

SPORTS

Serena Williams Tops Injured Venus For Second Wimbledon Title

By HOWARD FENDRICH
AP Tennis Writer

WIMBLEDON, England (AP) - Serena Williams sat at court-side, jacket over her legs and towel over her shoulders, trying to stay warm during a 10-minute medical timeout in the final set at Wimbledon. Her adversary and sister, Venus, was in the locker room getting treated for an abdominal strain that made her double over or grimace after shots.

Of all the things that could have been on Serena's mind, What is taking so long? Will she quit? How's my big sis doing? _ here's what she thought: "I want to make sure I hold serve here."

Tough as it might be to stay relentless against an injured sibling, Serena focused and beat Venus 4-6, 6-4, 6-2 Saturday for her second straight Wimbledon title. It's her fifth championship in the past six Grand Slams, each capped by a victory over Venus.

"I have to look at the big picture. Twenty years from now, I don't want to look back and say, 'You know what? I really should have fought harder,'" Serena said. "It was a little more difficult, seeing as it was Venus that's injured. I just had to tell myself to look at the ball and nothing else."

That's the type of drive Serena has displayed for the past 14 months, rolling up a 40-1 record at majors while establishing herself as No. 1 in the world and in her family.

And yet, once the last ball was struck, she and Venus were simply sisters again.

They hugged at the net, and Venus stepped aside to sit down, allowing Serena to speak in the applause. But Serena, soon went over and plopped down in the changeover seat next to Venus. They chatted, smiling, until Venus flagged down a club official and handed him a camera to capture the moment.

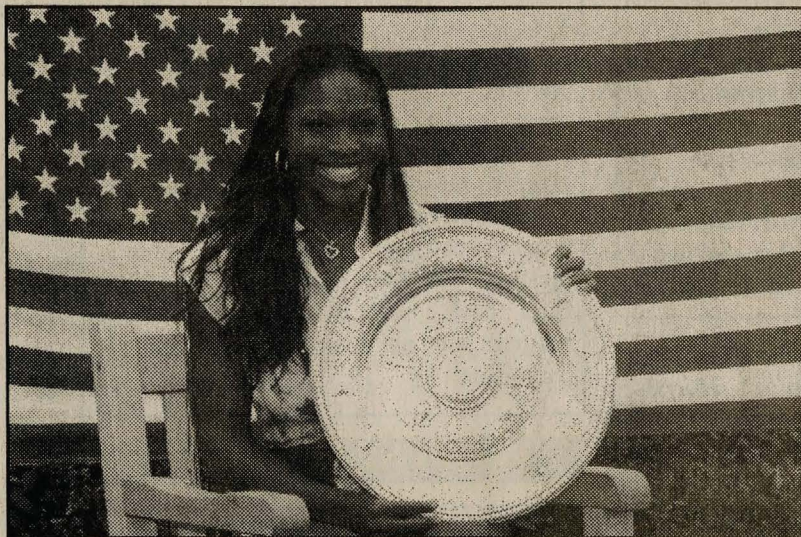
Venus started the match, her fourth straight Wimbledon final, including wins in 2000-01 and last year's loss to Serena, with her midsection and upper left leg taped.

She got more wrapping in the timeout after being broken to open the third set, when she double-faulted twice, put a forehand in the net and generally looked miserable.

"I couldn't run too fast, I couldn't stretch out too much," she said. "I was hitting serves in the net because it's harder to reach up."

Her serve speeds were down around 85 mph by then, 20-to-30 mph slower than usual, and after hitting them she would wince.

But she was determined to play. This was, after all, a Wimbledon final, she hadn't won a major in two years and, perhaps most



Serena Williams poses with the winner's plate, after defeating her sister Venus in the Women's Singles final on the Centre Court at the All England Lawn Tennis Championships at Wimbledon. Serena won the final 4-6, 6-4, 6-2 to retain her title. (AP Photo/Anja Niedringhaus)

significantly, she was facing her sister. The family drew jeers at a 2001 tournament in California after an injured Venus withdrew before a semifinal against Serena.

