

Carrie Soto Is Back

by Taylor Jenkins Reid · Language: EN

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Overview

Carrie Soto Is Back follows the legendary tennis player Carrie Soto, who, after retiring six years prior, decides to return to the professional circuit at age 37 to reclaim her record of 20 Grand Slam titles from rival Nicki Chan. The novel traces Carrie's grueling comeback over the 1994 and 1995 seasons, interwoven with flashbacks to her childhood training under her father Javier, her rise to dominance, and the personal sacrifices that made her the greatest. As she battles younger players, her own aging body, and the public's shifting perception of her, Carrie must confront what she truly wants from the sport and from life.

At its core, the book is a meditation on ambition, legacy, and the cost of greatness. Carrie is not a likable heroine in the conventional sense; she is ruthless, arrogant, and fiercely competitive, yet Reid renders her with such depth that readers understand the fear and vulnerability beneath her armor. The story arc moves from Carrie's stubborn refusal to accept her fading glory to a hard-won acceptance that her identity is not solely defined by records. The novel matters because it challenges the double standards applied to female athletes and aging women, and it celebrates the complexity of a woman who refuses to apologize for her drive. Reid's prose is propulsive and emotionally resonant, making the tennis matches as gripping as any thriller, while the father-daughter relationship between Carrie and Javier provides a tender counterpoint to the on-court battles.

Key Takeaways

- Carrie Soto's comeback shows that true greatness often requires sacrificing personal relationships and comfort, but that redefining success on your own terms is possible.
- The book highlights how female athletes are judged more harshly than male counterparts for the same confidence and ambition.
- Carrie's relationship with her father Javier demonstrates that a coach can be both a loving parent and a demanding taskmaster, and that this duality can shape an athlete's entire life.
- Aging does not mean the end of relevance; Carrie proves that experience and mental toughness can compensate for physical decline.
- The novel suggests that a legacy is not just about records but about the impact you have on others and the person you become.
- Carrie's rivalry with Nicki Chan shows that competition can be both destructive and motivating, and that respect can grow from fierce opposition.

- The book encourages readers to question what they are willing to give up for their dreams and whether the cost is worth it.

Chapter Summaries

Part One: The Return

Carrie Soto, now 37 and retired for six years, watches from the stands as Nicki Chan wins her 20th Grand Slam, tying Carrie's record. Carrie, who had been living a quiet life in Los Angeles with her father Javier, decides she cannot let her record be broken. She announces her comeback, despite the skepticism of the tennis world and her own father's initial reluctance. The section establishes Carrie's fierce pride and her complicated relationship with her past, including her mother's death and her father's role as her coach.

Part Two: The Early Years

Flashbacks reveal Carrie's childhood in Argentina and then California, where her father, a former tennis player, trains her obsessively from age three. We see the origins of her famous 'Soto Slam' and her relentless work ethic. Her mother's death from cancer when Carrie is young deepens her bond with her father and her commitment to tennis. The section also introduces her first rival, and the pressure she feels to be perfect.

Part Three: The Comeback Begins

Carrie begins her comeback at the Australian Open, where she faces a new generation of players, including the powerful and young Ingrid Cortez. She struggles with her body's limitations and the media's harsh scrutiny. Her father, Javier, agrees to coach her again, but their relationship is strained by his concern for her health. Carrie wins her first match but loses in the quarterfinals, realizing she has a long way to go.

Part Four: The French Open

Carrie's training intensifies, and she reaches the final of the French Open against Nicki Chan. The match is a brutal, five-set battle that Carrie loses, but she gains confidence from her performance. She also reconnects with Bowe Huntley, a former player and her ex-lover, who is now a commentator. Their relationship rekindles, offering Carrie a glimpse of a life beyond tennis. However, she remains focused on her goal.

Part Five: Wimbledon

Carrie wins Wimbledon, her first Grand Slam since her comeback, defeating Ingrid Cortez in the final. The victory is emotional, and she dedicates it to her father. However, the celebration is short-lived as she faces criticism for her aggressive style and her age. She also struggles with the physical toll of the tour, and her relationship with Bowe becomes more serious, complicating her single-minded focus.

Part Six: The US Open

At the US Open, Carrie faces Nicki Chan in the final. The match is a grueling, emotionally charged battle that goes to a third set. Carrie is on the verge of defeat but digs deep, recalling her father's lessons and her own determination. She wins the match, tying Nicki at 21 Grand Slams each. The victory is cathartic, but Carrie realizes that the record no longer defines her. She decides to retire for good, this time on her own terms.

Epilogue

Years later, Carrie is married to Bowe and has a daughter. She works as a commentator and runs a tennis academy with her father, who is now elderly. She reflects on her career and her legacy, understanding that her greatest achievement was not the records but the relationships she built and the person she became. The epilogue shows Carrie at peace, having found happiness beyond the court.

Themes

- Ambition and legacy
- Aging and identity
- Father-daughter bond
- Female athleticism
- Competition and rivalry
- Sacrifice and success

Notable Quotes

- "I am not a role model. I am a tennis player." — Carrie says this early in the book, when asked about her public image and the expectations placed on her as a female athlete.
- "You have to be willing to be hated to be great." — Javier tells Carrie this during a training session, reinforcing the idea that greatness requires sacrificing popularity.
- "I didn't come back to be liked. I came back to win." — Carrie states this to the press during her comeback, explaining her motivation for returning to tennis.
- "The record is not who I am. It is what I did." — Carrie reflects on this near the end of the book, after she has decided to retire for good, showing her growth and self-awareness.
- "I have spent my whole life trying to be the best. And now I just want to be happy." — Carrie says this to Bowe in a quiet moment, revealing her shifting priorities as she contemplates life after tennis.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is Carrie Soto Is Back about?

Carrie Soto Is Back is a novel about a retired tennis legend who returns to the sport at age 37 to reclaim her record of 20 Grand Slam titles from a rival. It explores her grueling comeback, her relationship with her father/coach, and her struggle to redefine her identity beyond her athletic achievements.

Is Carrie Soto Is Back worth reading?

Yes, if you enjoy character-driven fiction about ambitious women, sports, and complex family dynamics. Taylor Jenkins Reid delivers a compelling protagonist who is unapologetically fierce, and the tennis scenes are thrilling. It's a fast-paced, emotional read that has been widely praised by critics and readers alike.

How does Carrie Soto Is Back end?

Spoiler: Carrie wins the US Open, tying Nicki Chan at 21 Grand Slams, and then retires for good. She marries Bowe Huntley, has a daughter, and becomes a commentator and coach. She finds peace, realizing her legacy is not just her records but the relationships she built and the person she became.

Who should read Carrie Soto Is Back?

Fans of Taylor Jenkins Reid's other novels, such as Daisy Jones & The Six and The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo, will enjoy this. It also appeals to readers who like sports fiction, stories about female ambition, and explorations of aging and legacy. If you appreciate complex, flawed protagonists, this is for you.

How long does it take to read Carrie Soto Is Back?

The book has about 384 pages, and at an average reading speed of 250 words per minute, it takes roughly 8 to 10 hours to read. Most readers finish it in a few days, as the engaging narrative makes it a quick, immersive read.