to watch in sports. But time is treating Federer with a tenderness that almost defies reason.

—Brian Phillips, “The Sun Never Sets:
On Roger Federer, Endings, and Wimbledon”

The first time you win, nobody picks you; the last time you win, nobody picks you... You’ve just got to pick yourself.

—Venus Williams

How strange the way success and failure contained each other. How close vindication and humiliation had proved.

—Allegra Goodman, *Intuition*

*The long day wanes; the slow moon climbs; the deep
Moans round with many voices. Come, my friends,
'Tis not too late to seek a newer world.
Push off, and sitting well in order smite
The sounding furrows; for my purpose holds
To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths
Of all the western stars, until I die.
It may be that the gulfs will wash us down;
It may be we shall touch the Happy Isles,
And see the great Achilles, whom we knew.
Though much is taken, much abides; and though
We are not now that strength which in old days
Moved earth and heaven, that which we are, we are,
One equal temper of heroic hearts,
Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.*

—Tennyson, “Ulysses”

THE LAST MATCH

Lights up on Sergei and Tim, who face the audience. Tim is mid-30s, wholesome, Midwestern; Sergei is in his mid-20s and speaks with a thick Russian accent. They're both professional tennis players at the top of the game.

We begin at love all.

TIM. It's not exactly a whizzing sound—

SERGEI. No, it's more of a whoosh. Like a “whoosh” right past your ear—

TIM. I'd say it's fast and it's slow all at once.

SERGEI. Yeah, it's “sh-sh-sh-sh-sh”—and you are forgetting for a second that everyone is there and it's just FUCK. You think “Sergei, you asshole.” You don't understand why you are not good enough.

TIM. No. For me, it was always, you know, credit to him for getting it past me.

SERGEI. (*Rolling his eyes, sarcastic.*) Oh yes, for me too. Absolutely. Credit to him.

TIM. And when *you* hit one, I mean, when you hit an ace yourself, you are...well, you are intensely *alive* in that moment.

SERGEI. (*Taunting him.*) How nice that must feel, to be so intensely alive.

TIM. (*Taking the high ground.*) From the very first point, the match was close.

SERGEI. In those kinds of matches, there is tension all the way through. It never breaks. You are tired just from that, even more than from the physical exertions.

TIM. It had rained and now there was this eerie light when we came out on court.

SERGEI. A late start. All day I sat and then stood and then sat and

then stood, shaking out my legs. That's what you do. You try to rest without staying still.

TIM. The press in New York was...the media was into it.

SERGEI. It had been leaked—Tim Porter will retire after this US Open.

What did I think? I don't know. This is sport. You play your game. It does not matter what people say.

TIM. Really, Sergei?

SERGEI. (*A sharp shift.*) Hey, for all I know, you leaked this rumor yourself. To get in my head so I do not give my all in first ever US Open semifinal. Like announcing you will die but really wanting to live and taking a very Russian-like manipulating approach to staying alive.

TIM. I didn't leak the rumor because it wasn't true.

SERGEI. Yes, that is the thing... Even with his up and down playing, even though he is old OLD man at thirty-four years of age, he is still Tim Porter, the favorite in any match he plays. You cannot imagine he will ever go away.

TIM. It's the US Open. I've played it twelve times. Made ten semifinals. Nine finals. Won six of 'em.

SERGEI. (*Sarcastic.*) And I have ten fingers and ten toes. I keep track of things very carefully too.

TIM. (*Taunting Sergei.*) I was *gonna* say if you'd told me when I was a kid that I'd hold that trophy over my head six times, I'd have said you were the biggest liar there was.

SERGEI. But this year, how many trophies have you won?

Tim shoots him a dirty look.

Lose in Australia, second round; lose in France, quarterfinals. Wimbledon—what a loss! First round, to a qualifier, an eighteen-year-old from Galveston, Texas whose life will never be as good as it was that night. Yes, in last year, it has been lose lose lose.

TIM. (*With a smile, ribbing him.*) And yet...I'm still ranked in the top five and you have yet to crack the top ten, even though as a junior you were being heralded as the second coming of Christ... or of me, or something.

SERGEI. And so people talk. He must be done for, they say. The end of Tim Porter... And they want that. And also they don't want it at all.

TIM. We start the warm up.

SERGEI. Already I am hot hot hot. Like burning up hot. I can feel every tingle in every tingly spot in my body.

TIM. This is Sergei for you. Really no more than a boy.

SERGEI. No, Tim Porter, I have not felt like boy since I was five-years-old child.

TIM. Whatever you say, buddy.

SERGEI. See, we are always a little on edge with each other.

Me and Tim Porter.

Not really friends.

TIM. We practice our serves. Throw the ball up, slam the racquet down. It's a motion I could do in my sleep.

SERGEI. Why don't you take it easy, Tim? You're not young anymore.

TIM. Goad all you want. I've made it through five rounds without dropping a set.

SERGEI. So have I.

TIM. This is my tournament—my house. I own this court; I always have and I will again. I have to. I have to...because my son is here. He's two months old. And it feels like the sky's a different color than it's ever been before.

SERGEI. Tim is very sentimental about this little boy.

