

Metro / Sports

Williams claims U.S. Open title

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A glittery tiara in her hair and menace in her strokes, Venus Williams tightened the family grip on women's tennis Saturday night, capturing the U.S. Open title her sister won a year ago.

Two months after beating Lindsay Davenport at Wimbledon for her first Grand Slam title, Williams confirmed her place as the best in the game, if not in the rankings, by beating Davenport again 6-4, 7-5 in the hardest-hitting women's final in U.S. Open history.

Never before had two women's finalists walloped shots so fiercely, so consistently, from both sides as Williams and Davenport in this rain-delayed, 1-hour, 25-minute duel. They each needed to be fast to keep up with the other, and no one in the game is faster than the sinewy, long-legged Williams.

"I really have some wheels," Williams said. "I'm really speedy these days. It helped me out a lot."

Williams gazed at the silver trophy, taking pleasure in seeing where her name will be inscribed next to that of her sister, Serena.

"It feels real nice," Venus said.

Williams celebrated this victory less tamely than she did her Wimbledon triumph, skipping lightly to the net, twirling a bit, shaking hands briefly with Davenport. Williams then trotted over to the corner to kiss her mother and hug her father and coach, Richard, who came down to the court and danced jubilantly beside her, while Serena told her, "Great job, Venus."

"Venus was playing great. She forced me to play better and I couldn't do it," Davenport said.

Davenport beat 18-year-old Serena in the quarterfinals, but made too many errors to hold off Venus, who pocketed \$800,000 compared to Davenport's \$425,000.

Though clearly dominant in women's tennis as she rides a 26-match winning streak bookended by two major titles, Williams will remain No. 3 in the ranking behind No. 1 Martin Hingis and No. 2 Davenport. The lag in the rankings is due solely to Williams' absence from the game for nearly six months until the spring because of tendinitis in both wrists.

"This was a very nice victory because I feel like I played Lindsay when she was playing some of her best tennis, and now I've beaten the No. 1 and 2 players in the rankings successively," Williams said.

Asked whether she thought of herself as No. 1, Williams said:

"Oh, yeah. I always feel like I'm the best player... No. 1 is definitely one of my goals. I'm trying."

President Clinton watched the men's semifinals won by Pete Sampras and Russia's Marat Safin, and had planned to watch the women's final — the first between American-born women since Tracy Austin beat Chris Evert in 1979. But he left when showers delayed the start of the match more than an hour and a half. But most of the fans stayed right to the end at 8:19 p.m., the latest finish ever for a women's final.

The match was not always pretty as Williams and Davenport pummeled flat line drives, going for the corners, the sides, the baseline, finding them often, but nearly as often just missing or hitting wildly.

The 20-year-old Williams, fulfilling the championship dreams her father instilled in her since childhood, served at up to 117 mph, hit eight aces, and saved a dozen break points while yielding on her serve three times. Williams, far more mature a player than when she reached the Open final in her debut three years ago, showed she could handle Davenport's less powerful serves, breaking her five times.

At 24, Davenport showed in reaching the final that she remains a huge threat to add to the three majors she's already won — the 1998 U.S. Open, 1999 Wimbledon and 2000 Australian Open. But she doesn't have the range and speed and sheer athleticism that Williams has brandished this summer.

Davenport, who had the longest winning streak on the women's tour — 21 matches — until Williams



Venus Williams, of the United States, smiles with her trophy after defeating Lindsay Davenport in the women's finals at the U.S. Open tennis tournament Saturday, Sept. 9, in New York. Williams won 6-4, 7-5.

surpassed her last week, has lost to Williams now in five of their past six matches, all of them in straight sets.

Williams looked as if she would be in trouble at the start, beginning the match with a foot fault and falling behind 1-4 as Davenport broke her twice.

"I feel like I wasn't taking my opportunities very well," Williams said. "I was missing a little too much and maybe hitting a little too hard. She was playing at a high level, but I think maybe I was giving her what she wanted. I kept feeding her. I was giving her the spoon."

Williams dug in resolutely, as she has throughout her winning streak, and broke Davenport back to begin a run of six straight games. Davenport double-faulted twice to end the first set, and her broad shoulders sagged as she walked to her chair, angry with herself for giving so much away.

"I should have won that set," Davenport said. "I had a lot of chances to win the second set. I'm disappointed. At this level you just can't do that. I thought I was breaking enough. I just couldn't serve well enough to hold my own. She's definitely the No. 1 player right now."

