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Jessica Pegula has been encouraging officials to do more to combat online abuse of players: “I get told my family should get cancer and die from people on here on a regular basis.” Other tennis players have been the target of direct threats.

ANALYSIS

# New AI tool finds vast online abuse of tennis players

BY CHARLIE ECCLESHARE / THE ATHLETIC  
NYT News Service

Tennis players last year received abuse so threatening that 15 cases were escalated to law enforcement agencies, according to a joint report released Tuesday by the Women’s Tennis Association and the International Tennis Federation.

The report, which covers the 2024 season, lays bare the scale of abuse directed at players on social media. It also offers a reminder that the detected abuse only scratches the surface.

From January to December in 2024, an artificial intelligence threat analysis system analyzed 1.6 million posts and comments. It verified around 8,000 posts and comments sent from 4,200 accounts as

abusive, violent or threatening.

The report identified 458 players as targeted with direct abuse or threats, with five players receiving 26% of the posts classified as abusive. Ninety-seven social media accounts were responsible for 23% of all detected abuse.

According to the data analysis, angry gamblers sent 40% of all detected abuse last year. Of the 10 most prolific accounts, responsible for 12% of all abuse detected, nine have either been suspended or have deleted their posts or had them removed by the relevant platform. One account sent 263 abusive messages in 2024, but has not posted any abusive content in 2025 to date.

Of the 15 incidents reported to law enforcement

agencies, four took place at the Grand Slam events and one at the Olympics. The other 10 were from tour events. Three were submitted to the FBI, with 12 investigated by other national law enforcement bodies. They led to individuals being barred from venues and having tickets rescinded.

Signify Group’s Threat Matrix service, which went live in January 2024, is designed to help protect players by detecting and filtering out abusive messages through a combination of artificial intelligence and human analysts. All players competing in WTA Tour and ITF World Tennis Tour events (and WTA and ITF players competing in the four Grand Slam events) are automatically covered by the service.

But targeted abuse is just the start. During last month’s French Open, Jessica Pegula, the world No. 3, said that abuse always finds a way to enter her timeline, even if not directed at her.

“These bettors are insane and delusional,” Pegula wrote in the wake of her fourth-round defeat to French qualifier Lois Boisson. “I don’t allow DMs, and try to remember when to shut my comments off during tournament weeks.”

She added: “This stuff has never really bothered me much, but does any other sport deal with this to our level? I’d love to know because it seems to be predominantly tennis? It’s so disturbing.

“Every person on tour deals with it. It’s so bad. Those are just really small

snippets. I get told my family should get cancer and die from people on here on a regular basis. Absolutely crazy.”

Bettors and angry fans will name players in abusive comments after a loss, even if they do not message or tag them on social media when doing so. The normalization of this kind of abuse has become a major issue for the sport, and is the natural next step for people who have been blocked or cannot message the targets of their abuse directly.

The International Tennis Federation and the WTA and ATP Tours share match data with providers linked to sports betting. Income from those deals goes toward the funding of the tours.

Pegula, who sits on the WTA Players’ Council, said on Tuesday: “Online abuse is unacceptable, and something that no player should have to endure. I welcome the work that the WTA and ITF are doing with Threat Matrix to identify and take action against the abusers, whose behavior is so often linked to gambling.

“But it’s not enough on its own. It’s time for the gambling industry and social media companies to tackle the problem at its source and act to protect everyone facing these threats.”

Caroline Garcia, the French former world No. 4 who will retire later this year, opened up about the damaging effects of social media abuse at the U.S. Open last August. She wrote on Instagram that unhealthy betting accounted for most of the abuse, and emphasized how damaging it was to players who were already emotionally destroyed after a defeat.

“If someone decided to say these things to me in public, he could have legal issues,” Garcia wrote. “So why online we are free to do anything? Shouldn’t we reconsider anonymity online?”

A Betting and Gaming

Council representative told BBC Sport that the organization does “not tolerate abuse on social media, which has no place in betting or sport.”

In a statement, the organization said: “It is vital social media companies take swift action against users, remove offensive content and work more closely with BGC members on measures to further strengthen safer gambling. Each month, around 22.5 million people in Britain enjoy a bet, on the lottery, in bookmakers, casinos, bingo halls and online, and the overwhelming majority do so safely and responsibly.”

Meta, which owns social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram, did not immediately respond to a request to comment.

Jonathan Hirshler, the CEO of Signify Group, which developed the Threat Matrix service, said that the fact that a lot of the abuse came from a small number of accounts “means that we are able to be even more focused working with the platforms to ensure successful take down, support the tennis bodies to drive law enforcement intervention for the most egregious accounts and work with event security teams to ensure prolific abusers are unable to attend tournaments.”

