



By: Elise Quevedo

Behind every innovation, there's a human being



My dear Wimbledon, this year I tuned in to watch you with a bit of sadness, knowing what was to come.

The line judges, those incredible, silent, poised custodians of the game, were officially **gone**. Replaced by **Hawk-Eye Live**, a system of high-speed cameras, their absence became one of the most talked-about aspects of the tournament.

And not for the right reasons. This moment at Wimbledon has changed the course of history. When technology begins to erase the people who helped shape the soul of a sport, we need to take a moment to remember why we play and why we watch in the first place.

Where Human Meets Machine, or Does It?

The 2025 Wimbledon Championships mark a major milestone. For the first time in 148 years, there were no line judges on the court. It was a complete handover to machines.

The company behind Hawk-Eye Live has long provided tracking systems used for challenges in tennis, line calls in cricket, and offside decisions in football.

They cover 25 top sports, and their tech is incredibly accurate, tracking the ball at up to 10,000 frames per second.

Who remembers John McEnroe's famous "You cannot be serious"?

But this year, it wasn't used as a backup or an assistant. It was the judge, jury, and executioner.

Wimbledon's leadership called it progress. But for many of us who understand the foundation and history of the sport, it felt more like a rupture.

Who **remembers** John McEnroe's famous "You cannot be serious"? Or Viktor Troicki's

hilarious four-minute tantrum that **delighted** the fans during the Italian Open.

Three Sports, Three Different Roads to the Future

Precision Over Presence in Tennis

Hawk-Eye has been around and trusted for years, and players appreciate its accuracy, especially when calls are tight.

But replacing human officials entirely removes an essential part of the game's theatre, especially at Wimbledon.

The subtle nods, the occasional tension, and the applause shared between the line judge and player, all gone. Wimbledon's courts are now quieter, cleaner, and arguably more clinical. But they're also less human.

Behind this transformation, we have two major players, Hawk-Eye Innovations, a Sony-owned company, and IBM, which has **worked** with Wimbledon for over 30 years.

IBM is the brains behind the AI-powered match insights, automated commentary, and player analysis delivered to millions of fans in real time.

Their AI models, powered by IBM Watson, help drive the tournament's immersive digital experiences. I've written about IBM's technology at Wimbledon before, so I won't go into detail today.

While IBM is using AI to enrich fan engagement, the decision to remove line judges feels like a separate direction, one focused more on operational efficiency than emotional connection.

The amusing part is that dozens of line judges were still on site as a backup in case technology failed.

Technology on Trial in Football

Football's relationship with technology has been more complicated. The Video Assistant Referee (VAR), which is backed by companies such as EVS and ChyronHego, promised to bring fairness and accountability.



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These systems, using a combination of video replay, motion tracking, and referee communication platforms, have created more uncertainty than they've solved.

VAR is both praised and criticised. Unlike tennis, football hasn't yet replaced its officials. While still present, it now often feels secondary to the technology operating behind the scenes.

Human and Technology Play in Harmony at Formula 1

A sport that has found its rhythm is Formula 1. It is the perfect marriage of man and machine. Teams like Mercedes-AMG Petronas, Red Bull Racing, and Ferrari already partner with global tech powerhouses such as Amazon Web Services (AWS), Microsoft, and SAP to leverage data analytics, machine learning, and cloud computing.

With every lap generating thousands of data points, ranging from tire wear and fuel flow to wind direction and driver biometrics, AI models enable real-time strategic decision-making.

But ultimately, it's still a human being behind the wheel, feeling the car, reading the race. What makes F1 unique is its culture of augmentation.

Technology is not replacing humans; it supports them, and it's making the right hybrid moves.

The Good, the Bad, and the Blurred Lines

The good news is that technology has made sports safer, faster, and more inclusive. Wearables from companies like **Catapult Sports** track athlete health in real-time.

AI platforms like **Zone7** help predict injuries before they happen. Broadcast innovations enable fans worldwide to access games that were previously limited by geography or rights.

We can't let economic efficiency dictate emotional experience

The bad is that innovation sometimes arrives without asking if it's wanted. In our quest for accuracy, we lose spontaneity. In removing imperfections, we lose character.

When the most memorable moment of a tournament is a machine replacing a person, we are losing a part of the core foundation.

The ugly here is that some of these decisions are purely financially driven. Removing line judges saves costs and simplifies logistics.

But calling that progress without acknowledging the cultural cost is disingenuous. We can't let economic efficiency dictate emotional experience.

So, What Are We Really Cheering For?

What makes sport beautiful isn't the precision of a perfect call. It's the roar of a crowd, the moment of human error, and the comeback born out of chaos.

If we continue to hand over control to technology without thinking, we will lose the very soul that makes people fall in love with sport in the first place. How will we get the next John McEnroe moment otherwise?

The Future Should Always Be Hybrid

Lazy innovation is something I oppose. A mixed, human experience aided by technology is the most potent paradigm.

Consider basketball's replay review, which incorporates both officials and video, or cricket's umpire decision review system (DRS), which permits human calls to be reviewed but not removed.

Models that improve the game and its players are what we need. We have a responsibility to the athletes, coaches, referees, and fans of tomorrow to maintain the human element, emotion, and unpredictable nature that technology cannot replace.

As I always say, behind any technology and innovation, there's a human being. Let's never forget the people who make sport worth watching.