Curious case of draws at the ITF Grand Slam tournaments (2008-2011)

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ITF Grand Slam Tournaments

1. Australian Open *(hard court)*
2. French Open *(clay court)*
3. Wimbledon *(grass court)*
4. US Open *(hard court)*

- Held annually
- Most lucrative tennis events for players and organisers, great ad for sponsors
- Watched by millions of fans worldwide (for e.g., 51% of the UK tuned in to watch Wimbledon 2011)
- Grand Slam Rulebook 2011

ATP rank list

- Official world ranking of the players on the basis of their on-court performance
- Used, *inter alia*, to effect the draws on professional tennis tournaments for men
- Dynamic - updated weekly
Top four players on ATP rank list

• **ROGER FEDERER**
  - Grass and hard court specialist
  - Rose to No. 1 in 2004
  - Sponsored by NIKE

• **RAFEL NADAL**
  - Clay court specialist
  - Rose to No. 1 in 2008
  - Sponsored by NIKE

• **NOVAK DJOKOVIC**
  - Rose to No. 3 in 2007 (remained No. 3 at the end of 2008-2010 seasons)
  - Challenged the Federer/Nadal duopoly, and so did...

• **...ANDY MURRAY**
  - Rose to No.4 at the end of 2008 season
  - Leads 8-6 against Federer
  - Down 13-4 to Nadal
How tennis draws are made

- ATP RANK LIST
  1. _________________
  2. _________________
  3. _________________
  4. _________________
  5. _________________
e tc.
Results of Grand Slam tournament draws 2008-2011

- In 12 out of 12 Grand Slams from 2008 to 2011, 3rd seeded DJOKOVIC was placed in Federer’s half of the draw. This included all the hard court and grass court Grand Slam tournaments - surface on which Federer was statistically harder to beat.

- From 2008 onwards, top 3 players often changed places on ATP rank list but draws remained faithful to this scheme.

- At the same time, 4th seeded MURRAY (in 2009-2011) was placed in Nadal’s half of the draw against whom he has 13-4 negative score.

- He has positive score with Federer of 8-6.

- For most of 2008 Davydenko was 4th seed but he never reached the semi-finals of any Grand Slam in that year...
Analysis of the draws’ results

- Under the laws of probability, where the probability of success of single trial is 0.5, having a draw turn the same way 12 out of 12 times is 0.0002 (i.e., 0.02%).

- Add to this the fact that the top players were constantly switching places at the ATP rankings and the presented probabilities will further decrease.

*(French Open is the only Grand Slam tournament that does not follow this scheme and has a healthy 50% of Djokovic and Federer being in the same half of the draw)*
Curious case, indeed!

- Furthermore, in August 2011 ESPN published a research claiming that computer-generated random part of the draw has been fixed at the US Open for the past 10 years: top 2 seeds received an easier draw than is statistically probably if the draws were truly random.
  
  http://espn.go.com/video/clip?id=6861149&categoryid=2378529

- The chances of having two statistically incredible coincidences happening at the same time in the history of tennis, and at the time when NIKE and organisers hope for Federer/Nadal finals is one in a million.

**BUT**

- Drawing ceremonies are public – seeded players are usually drawn by another player, often a female professional player.
Thank you!

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1. Novak Djokovic (SRB) 14.720
2. Rafael Nadal (ESP) 10.575
3. Roger Federer (SUI) 8.380
4. Andy Murray (GBR) 7.415