

= Tennis the Menace =

" Tennis the Menace " is the twelfth episode of the twelfth season of the American animated sitcom The Simpsons . It originally aired on the Fox network in the United States on February 11 , 2001 . In the episode , the Simpsons build a tennis court in their backyard and are ridiculed by the entire town because of Homer 's inferior tennis ability . Homer therefore tries to please Marge by entering the two into a tournament , but they quickly turn into rivals when Marge replaces Homer with Bart as her partner .

The episode features guest appearances from tennis professionals Andre Agassi , Pete Sampras , and sisters Venus and Serena Williams as themselves . " Tennis the Menace " was directed by Jen Kamerman and written by Ian Maxtone @-@ Graham , who also directed the Williams sisters ' performance . The animators of The Simpsons experimented with digital ink and paint on " Tennis the Menace " , making it the second episode of the series to be animated using the process .

" Tennis the Menace " has received generally positive reviews from critics with particular praise for its guest stars . Around eight million American homes tuned in to watch " Tennis the Menace " during its original airing , and in 2009 it was released on DVD along with the rest of the episodes of the twelfth season .

= = Plot = =

The Springfield Retirement Castle holds a talent show , which the Simpson family attends . Grampa wins the show after performing his version of the song " What 's New , Pussycat ? " . He wins a free autopsy , so the Simpsons visit a funeral salesman to claim the prize . While there , Homer decides to buy a casket and a tombstone for Grampa . He also discovers that a certain kind of tombstone is produced from the same amount of cement as a tennis court , and this gives him the idea to build a tennis court in the family 's backyard .

The court is very popular with Springfield 's residents , but these residents mock Homer and Marge for losing all the time , thanks to Homer 's poor play . Marge pleads with Homer to take the game seriously ; however , Homer is too oblivious to how bad he is at tennis . Homer tries to please Marge by entering Krusty 's celebrity tournament , the " Krusty Kharity Klassic " . Marge , tired of being laughed at , ditches Homer and enters with Bart as her new partner . Homer is outraged that he was abandoned for a ten @-@ year @-@ old boy , and tries to get revenge by entering the tournament with Lisa as his partner , despite Lisa 's disapproval .

Because of this , the Simpson family begins to argue and compete against each other . The tournament takes place and in the stands are leading tennis professionals Andre Agassi , Pete Sampras , Venus Williams , and Serena Williams . At the tournament , Homer ditches Lisa for Venus Williams . In response , Marge replaces Bart with Serena Williams as her partner . Ultimately , Serena and Venus replace Marge and Homer with Sampras and Agassi respectively . This forces the family to go back to the bench and resume their normal places in the family ; as they enjoy the exhibition of top @-@ class tennis , they agree that it is better to watch things than to do things and Homer offers to buy the family dinner with money he took from Sampras ' wallet .

= = Production = =

" Tennis the Menace " was written by Ian Maxtone @-@ Graham and directed by Jen Kamerman as part of the twelfth season of The Simpsons (2000 ? 2001) . Maxtone @-@ Graham considers himself to be a bad tennis player and he has always wanted to win against his mother in a tennis match . This served as the inspiration for the episode , as he thought " family dynamics around tennis would be a fun show . " Maxtone @-@ Graham did a lot a research for the scenes at the beginning of the episode where the Simpsons visit a funeral salesman at a cemetery .

He read Jessica Mitford 's book The American Way of Death Revisited , which discusses the funeral industry , and was able to take a tour with funeral salesmen at Westwood Village Memorial Park Cemetery in Los Angeles . At the time , he did not reveal that this was for research , and

instead pretended to have a dying relative . According to Maxtone @-@ Graham , the tour helped him find out " all about urns versus coffins , and cremation . I asked sort of questions about , ' Well , do the bodies smell ? ' They were very nice and gave me all the answers . It was quite fascinating . "

The opening of " Tennis the Menace " is what Maxtone @-@ Graham describes as a " screw you " beginning , as the viewer has " no idea that the twist is going to be tennis " . The part of the story revolving around tennis does not begin until around eight minutes into the episode . The Simpsons show runner Mike Scully has said that he thought this was " probably too long to wait before getting the story started . "

