

Why The BNP Paribas Open In Indian Wells Is The Fifth Grand Slam Of The Pro Tennis Circuit



You can judge a professional tennis tournament in many ways. Judge it by attendance. Do fans show up? Judge it by the setting. Is it a nice place to be? Or judge it by the jackpot. How many zeros are there in the purse?

In all of these categories, BNP Paribas Open in Indian Wells stands alone.

Outside of the Grand Slams, this is the most attended tennis event in the world.

The locale? OK, maybe it's not Monte Carlo, but nestled at the foot of some majestic desert mountains, this setting in Southern California will occasionally take your breath away.

And the purse is the fifth largest in the world.

But you don't care about that stuff. You want to see some tennis. That means the most important criteria to you is who competes.

Are these the best men and women in the world?

Past champions are Federer, Djokovic, Nadal. On the women's side, it's been Azarenka, Sharapova, Williams.

But maybe seeing the best isn't enough. You're greedy. You want more. You want to see the best at their best. You want to see them pushed. You want to see them red-line. You want to see them reach inside, deep down and find something more.

Isn't that why we watch sport? Not just to see a battle, but to see what humans are capable of. True, you can see it at the grand slams. But you can also see it here.

And sit a little closer.

Like us on facebook, follow us on twitter, and subscribe to our YouTube channel.

Each year the tournament gets better and better about getting the fans near the players. On the practice courts you are literally sitting just a few feet away. Mostly the players play practice sets against each other. It is intense and highly competitive. But you also might see a player hit some balls with his 5-year-old son. You might see two women in the top ten, playing a game of short court, giggling like schoolgirls because, after all, it is a game.

You might even see Jimmy Connors hitting against a wall. (Is it because no one likes that guy or he just prefers a wall?)

Even the stadium courts feel incredibly intimate. Tennis is only fun when you feel like you're a part of the action, when you can feel the battle, the heartbreak, the triumphs.



Whoever designed this place knew what they were doing.

You will come to revel in this proximity. Your own game will improve simply by being this close to the best in the world. We call it The Desert Effect. Your technique, your timing, your game improves ... as if by osmosis. Indian Wells might be the best tennis lesson you ever take.

So when you take to the courts at the hotel, you will probably be playing the best tennis of your life. It's a good time for that. It turns out, halfway through your set, the best in the world might wander past your court, pause for a moment, and judge your game.

Going to the BNP Paribas Open is a little like being at a garden party with the gods. True, it'd be nice to hit some balls with them, but this might be the next best thing.

-- Rob Perez is a writer for screen and television whose credits include "40 Days & 40 Nights." He is a passionate tennis fan, player and periodic coach.