A SEA OF RED CLAY : LOOKING BACK AT MONTE CARLO

By the time the tour reached Monte Carlo in April, the season had already started to take its shape. The Australian summer was over. Indian Wells and Miami were done. The hard courts were behind everyone, and the clay was finally waiting. Now, at the end of the year, that first week on the red dirt feels like the true beginning of the clay story of 2025.

Monte Carlo is not just another stop on the calendar. The stadium is built on a hill above the sea, the stands are close to the court, and the red clay feels almost like part of the tradition of the place. It is the first Masters 1000 of the clay season, one week that often changes the mood before the tour moves on to Madrid, Rome and finally to the iconic Roland Garros.

In 2025, the trophy went to a man everyone already knew was dangerous on clay. The current No. 1 player of the world, Carlos Alcaraz won the title for the first time, beating Lorenzo Musetti 3–6 6–1 6–0 in the final. It was his sixth Masters 1000 trophy and his 18th title on the ATP Tour. Earlier in the year, he had talked about having a tough month off the court, and his results in Indian Wells and Miami were not at his usual level. Monte Carlo became the reset button. After a slow start in the final, he cut down his mistakes, played cleaner shots with more power and precession, and in the last two sets he completely took over.

For Musetti, it was still the best week of his career so far. The Italian reached his first Masters 1000 final and reminded everyone why people often talk about his talent on clay. On the way, he beats defending champion Stefanos Tsitsipas in the quarterfinals and handled big moments against several top players. His hardest test actually came right at the beginning, and it came from Asia.

In the first round, Musetti played against Chinese qualifier Bu Yunchaokete. Bu had already won two excellent matches in qualifying to make the main draw, and he started strongly again. He took the first set 6–4, pushed Musetti into long rallies and made the 13th seed work hard for every point. Musetti finally turned it around and won 4–6 7–5 6–3 but for many people this was the first time they really noticed Bu at this level.

For Novak Djokovic, Monte Carlo was a reminder that even the greatest have difficult days. He arrived chasing his 100th career title and trying to become the first man to complete a ‘triple’ Career Golden Masters by winning each Masters 1000 event at least three times. Instead, he went out in his first match, losing 6–3 6–4 to Alejandro Tabilo in the second round. Afterwards, Djokovic himself called his performance very poor and said he was disappointed with how he played. For Tabilo, it was a huge win. For the rest of the field, it quietly opened up one more space in the draw.

There was also a home story that made Monaco smile. Valentin Vacherot became the first player from Monaco to win a main draw match in Monte Carlo since 2009. In a tournament full of big stars, it may look like a small result, but for a small tennis nation it meant a lot. For children training on those same courts and seeing one of their own winning at this level, it is the kind of moment they will remember.

The doubles event also gave the home fans a reason to cheer. Romain Arneodo from Monaco and Manuel Gulnard from France won the title, beating the British pair Julian Cash and Lloyd Glasspool 1–6 7–6(8) (10–8) in a very tense final. Cash and Glasspool had two championship points, but Arneodo and Guinard stayed steady, saved both, and then turned the match around in the tie break. Seeing a player from Monaco lift a Masters 1000 doubles trophy on these courts was a special sight for the tournament and for the crowd.

When we look back now from December, Monte Carlo feels like a clear opening chapter to the clay season. Alcaraz used it to restart his year and show again why clay suits his game so well. Musetti used it to play the biggest final of his career. De Minaur put his name in the record books with a scoreline nobody expected. Djokovic had a rough day that reminded everyone he is human too. Vacherot and Arneodo gave Monaco some moments it will remember for a long time. And from Asia, Bu Yunchaokete's week – from qualifying wins to that three set battle with Musetti, quietly added another line to the story of the region's growing presence on the biggest stages.