

SPORTS PLUS

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SPORTS PLUS EXCLUSIVE:

WRIGHT GETS TOUGH & SERIOUS ON 2009

- 'LIVERPOOL ARE IN A SORRY MESS AND ONLY HAVE THEMSELVES TO BLAME.'
- 'JENSON BUTTON IS THE MOST UNDESERVING CHAMPION EVER!'
- 'ANDY MURRAY WILL NEVER WIN WIMBLEDON.'

**HARD-HITTING SPORTS CRITIC SIMON
WRIGHT IN HIS TOUGHEST INTERVIEW YET!!**

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TO HIDE!!**

PLUS SPORTS REVIEW OF THE YEAR, PREDICTIONS FOR 2010 & FUN QUIZ!!!

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CONGRATULATE JENSON BUTTON
AND BRAUN GP.**

**2009 FIA FORMULA 1 WORLD
CHAMPION: JENSON BUTTON**

**2009 FIA FORMULA 1 WORLD
CONSTRUCTOR CHAMPIONS:
BRAUN GP**

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EDITORIAL

Hi everyone!

Well, what a sporting year 2009 has been. There have been some unforgettable moments in the last calendar year and it completes a fascinating and dramatic first decade of the millennium.

My highlights of 2009 include Roger Federer breaking Pete Sampras's Grand Slam record at Wimbledon, with the great Pete watching him from the Royal Box. Once again, Usain Bolt has shown his lightning speed, almost cheetah-like with his dominance of the sprint events at the World Athletics Championships. Tyson Gay ran 9.72 in the 100m final and still, Bolt was in class of 1, how on earth can you beat this guy?

Jessica Ennis magnificent Heptathlon performance, Braun GP's rise from Honda's Ashes to become the new kings of Formula 1 and another home Ashes success for England's cricketers also made the headlines.

So what for 2010? We have the FIFA World Cup, another Ashes series, this time Down Under, another Grand Prix season across the globe, the Commonwealth Games and all the classical events such as Wimbledon, The Open Championship & the Grand National.

Who is going to win? I predict a successful year for English cricket, Brazil in the FIFA World Cup, Fernando Alonso, Chelsea FC & Roger Federer. Watch this space as we enter decade two of what is set to be a prosperous 2010.

I wish all readers a Merry Christmas & Happy New Year!!

SIMON WRIGHT, SPORTS PLUS EDITOR & CRITIC

QUIZ

So, what do you know about sport in 2009, try this brain-teasing challenging quiz....

(Don't peek at the answers, otherwise you are Thierry Henry in disguise!)

1. How much did Wigan Athletic have to pay fans in total, as compensation for their 9-1 Premier League loss at Tottenham in November?
2. Who was the leading run scorer in this year's Ashes series?
3. Which team ended with the wooden spoon in the 2009 Six Nations?
4. Who resigned as coach of Rugby League side, Wigan Warriors at the end of the Super League season?
5. Which English golfer ended as the top European for prize money in 2009?
6. Which champion boxer retired in 2009, then went onto star in Strictly Come Dancing?
7. In which country did Kimi Raikkonen score Ferrari's only Grand Prix triumph of 2009?
8. Which player was Roger Federer's unlikely opponent in the French Open final at Roland Garros?
9. How many races did Dani Pedrosa win in the 2009 MotoGP season?
10. What nationality is WRC runner-up Mikko Hirvonen?
11. How many races did jockey Ruby Walsh win at the Cheltenham Gold Cup meeting?
12. Barcelona knocked Chelsea out of the Champions League semi-finals, who scored the vital away goal at Stamford Bridge?
13. PDC World Darts runner-up Raymond Van Barneveld comes from which country?
14. Which terrestrial station screened their coverage of the University Boat Race for the last time?
15. Which Formula 1 team boss was given a lifetime ban from the sport for his involvement in the Singapore 2008 race-fix scandal?
16. Which Belgian tennis ace announced her comeback to the WTA tour in October?

