

Left, Roger Federer (left) holds the trophy after winning the men's final against Andy Roddick at Wimbledon in 2009.



third-round loss at Ro-
Wimbledon brought
nd upset, followed by
ses in the first two
court tournaments.
ow-point for Mr. Rod-
rlier this month in
ring the loss against
25-year-old French-

serves into the net. In the second
set, he smacked a ball over the
stands and out of the stadium.

Five days later, Mr. Roddick with-
drew from the Rogers Masters in To-
ronto, one of the biggest events of
the North American hard-court sea-
son, citing illness, and days later re-
vealed the mild case of mono.

Sam Querrey, the American
ranked 21st in the world, who counts
Mr. Roddick as a friend and a men-
tor, said Mr. Roddick isn't as aggres-
sive as he once was, and his serve no
longer seems so intimidating.

"After playing him five or six
times, I'm used to the pace. I'm used

Reign of Spain

Not just Nadal—six others are in the top 25

By MATTHEW FUTTERMAN

IT HAS BEEN an awfully good
year for Spanish sports en-
thusiasts. Spain won its
first World Cup in South Af-
rica. Cyclist Alberto Contador
won his third Tour de France.
Rafael Nadal won his sixth
French Open and his second
Wimbledon, and is the favorite
to take his first U.S. Open.

But just as tennis is only a
part of Spain's takeover of inter-
national sports, Mr. Nadal is
merely the best-known member
of one of the best generations
of tennis talent any country has
ever produced. As of this month,
Spain had seven men ranked
among the top 25 in the world.

"I think God said, 'From
2005 to 2010, Spain is going
to have great athletes,'" said
Fernando Verdasco, currently
eighth in the world, said after
a victory earlier this month.

Mr. Verdasco's faith aside,
Spain's tennis success is no ac-
cident. Its roots stretch back
30 years, according to
Fernando Soler, who works
with Mr. Nadal as the global
head of tennis for IMG World-
wide, the New York-based
sports and entertainment man-
agement firm that represents
Mr. Nadal. Mr. Soler said Spain
has benefited from a conflu-
ence of events and geography.

First, a handful of solid, if
not spectacular, players from
the 1970s through the 1990s
decided to become coaches.
That gave Spain a critical
mass of tennis expertise that
could be disseminated to devel-
oping players. Javier Duarte
helped develop Alex Corretja
and now works closely with
No. 39, Tommy Robredo, while

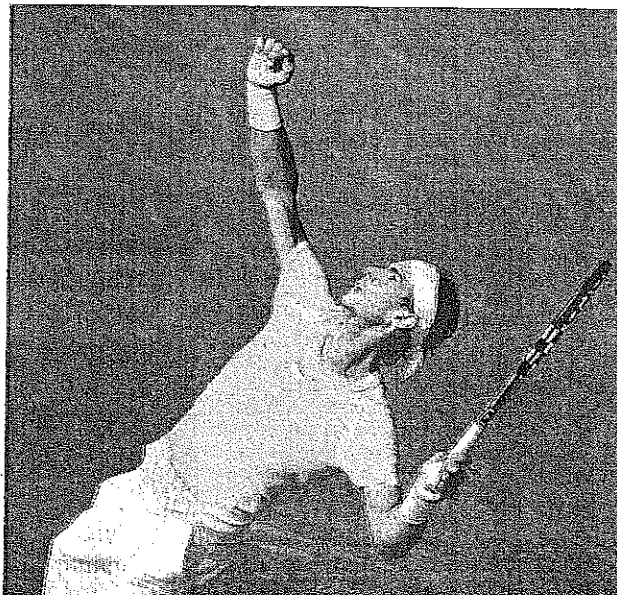
José Perles works with No. 16,
Nicolas Pietrangeli.

In addition, Spain's mild cli-
mate allows outdoor play 11
months of the year, making it
a favorite spot for small tourna-
ments on the satellite profes-
sional circuits. That lets young
Spanish players test their met-
tle cheaply, "so they can see if
they have what it takes to play
professionally," Mr. Soler said.

Finally, while the Spanish
Tennis Federation, based in
Barcelona, has continued to
expand its programs, private
clubs have sprouted in Spain's
major cities, especially in
Madrid, Valencia and Barce-
lona. The last is home of the
world-famous Sánchez-Casal
Academy, founded by former
top player Emilio Sánchez.

However, Spanish women
haven't been as dominant
lately as the Spanish men. At
No. 24, María José Martínez
Sánchez is the only Spanish
woman in the top 25, a decline
from the days of Arantxa
Sánchez Vicario and Conchita
Martínez, suggesting that the
rush of male talent may have
more to do with happenstance
than any programmatic
changes in the country's ten-
nis operations.

Mr. Soler doesn't expect suc-
cess of the magnitude Spanish
men are enjoying to last for-
ever. Football will always grab
the best athletes, he said, and
a youth champion with Mr. Nad-
al's natural talent has yet to
appear on the Iberian horizon.
"There's a lot of talent that
you cannot build," Mr. Soler
said. "It's a process, where
over a number of years, every-
thing sort of came into place."



bad timing,
er was
nense talents,
nto his own