

# Osaka, 20, beats idol Serena to win the U.S. Open

By Brian Mahoney  
AP Sports Writer

**N**EW YORK — Naomi Osaka walked to the net, the excitement of being a Grand Slam champion mixed with a bit of sadness.

She grew up rooting for Serena Williams, even did a report on her way back in third grade. Her dream was to play her idol at the U.S. Open.

So when she had actually done it, beating Williams 6-2, 6-4 to become the first Grand Slam singles champion from Japan, why was it so difficult?

“Because I know that, like, she really wanted to have the 24th Grand Slam, right?” Osaka said. “Everyone knows this. It’s on the commercials, it’s everywhere.”

“When I step onto the court, I feel like a different person, right? I’m not a Serena fan. I’m just a tennis player playing another tennis player. But then when I hugged her at the net ... I felt like a little kid again.”

Osaka teared up as she was finishing her answer, still overwhelmed as she juggled the idea of her winning and Williams losing.

Though her nerves on the tennis court don’t show it, it was a reminder of just how youthful the 20-year-old Osaka is. Not since Maria Sharapova was 19 in 2006 has the U.S. Open had a younger women’s champion.

The way Williams lost, of course, was what stood out most in the match. The arguments with chair umpire Carlos Ramos and the three code violations — one that gave Osaka a game for a 5-3 lead in the second set when Williams was trying to rally — will be what was most remembered.

But not for Osaka, who claimed to not even hear the interactions between Williams and Ramos. What will stay with her is the hug at the net afterward, and Williams’ kind words during the trophy presentation, when she asked a booing crowd to focus its intention on Osaka’s moment.

“So for me, I’m always going to remember the Serena that I love,” Osaka said. “It doesn’t change anything for me.



**GRAND SLAM CHAMP.** Naomi Osaka of Japan returns a shot during a match at the U.S. Open tennis tournament in New York. Osaka beat Serena Williams 6-2, 6-4 to become the first Grand Slam singles champion from Japan. (AP Photo/Frank Franklin II)

She was really nice to me, like, at the net and on the podium. I don’t really see what would change.”

Osaka was nervous before the final, making a few phone calls to her sister in Paris to calm her down. Even during the

match, whenever she was faced with a tough spot, she kept telling herself to try to do what Williams would do.

Williams was certainly impressed.

“She was so focused,” the 36-year-old Williams said. “I think, you know,

whenever I had a break point, she came up with some great serve. Honestly, there’s a lot I can learn from her from this match. I hope to learn a lot from that.”

It was that way throughout the tournament for Osaka, who won the second title of her career. She was mostly dominant, dropping only one set in her seven matches, and she saved five of six break points against Williams after erasing all 13 in the semifinals against Madison Keys.

That’s the kind of toughness Williams has so often shown in winning 23 Grand Slam singles titles, one shy of the record. It’s one of the things Osaka always admired about Williams, and made her choose her as the topic of that report years ago.

“I colored it and everything,” Osaka said. “I said, ‘I want to be like her.’”

On that day, she was better.

## Virtual learning: Using AI, immersion to teach Chinese

By Michael Hill  
The Associated Press

**T**ROY, N.Y. — To learn Chinese in this room, talk to the floating panda head.

The Mandarin-speaking avatar zips around a 360-degree restaurant scene in an artificial intelligence-driven instruction program that looks like a giant video game. Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute (RPI) students testing the technology move inside the 12-foot-high, wraparound projection to order virtual bean curd from the panda waiter, chat with Beijing market sellers, and practice tai chi by mirroring moves of a watchful mentor.

“Definitely less anxiety than messing it up with a real human being,” says Rahul Divekar, a computer science graduate student working on the project. “So compared to that anxiety, this is a lot more easy.”

The “Mandarin Project” is a joint venture of RPI and IBM. Cognitive and Immersive Systems Laboratory researchers are developing a sort of smart room that



**VIRTUAL CLASSROOM.** Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute (RPI) graduate student Xiangyang Mou practices tai chi with an avatar in a campus studio at RPI in Troy, New York, in this August 22, 2018 file image taken from video. The “Mandarin Project” is a joint venture of RPI and IBM. Cognitive and Immersive Systems Laboratory researchers are developing a sort of smart room that can understand students’ words, answer their questions, and perceive their gestures. (AP Photo/Michael Hill)

can understand students’ words, answer their questions, and perceive their gestures. Lessons are presented as games or tasks, like ordering a meal out.

Divekar orders Peking duck — *Beijing kaoya* — and the panda fetches the virtual dish. Divekar says the food was good — *Cai hen hao chi* — but he can’t pay the bill. No problem, the panda replies — *ni keyi xi pan zi* — you can wash the dishes.

Other scenes include an outdoor market and a garden, each a high-tech twist on cultural immersion.

“Our plan is to complete several scenes of real life in China, to let the student be able to have a virtual trip over there,” said Hui Su, director of the lab at RPI.

Tests on the room with students studying Mandarin will continue this school year as they work on additional scenes, including an airport. A six-week course is being readied for the summer.

Artificial intelligence, or AI, is ubiquitous in everything from call-center chat-bots to home assistants. Even some language instruction products on the market feature AI or virtual reality.

The Mandarin Project is notable for its scale and sophistication. Computers simultaneously interpret speech and gesture to keep a dialogue going. When a student points to a picture and asks “What’s that?” computers can come up with an answer.

And feedback is immediate. When Divekar orders *dou fu* — or tofu — a voice responds “here’s how close you got” and illustrates it with a graph of his intonation. Another voice gives the precise pronunciation.

Still, language teachers need not fear for their jobs just yet. Developers of the

Mandarin Project say it isn’t sophisticated enough right now to completely replace classroom instruction.

RPI president Shirley Ann Jackson foresees the same type of technology being applied to other spaces, such as corporate boardrooms. When the executives discuss a potential acquisition, the room will follow the group discussion and produce relevant information seamlessly into the debate.

“We’re not at the end of the line,” Jackson says, “but closer to the beginning.”

## Wanted: New Oregon Supreme Court justice

**SALEM, Ore.** (AP) — Governor Kate Brown announced she’s accepting applications to fill a pending vacancy on the Oregon Supreme Court, created by the retirement of Justice Rives Kistler on December 31.

Brown said she’s looking for applicants with a wide variety of backgrounds and experiences.

Earlier this year, the court gained its first black judge when Brown appointed Adrienne Nelson. In 2015, an Asian-American woman, Lynn Nakamoto, became the first minority woman on the bench.

Kistler, 69, expressed gratitude for the privilege of working with appellate courts and lawyers.

Chief Justice Martha Walters called him a brilliant thinker who cares deeply about the law and people.

When Kistler was appointed to the Supreme Court in 2003, he became the first openly-LGBT state Supreme Court justice in America.

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Difficulty level: Hard #17269

**Instructions:** Fill in the grid so that the digits 1 through 9 appear one time each in every row, column, and 3x3 box.

Solution to last issue’s puzzle

Puzzle #35546 (Medium)

All solutions available at <www.sudoku.com>.

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