ANSWERS:

1. £15,000
2. Andrew Strauss
3. Italy
4. Brian Noble
5. Lee Westwood
6. Joe Calzaghe
7. Belgium
8. Robin Soderling
9. Two
10. Finnish
11. Seven
12. Andreas Iniesta
13. Holland
14. ITV
15. Flavio Briatore
16. Justine Henin

FINAL SCORE

- 16: Top marks, you know your stuff!
11-15: Near-perfect, you've got the passion for sport!
6-10: Could do a whole lot better, stop watching Countdown, it's no good for the brain
0-5: You have the concentration spam of a pidgeon! Epic fail!

YOUR FINAL SCORE: /16

THE MEAN MACHINE!!



Tough hard-hitting sports critic Simon Wright gives his account on the sporting year in 2009 and his opinions may be controversial. **SPORT-STARS, BEWARE, YOU AREN'T GOING TO LIKE WHAT HE SAYS!!**

What is your opinion on Chelsea's transfer ban?

I think it is time for FIFA to clamp down on these illegal approaches that the English clubs are making, and if Chelsea are made a prime example, then so be it. Since the Ashley Cole saga, the Blues have not learned their lessons with both Nathan Porritz & Gael Kakuta, so consequently, the penalty fits the crime. They've appealed, so it's likely it is going to be overturned sadly, which would be very bad news for the game in general.

Was Jenson Button a deserved world champion and was it right for him to ditch Brawn GP for McLaren?

Jenson Button is the most undeserving World Champion in Formula 1 history. Okay, his drive to wrap up the title in the Brazilian Grand Prix was champions' class, but he lacks

the cutting edge of other drivers in the pack like Lewis Hamilton & Sebastian Vettel. It was down to the equipment advantage at the start of the season which gave him such an unassailable point's lead. We will find out how good he really is in a McLaren next season. Personally, I think Lewis Hamilton will sweep the floor with him and prove what an average driver Jenson really is.

How did you rate Usan Bolt's demolition derby in this summer's World Athletics Championships?

I have seen most things in sport in the last 20 years, I HAVEN'T SEEN ANYTHING LIKE HIM!! Usan Bolt is absolutely awesome and a real credit to a sport that has been dogged in recent times by drugs allegations.



What have you've made of Liverpool's start to the season and who is to blame?

Liverpool are in a sorry mess and only have themselves to blame. The American owners continue to squabble, which makes tensions at boardroom level very uncomfortable. On the pitch, things looked far more promising, but Rafa Benitez has made some very questionable decisions of late, both in tactical decisions and options in the transfer market. The fans will keep belief in the club, they always do, but something has got to give, either with a change of manager or in the boardroom for the club to be successful again. I smell a very dark period hanging over Anfield.

How would you review Andy Murray's year?

With six tournament wins on the ATP Tour, including Queen's, Andy Murray has had another solid and successful year. Despite this, I think his Grand Slam performances were below-par, particularly on his strongest surfaces in Australia and Flushing Meadows. Wimbledon was a case of so near, yet so far. I'm convinced he will win Grand Slams in the future, but Andy Murray will never win Wimbledon. This is because he lacks the cutting edge on the grass courts in comparisons to the likes of Federer & Nadal.

What did you think of this year's Ashes series, was it better than 2005?

England may have deservedly won the 2009 Ashes, but the summer of Cricket didn't quite match up to the incredible 2005 series. England is nowadays a solid, but unspectacular side and can be amongst the best in spells of the game,

and the worst in others. I think they were largely helped by the Australians being so weak and lacking inspiration. Michael Clarke aside, it was a forgettable summer for most Wallabies and I think Ricky Ponting needs to step down as captain to help the side regain the invincible form it showed in the days of Gilchrist, Warne & McGrath.

What do you think of Manchester United's year?

Sir Alex Ferguson will look back on 2009 and admit that it was a disappointment. Yes, they won another Premiership title and equalled Liverpool's proud record of 18 league titles, but they were dreadful in Rome in the Champions League final and since the sales of Cristiano Ronaldo and Carlos Tevez in the summer, United don't look like the same unit. It could well be the end of an era at Old Trafford. I think Manchester United is finished!

What were your thoughts on this year's six nations and what are your thoughts on Martin Johnson, is he the right man for England?

Ireland was a class above everyone else in this year's Six Nations and thoroughly deserved to sweep the board in 2009. As for England, it was another stuttering year, with signs of improvements, but too much mediocrity. Is Martin Johnson the right man for the job? The jury remains out on that one.