The threat of online abuse can also tip into real-world threats. At the French Open, Clara Tauson of Denmark and Jakub Mensik of the Czech Republic confronted bettors who abused them from the stands. And in March, at a practice session during the Miami Open, Iga Swiatek was confronted by someone who has regularly abused her online. The tournament gave Swiatek additional security after the incident, which a representative for the five-time Grand Slam champion described as “a direct transition from verbal aggression online to harassment in the real world.”

# Wimbledon champ Kvitova plans to retire

Field Level Media

Two-time Wimbledon champion Petra Kvitova plans to retire from professional tennis at the end of the season.

Kvitova, 35, announced her intentions Thursday on both Instagram and X.

“I’ve been privileged to reach incredible heights over the past 19 years since becoming a professional

tennis player,” she wrote. “From winning my two Wimbledon Championships, bringing home six Billie Jean King Cup trophies for the Czech Republic, reaching the world (No.) 2 ranking and so much more.

“I have accomplished more than I could have ever imagined and I am so grateful to everything that tennis has given me all these years. It has taught

me countless lessons, not only on the court or in the gym, but also in life. I would never be whom I am today without this beautiful sport, and everything it has given me both on and off the court.”

Kvitova was granted a wild card for Wimbledon on Wednesday. She won at the All England Club in 2011 and 2014, her only Grand Slam titles. She last competed there in 2023

and became a mother for the first time when her son was born last year.

“As (with) all phases in life, there comes a day that it is time for a new chapter, and that time for me has come now. I therefore wanted to share with you that 2025 is my last season on tour as a professional. I am excited and very much looking forward to soak in the beauty of playing The Championships, Wimbledon one more time, a place that holds the most cherished memories in my career for me. And while I am not entirely sure yet what my hardcourt swing in the US will look like, I am intending to finish my

active playing career at the US Open in New York later this summer.

“While no such decision is ever easy to make, for me this is a happy moment! I will leave the sport with the biggest smile on my face – the same smile you’ve seen from me on

and off court throughout my whole career.”

Kvitova reached a No. 2 world ranking in October 2011. She won 31 singles titles on the WTA Tour and a bronze medal at the 2016 Summer Olympics in Brazil. Her career earnings exceed \$37 million.

# 100 days from Ryder Cup, Bradley savoring journey

Field Level Media

U.S. captain Keegan Bradley said Wednesday that the only time he isn’t thinking about September’s Ryder Cup is when he is “inside the ropes Thursday through Sunday.”

With the start of the Ryder Cup now just 100 days away, Bradley fielded questions about the experience as he got ready to tee off in the Travelers Championship starting Thursday in Cromwell, Conn.

“For the most part, I’m thinking only about the Ryder Cup,” the first-time captain said. “I’m looking at the points list. I’m looking at potential pairings. I’m talking to the scouts. I’m talking to the vice captains. We’re talking about strategy, bus ride

schedules, media schedules.”

The 45th Ryder Cup competition against the defending champions from Team Europe runs from Sept. 26-28 at Bethpage Black on Long Island, N.Y.

Bradley, 39, was serenaded with chants of “USA” from the fans on Sunday when he made his final putt of the U.S. Open, where he finished T33 at Oakmont Country Club. “Everywhere I go, I’m getting USA chants, people are cheering me on,” he said. “... It’s been something that I hadn’t really expected, to be honest. It’s taken me by surprise, and it’s just a treat to go out there and play every day the Ryder Cup captain.”

Bradley is still finalizing the roster, but it sure sounded like J.J. Spaun

locked up a spot with his first major win on Sunday.

“I think going to a course like Bethpage Black, the people are really going to be behind a guy like J.J. Spaun. His story is incredible. He’s a hard working guy that’s just building and building and building his whole career. To win the U.S. Open at Oakmont, in my eyes, is the pinnacle of major golf. It’s as tough as you can get,” Bradley said.

“I think he’s a guy that people at Bethpage will

really resonate with and a guy that on our team is the heartbeat. He’s now the U.S. Open champion. That’s a heavy burden to bear, but he’s also -- that’s also a great thing to have on your team.

“I’m really proud to have him on this team because it’s really difficult to make your first team. To go out there the way he did this year and play in these big events this well is a testament to what a player he is.”



CHARLES LECLAIRE Imagn Images

Keegan Bradley, seen during the U.S. Open, is finalizing an American roster, trying to knock off defending champion Team Europe at the Ryder Cup in September.

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