"Everyone's quite familiar with the history. I had to at least show up and go out on the court," Venus said.

Actually, Venus might not even have been a finalist at all if not for Serena. When Venus aggravated the two-month-old stomach muscle strain during her semifinal against Kim Clijsters, it was Serena's encouragement during a rain delay that kept her going.

Venus skipped practice Friday, and cut short a session before the final, limping away after 10 minutes with a left groin twinge.

"I think she was very courageous to go out there and play," said trainer Karen Davis, who treated Venus and predicted she'll be out two-to-four weeks.

Shortly before the start, All England Club chief executive Chris Gorringe emerged on court with a microphone and intoned, "Ladies and gentlemen, may I have your attention, please." The crowd of 13,810 suddenly quieted, wondering if a withdrawal announcement was coming. Instead, Gorringe merely noted that a representative of a charity would handle the prematch coin toss.

And then the players came out, Venus several paces behind, walking with a slight hitch.

She didn't have problems early, though, winning the first game with three service winners up to 110 mph. She broke at love with a passing shot and held to 3-0 thanks to two forehand errors by Serena, capping an 11-point Venus run.

"It tugged at my heartstrings watching Venus out there," said their mother, Oracene Price. "I

didn't want her out there in the first place, but that's her choice. That's what probably made it difficult for Serena at the beginning."

Serena gained control in the second set by breaking at love to 4-1 with Venus missing two backhands and two forehands, the last sailing 5 feet long.

The final set was similar, Venus' errors mounting as she looked more uncomfortable. When her eighth double-fault made it 5-2, she slumped over, leaning on her racket as though it were a cane.

"She's tougher than I ever thought she was," Serena said. "I knew she was tough, but she's definitely on a different level."

The same could be said of Serena's tennis right now.

If not for an acrimonious semifinal loss to Justine Henin-Hardenne at the French Open a month ago, Serena might have tied the record of six straight major titles.

"I love being a champion again," Serena said. "I love walking off the court and seeing my name up there again."

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It's On!

Report: Payton Won't Return To Milwaukee Bucks

RACINE, Wis. (AP) - Milwaukee Bucks free agent Gary Payton will sign with either the Miami Heat, the Portland Trail Blazers or the Los Angeles Lakers, a newspaper reported Monday.

Payton's agent Aaron Goodwin told The Journal Times in Racine that his client doesn't want to play for the Bucks anymore.

"Please note that Milwaukee was Gary's first choice. But it's become quite clear to him that Milwaukee doesn't want to re-sign him," Goodwin said in a telephone interview with the newspaper from Oakland, Calif.

Goodwin told the newspaper Sunday that discussions between Payton and new Bucks general manager Larry Harris have been disappointing, which prompted him to entertain other offers.

Goodwin and Harris did not immediately return calls Monday from The Associated Press.

More than eight teams expressed serious interest in Payton, including the Washington Wizards, Goodwin said.

Washington's vice president of basketball operations is now Ernie

Grunfeld, the former Bucks general manager who had pushed for keeping Payton in Milwaukee.

Goodwin said Grunfeld made an intriguing offer for Payton to play for the Wizards, but the veteran guard decided against it.

"It's 100 percent Gary will play for one of three teams," Goodwin said. "Those teams are the Miami Heat, the Portland Trail Blazers and the Los Angeles Lakers. I think Gary's going to decide in the next day or two which one it will be."

Payton, a nine-time NBA All Star who is regarded as one of the league's best defensive point guards, became a free agent July 1.

The Bucks got Payton and Desmond Mason in February for guard Ray Allen, Kevin Ollie and Ronald Murray and a first-round draft choice.

Payton started 28 games for the Bucks, averaging a team-high 19.6 points and 7.8 assists.

Payton led the Bucks with 18.5 points and 8.7 assists in the first-round playoff series the Bucks lost to the New Jersey Nets.



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