What do you think of the women's tennis ranking system?

Rubbish. Why is Dinara Safina the world No.1 when she has never won a Grand Slam? It is an unbelievable joke of a system, and needs urgent reviewing.

Can Fabio Capello lead England to World Cup glory?

I don't think England will win the World Cup in South Africa next year. Fabio Capello has taken the team from the depths of despair, to leading contenders. Although they have a very strong starting eleven, I'm still concerned about the strength-in-depth which is no match for the likes of Brazil and Spain. Euro 2012 is probably a more realistic goal; the World Cup is a fraction too soon.

Was Andrew Flintoff right to quit test cricket?

Freddie Flintoff has had a catalogue of injuries since 2005 and he has made the right call. He isn't getting any younger and his impact wasn't as large as it was four years earlier, despite his five-wicket haul at Lords & critical run-out of Ponting in the decider at The Oval. However, English Cricket will miss an absolute legend.

Will Felipe Massa be the same after his horror Hungarian GP shunt?

I truly hope so, as Felipe is such a dignified and charming guy. The accident was so freakish and he is incredibly lucky to be alive, let alone drive a racing car again. His maturity in recent seasons has impressed me and together with Fernando Alonso, I predict fantastic times for Ferrari again in the coming years, after a lean few years since the Schumacher era.

What did you think of David Haye's World Heavyweight Boxing success?

After years of failing to produce a decent heavyweight boxer, especially since Lennox Lewis retired, it is nice to see someone like David Haye at the top of the world. Let's hope he can hang onto his belt in more challenging outcomes to come.

Is Kauto Star the greatest jump horse of all-time following his Cheltenham Gold Cup success?

It is a major debate which will rage on for ages. I would rather not judge. However, Kauto Star is a stunning horse who must rank amongst the greats at Cheltenham. It will be interesting to see the response of Denman, his main rival in next year's Gold Cup.

Finally, who is your sports personality of the year?

UK-wise, I'm going to say Stuart Broad, for his devastating impact on the Australians during the winning Ashes series.

SPORTS REVIEW OF THE YEAR 2009

2009 was full of drama, intrigue, controversy and record-breaking performances. Our expert now analyses the Sports Review of the year 2009.

FOOTBALL



Manchester United win an 18th English league title, equalling Liverpool's long-standing record as England's most successful football club. However, it was a very mixed year for Sir Alex Ferguson, with a limp 2-0 defeat to Barcelona in the Champions League final and the key sales of star players, Cristiano Ronaldo and Carlos Tevez. Ronaldo's transfer to Real Madrid broke the world transfer record, £80 million the final fee, weeks after Kaka had switched to the Bernabeu from AC Milan for £56million. It was a nightmare year for the North East, as both Newcastle United & Middlesbrough dropped out of the Premiership. They were replaced by Burnley, who made the top-flight for the first time in 33 years. Guus Hiddink won the FA Cup for Chelsea, defeating Everton 2-1 at Wembley, before passing the reins over to Carlo Ancelotti. Internationally, England easily qualified for South Africa 2010 without a sweat, but the Republic of Ireland were denied a spot at the finals by a blatant Thierry Henry handball in Paris during their world-cup playoff. Football also said goodbye to Robert Enke, who committed suicide and Sir Bobby Robson, succumbing in his long battle against lung cancer.

CRICKET

England regained the Ashes, beating Australia 2-1, with victory in the deciding test at The Oval. The game marked the retirement from test cricket for Freddie Flintoff, due to numerous injuries.

FORMULA 1



Jenson Button became Formula 1 World Champion with a champions drive in Brazil, to complete a remarkable story, which saw Brawn GP rise from the ashes of Honda. Button takes the No.1 plate to McLaren next season, to partner fellow Brit Lewis Hamilton. For Ferrari, it was a nightmare season, with Kimi Raikkonen quitting the sport at the end of the season and Felipe Massa suffering life-threatening injuries in a freakish qualifying crash at Budapest, caused by flying debris. The season was plunged into chaos by threats of a rival breakaway series, the departure of BMW & Toyota from the sport and a race-fixing scandal involving the Renault team from Singapore 2008, which threatened to ruin the reputation of a global industry.

