

If I bounce the ball five times...

Matthew Syed writes about sporting superstitions



- 1 Tennis players are strange people.** Have you noticed how they always ask for three balls instead of two; how they bounce the ball the same number of times before serving, as if any change from their routine might result in disaster?
- 2** [REDACTED], the ex-world number 1 female tennis player. When she was once asked why she had played so badly at the French Open she answered, 'I didn't tie my shoe laces right and I didn't bounce the ball five times and I didn't bring my shower sandals to the court with me. I didn't have my extra dress. I just knew it was fate; it wasn't going to happen.'
- 3** [REDACTED]. Goran Ivanišević, Wimbledon champion in 2001, was convinced that if he won a match he had to repeat everything he did the previous day, such as eating the same food at the same restaurant, talking to the same people and watching the same TV programmes. One year this meant that he had to watch Teletubbies every morning during his Wimbledon campaign. 'Sometimes it got very boring,' he said.



- 4 [redacted]. As we were watching British tennis player Andy Murray play the fourth set at Wimbledon, my wife suddenly got up and went to the kitchen. 'He keeps losing games when I'm in the room,' she said. 'If I go out now, he'll win.'
- 5 [redacted]. Last year, a survey of British football supporters found that 21 per cent had a lucky charm (anything from a scarf to a lucky coin), while another questionnaire revealed that 70 per cent of Spanish football fans performed pre-match rituals (like wearing 'lucky' clothes, eating the same food or drink, or watching matches with the same people).
- 6 [redacted]. She returned, and he won the fifth. I laughed at her, and then remembered my football team, Spurs, who were losing 1–0 in the Carling Cup. 'If I leave the room now, Spurs will score,' I told my kids, after 27 minutes of extra time. I left the room and they scored. Twice.

Glossary

Teletubbies a British television series for very young children

Spurs Tottenham Hotspur, a London football team

Adapted from The Times