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**Journalistically speaking,** there is no hot news to offer you about Roger Federer.

He is, at 25, the best tennis player currently alive. Maybe the best ever.

Bios and profiles abound. “60 Minutes” did a feature on him just last year. Anything you want to know about Mr. Roger N.M.I. Federer — his background, his home town of Basel, Switzerland, his parents’ sane and unexploitative support of his talent, his junior tennis career, his early problems with fragility and temper, his beloved junior coach, how that coach’s accidental death in 2002 both shattered and annealed Federer and helped make him what he now is, Federer’s 39 career singles titles, his eight Grand Slams, his unusually steady and mature commitment to the girlfriend who travels with him (which on the men’s tour is rare) and handles his affairs (which on the men’s tour is unheard of), his old-school stoicism and mental toughness and good sportsmanship and evident overall decency and thoughtfulness and charitable largess — it’s all just a Google search away. Knock yourself out.

This present article is more about a spectator’s experience of Federer, and its context. The specific thesis here is that if you’ve never seen the young man play live, and then do, in person, on the sacred grass of Wimbledon, through the literally withering heat and then wind and rain of the ’06 fortnight, then you are apt to have what one of the tournament’s press bus drivers describes as a “bloody near-religious experience.” It may be tempting, at first, to hear a phrase like this as just one more of the overheated tropes that people resort to describe the feeling of Federer Moments. But the driver’s phrase turns out to be true — literally, for an instant ecstatically — though it takes some time and serious watching to see this truth emerge.

**Beauty is not the goal** of competitive sports, but high-level sports are a prime venue for the expression of human beauty. The relation is roughly that of courage to war.

The human beauty we’re talking about here is beauty of a particular type; it might be called kinetic beauty. Its power and appeal are universal. It has nothing to do with sex or cultural norms. What it seems to have to do with, really, is human beings’ reconciliation with the fact of having a body.([1](http://www.nytimes.com/2006/08/20/sports/playmagazine/20federer-footnotes.html?pagewanted=all#footnote1))

Of course, in men’s sports no one ever talks about beauty or grace or the body. Men may profess their “love” of sports, but that love must always be cast and enacted in the symbology of war: elimination vs. advance, hierarchy of rank and standing, obsessive statistics, technical analysis, tribal and/or nationalist fervor, uniforms, mass noise, banners, chest-thumping, face-painting, etc. For reasons that are not well understood, war’s codes are safer for most of us than love’s.