TENNIS

Roger Federer beat Pete Sampras's long-standing record of 15 Grand Slam success, by beating Andy Roddick in a memorable Wimbledon final. Roddick had dispensed of Andy Murray in the semi-finals. For Murray, it was a disappointing season grand-slam wise, but he won 6 events on the ATP tour, briefly reached No.2 in the world and won Wimbledon's first ever night match, beating Stainslas Wawrinka in Round 4. Rafael Nadal had an injury-hit season, but started it well enough, ending Federer's grip on the Australian Open. Roger also lost the US Open final at Flushing Meadows, to rising Argentine sensation, Juan Martin Del Potro. In the women's game, Serena Williams dominated, with Grand Slam successes in Australia and at SW19, but the story of the year was the stunning return of Kim Clijsters. The Belgian came back from retirement to wrap up a famous US Open triumph.

RUGBY UNION

Leicester Tigers ruled the roost in the domestic game yet again, running out Guinness Premiership winners, edging out surprise finalists London Irish at Twickenham. They were denied a domestic double by Leinster in the Heinenken Cup final up in Scotland. On the international scene, the Spring belonged to the Irish. A Ronan O'Gara drop goal in the closing stages of a nervy affair in Cardiff wrapped up the Six Nations Championship, the Triple Crown and for the first time in over 30 years, the Grand Slam. England turned to Martin Johnson to revive their fortunes, and so far, he has found the job a poisoned chalice, like his predecessors Andy Robinson & Brian Ashton. Robinson recently steered Scotland to a heroic Autumn international win over Australia. To compound Australia's nightmare sporting year, the Wallabies ended rock bottom of the Tri-Nations series, won comfortably by World Champions South Africa.

HORSE RACING

100-1 outsider Mon Mome was a very surprise winner of the John Smith's Grand National at Aintree. The flat season belonged to Sea the Stars, who became the first horse in 20 years to win the prestigious double of the 2000 Guineas & the Epsom Derby. The other horse that was in top form was Kauto Star. Ridden by Ruby Walsh, he stormed arch rival and stable mate, Denman to clinch his 2nd Cheltenham Gold Cup. It was a successful year for Ruby too, who thrashed his fellow jockeys at the Cheltenham meeting.

TIME TO SAY GOODBYE....

The following famous people said farewell in the sporting world this year:
 Teddy Mayer
 Reg Gutteridge
 David Shepherd
 Darren Sutherland
 Frank Gardner
 Daniel Jarque
 Henry Surtees
 Robert Enke
 Sir Bobby Robson

ATHLETICS



Jamaican sprinter Usan Bolt was literally unstoppable at the World Athletics Championship in Berlin, breaking two world records in the sprint events. This included running an astonishing 9.4 in the mens 100m final. For Great Britain, it was their most successful championships for 14 years, ending with seven medals, including two golds. The main story in Athletics this year was by South African Caster Semanya. Semanya won the women's 800m but a country's mile, but the IAAF ordered a gender tests after claims were made that she actually was a 'he.' She was eventually cleared and kept her gold medal.

OTHER SPORT

In other sport, the 'Doctor' ended up on top in a thrilling Moto GP season. Valentino Rossi held off the challenge of his young team-mate, Jorge Lorenzo to wrap up another MotoGP title. More motorsport domination continued as Sebastian Loeb won the season-ending Rally GB to wrap up his 6th successive WRC title. In Rugby Leagur, Leeds Rhinos defeated St. Helens to retain the Super League in a nervy Grand Final at Old Trafford. Meanwhile, Warrington Wolves beat Huddersfield Giants in a very surprising Challenge Cup Final at Wembley. Oxford overcame Cambridge to win another University Boat Race and there was a welcome return to form for John Higgins, overcoming Shaun Murphy 18-9 in the World Snooker Championship Final. Darts saw another PDC world title for Phil 'the Power' Taylor, dismantling great rival, Raymond Van Barneveld in the final. Finally, congratulations to David Haye, who in November, became Britain's first boxing World Heavyweight Champion since Lennox Lewis at the beginning of the century.



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