Maxtone @-@ Graham has similarly said that while he thinks these type of openings " are kind of funny " , they may be best avoided . However , Scully liked the fact that the staff included a comment in the episode on its " screw you " beginning by having Homer say " I 'll bet you didn 't see that coming ! " to the viewers when he decides to get the tennis court . The writers had a number of alternate endings to " Tennis the Menace " before deciding on the one eventually used . For instance , at one point , the family was to return home to watch the match in which Serena and Sampras faced off against Venus and Agassi on television . The staff changed it to the final one because they did not want it to feel like the episode petered out .

" Tennis the Menace " features guest appearances from Andre Agassi , Pete Sampras , and sisters Venus and Serena Williams . All of them appeared as themselves . Executive producer Al Jean directed Sampras , who Jean thought delivered his lines " very naturally " , while Maxtone @-@ Graham directed the Williams sisters . Agassi recorded his lines in the summer of 2000 . The Williams sisters , however , recorded their lines in Los Angeles sometime in the winter of 2000 ? 2001 . According to Maxtone @-@ Graham , the sisters were " incredibly nice and incredibly generous with their time . "

This is the second episode ? after season seven 's " Radioactive Man " (1995) ? to be animated with digital ink and paint . This kind of digital coloring would not be used permanently on the show until the season fourteen episodes " Treehouse of Horror XIII " and " The Great Louse Detective " (2002) . It was used on " Tennis the Menace " primarily to test the technique . The reason for the long gap between this episode and " The Great Louse Detective " was that the staff of The Simpsons wanted to refine the look some more before doing it full @-@ time .

= = Reception = =

The episode originally aired on the Fox network in the United States on February 11 , 2001 . It was viewed in approximately eight million households that night . With a Nielsen rating of 8 @. @ 2 , the episode tied the X @-@ Files episode " Medusa " for the 41st place in the ratings for the week of February 5 ? 11 , 2001 . The episode was the fourth highest @-@ rated broadcast on Fox that week (together with " Medusa ") , following episodes of Temptation Island , Ally McBeal , and Boston Public . On August 18 , 2009 , " Tennis the Menace " was released on DVD as part of the box set The Simpsons ? The Complete Twelfth Season . Staff members Mike Scully , Al Jean , Ian Maxtone @-@ Graham , John Frink , Don Payne , Matt Selmán , Max Pross , as well as television writer and producer Philip Rosenthal , participated in the DVD audio commentary for the episode .

Critics have given " Tennis the Menace " generally positive reviews . Jerry Greene of the Orlando Sentinel listed it at number nine on his 2004 list of the show 's " Top 10 Sporting Episodes " . Nancy Basile of About.com wrote in her 2003 review that the plot of the episode " allowed us to see more secondary characters than usual . It also gave Springfield a sense of community that we sometimes don 't get in recent seasons .

Though the blatant use of guest stars has sweeps written all over it , the tennis stars were funny and able to make fun of themselves . Homer had some wonderful lines , too , such as , ' Take your hands off me . They feel like salad tongs . ' Overall , a very funny episode . " In July 2007 , Simon Crerar of The Times listed Agassi 's performance as one of the thirty @-@ three funniest cameos in the history of the show .

In his review of the twelfth season of The Simpsons , Jason Bailey of DVD Talk wrote that the staff

members' " habit of using the first act as a red herring , only semi @-@ connected to the rest of the show , is ingenious and hilarious [...] They 'd been doing this kind of thing for years , but it still plays ; what 's more , they 've begun to acknowledge it , and wink about it . "

He noted the scene from this episode in which Homer tells the viewers that " I 'll bet you didn 't see that coming ! " , adding that a " moment like that is The Simpsons at its best : smart , knowing , and ridiculously funny . " Also reviewing the twelfth season , DVD Movie Guide 's Colin Jacobson was less positive , commenting : " I ? d love to report that ' Menace ' disrupts the string of mediocre episodes [before it in the season] , but I can ? t . Like its predecessors , it offers a moderately enjoyable experience , but that ? s the best it can do . Expect a few chuckles and little else . "