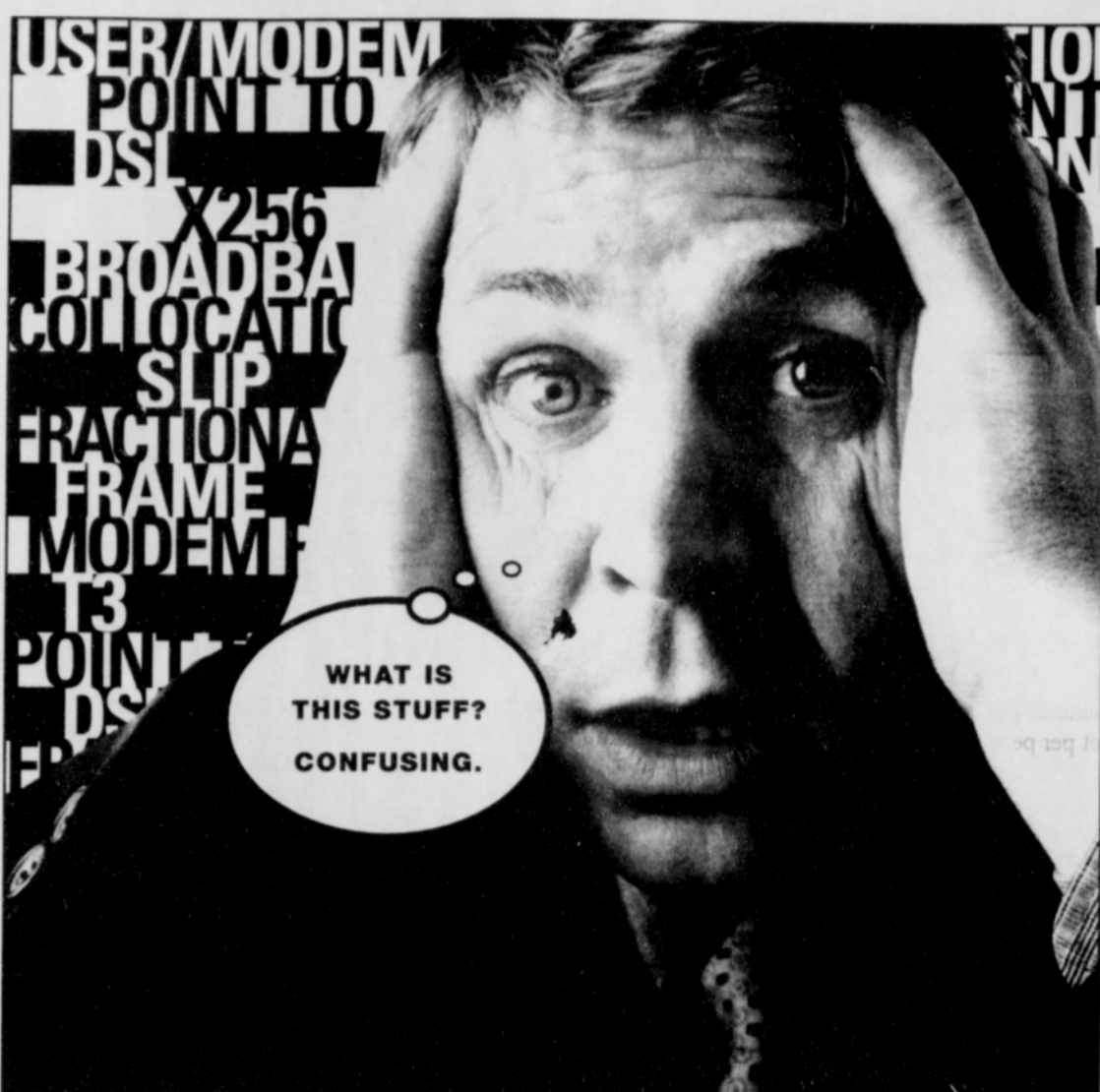
Clinton made a congratulatory phone call after the match, as he did last year to Serena, and Williams asked boldly and with a laugh what he could do to reduce her taxes.

"Not too much right now," the president said. "I think there ought to be new rules for athletes."

To which Williams responded, "Should I read your lips?"

When Williams asked him why he didn't stay to watch, Clinton said he had to get home for dinner with Hillary.

When Clinton invited Williams to visit the White House, she said: "I'll see what I can do about it."



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