TIM. After a long line of—"This has Tim's last final written all over it," and, "We might never see Tim this deep in the second week of a slam again"—it changes here. No more losing.

SERGEI. (*Getting really worked up by the end.*) No more walking off court embarrassed to be seen by anyone, especially the people you love. No more hatred for all the players ahead of you, who create such jealousy in you that you are ashamed to know yourself. To shake their hands in front of the cameras, to make nice, to smile, when really you are wishing so many bad things happen to them.

TIM. And we're only in the warm up.

SERGEI. (*An aside, to the audience.*) And yet. In the “He is done for,” in the “This is the end of Tim Porter,” is the end of all of us, yes?

TIM. I hate to break it to you, Sergeyev, but I’m not going anywhere.

SERGEI. I hate to break it to *you*, Tim Porter, but we’re all going to the same place.

TIM. We starting, or what??

SERGEI. Yeah. I want to start.

I’m ready for you. Tim Porter.

TIM. Are you sure?

A scoreboard lights up: Set #1.

SERGEI. He got the toss and elected to serve.

TIM. You choose to serve first no matter what. It’s a psychological thing. Right, Sergei?

SERGEI. They are chanting his name: “Porter, Porter, Porter”—and he wins first game pretty easily... Or another way of looking at it is I lose first game pretty easily.

Scoreboard: T. Porter, 1-0

TIM. I take the first game so fast and in that moment you don’t feel the pressure and the failure and the death and the ambition and the coming up short. It’s one of those. When you feel like you can do anything. Like you’re eighteen years old, with everything in front of you.

Mallory enters; they are mid-conversation.

MALLORY. (*Teasing him.*) You wish you were eighteen.

TIM. This is four years ago.

MALLORY. You wish you were eighteen and that your body didn’t make creaking noises and that people weren’t calling you old on TV.

TIM. This is Mallory.

MALLORY. But, you know, happy birthday.

TIM. Gosh, thanks honey.

MALLORY. The good thing is: I will love you when you’re actually old. When no one talks about you on TV anymore. When they can’t even remember your name.

TIM. Where's my present?

MALLORY. What present?

TIM. What do you mean "what present"?

MALLORY. Isn't it enough that all the guys on tour are celebrating today? There are parties happening all over the world. *Tim Porter turns thirty*. He's gotta start showing his age soon.

TIM. (*Matter-of-fact.*) So I'm ready for that present now.

MALLORY. I mean, I know you've been, like, winning slams and stuff, but I've been pretty busy lately too.

TIM. I hope Angie knows how lucky she is. That girl won the lottery with you. You're gonna be a kickass coach.

MALLORY. (*Laughing.*) Well, she's nineteen. At nineteen, you don't think about luck. You just *know* your life is gonna go exactly as planned.

TIM. She's gonna be the biggest star. And it's gonna be because of you.

Beat.

MALLORY. So...do you remember when you proposed to me?

He stares at her, suspicious.

TIM. Okay, what are you up to.

MALLORY. Nothing. Do you remember or not?

TIM. (*Teasing her.*) ...wait. I know it'll come to me.

MALLORY. I certainly hope you'd remember the best day of your life.

TIM. Well...a close second to winning Wimbledon for the first time—

MALLORY. (*Smiling.*) You *are* an asshole, you know that?

TIM. No no, I think I've got it. We were at that weirdo's wedding...

MALLORY. Inga's not that weird.

TIM. Okay, she's *objectively* weird, but it doesn't matter. She's up there *singing* her vows and I believe I took your hand. Really tenderly, *really* romantically. And it was incredibly damp.

MALLORY. That is a load of BS, Tim Porter, and you know it.

TIM. And then later in the night, I took you into the hallway—

MALLORY. Right next to the *bathrooms*—

TIM. I wanted it to be picturesque.

THE LAST MATCH

by Anna Ziegler

2 men, 2 women

Played out under the bright lights of the US Open semifinals, *THE LAST MATCH* pits rising Russian star Sergei Sergeev against American great Tim Porter in an epic showdown that follows two tennis titans through pivotal moments in their lives both on and off the court. This gripping, fast-paced story captures the intense world of competitive sports, and human rivalry, and what it means to want something—and the lengths we will go to in order to feel relevant, important, and young.

“Ziegler [is] a fertile writer of admirably varied style and subject... Ziegler is also... a master of swelling choral dialogue, in which urgent but lyrical phrases are intoned in a counterpoint that seems to echo down the halls of history. ... The routine back-and-forth of a hard-fought match... approaches the ineffable radiance of one of those moments that tennis fans live for. Time seems to stop in such moments, even as it extends into eternity.”

—The New York Times

“A tennis match with no net, no balls, and no rackets proves...gripping in Anna Ziegler’s play. ...[Ziegler] manages to dramatize a very realistic and quite exciting tennis match between perfectly matched players. ...Like those invisible balls, the dialogue whizzes by at warp speed.”

—Variety

“A play with plenty of underspin, Anna Ziegler’s gripping and contemplative drama...is a nail-biter, even as Ziegler pauses to eavesdrop on the men’s thoughts, memories, and interactions with the women in the stands.”

—The New Yorker

Also by Anna Ziegler

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BOY
THE MINOTAUR
and others

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