

# Serena Has A Special Support Group

*In Spite of What They Do or Say*

**T**he threat of Irene and its aftermath at the 2011 US Open was a major factor in the order of play, especially during the early rounds. The rains wiped out play completely for several days, threatening a complete shutdown of the entire event.

Match scheduling became a headache for the tournament director, who got complaints from the men who were required to play back-to-back five-set matches every day.

On the women's side, the issue was scheduling, but overshadowed by the outstanding play of Serena Williams, seeded number 38 even though she had been the number one seed at the last Open. Even though she had major surgery, a life-threatening illness, and a lack of enough tournament play during the year, Serena exhibited her brilliance in reaching the finals of the US Open again in her outstanding career as a tennis professional.

On her way to the finals, struggling with the foot injury that required major surgery earlier, Serena won over her opponents without losing a set. She destroyed Bojana Jovanovski in the first round, beat Michaella Krakcek in the second, won over the number fourth seed, Victoria Azarenka, in the third round, defeated the former number one female, Ana Ivanovic in the quarters, and out played Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova in the semifinals.

The most inspiring victory for Serena was over the number one female player, Caroline Wozniacki, in the semifinals. Serena served aces, and



hit placements with her ground strokes that gave the top seed difficulty throughout the match. The victory was sweet, but ended late in the evening which put undue stress on Serena. Serena's match ended near midnight, followed by press interviews, and other official matters, putting her in bed after 2 a.m., in contrast to her opponent Samantha Stosur, who played her match earlier in the day. Normally, the women have one day of rest before the finals, but because of Irene, the schedule of play had to be altered, forcing Serena to play the finals the next day on Sunday afternoon.

Going into the match after little sleep the night before, suffering with a very sore foot, the doom and gloom of the 9-11 Anniversary Celebration, were factors that weighted heavily on Serena's shoulders as she took the court for the finals.

The first set, won by Stosur, was Serena's first loss during the entire event, a good indication of her level of play at this time. At the beginning of the second set, just when Serena started making her move, the chair official got into the match.

Serena was awarded a Code Violation for remarks she made to the official after making verbal sounds while hitting a forehand winner. The call by the official, brought back old memories while watching Arthur Ashe play a WCT match, when the linesman called a footfault against him on match point. Arthur wasn't the same after that call, and everyone knows that he was known as "Mr. Cool." This is just one incident out of hundreds, where the officials at professional tennis matches have made calls that caused the results to favor players of their own liking.

Serena protested the call in a non-threatening way while toweling off before taking the court for the next game. The efforts she made to win in spite of these distractions are to be applauded, not scorned as so many have written. Serena lost the set and match, accepted the second place trophy with dignity, and conducted the post-game activities in a professional way that only the Williams sisters have done over the years.

Reaction to the Code Violation and possible suspension was issued by the USTA in the following news releases:

On Sunday evening at 7:16 p.m., September 11, 2011, the United States Tennis Association (USTA) issued the following statement to the media:



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## **Statement Regarding Serena Williams' Code Violation during the First Game of the Second Set of the US Open Final vs. Samantha Stosur**

Serena Williams was issued a code violation for verbal abuse by Chair Umpire Eva Asderaki at the conclusion of the first game of the second set during the US Open women's singles final vs. Samantha Stosur.

Tournament Referee Brian Early is presently reviewing this incident on tape and also will have further discussions with the chair umpire to determine whether this code violation will result in a fine, and, if so, the level of that fine. The decision regarding this matter will be issued tomorrow.

Any impact this code violation might have on Serena Williams' Grand Slam probation would require the incident being ruled a major event. That determination will be made by the Grand Slam Committee Director.

On Monday afternoon at 1:32 p.m., September 12, 2011, the United States Tennis Association (USTA) issued the following statement to the media:



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## Statement Regarding Serena Williams' Code Violation Fine

US Open Tournament Referee Brian Earley has fined Serena Williams \$2,000 following the code violation issued for verbal abuse during the women's singles final. This fine is consistent with similar offenses at Grand Slam events. As with all fines at the US Open, the monies levied are provided to the Grand Slam Development Fund which develops tennis programs around the world.

After independently reviewing the incident which served as the basis for the code violation, and taking into account the level of fine imposed by the US Open referee, the Grand Slam Committee Director has determined that Ms. Williams' conduct, while verbally abusive, does not rise to the level of a major offense under the Grand Slam Code of Conduct.

Immediately upon receiving the first release, *Black Tennis* magazine sent out over 10,000 emails to readers throughout the U.S. and around the world, asking their opinion of the Code Violation. Ninety-nine per cent of those who received the emails said that the action taken by the USTA was unfair, unjust, and unwarranted. One example of many responses is below:

"International Tennis Federation rules say: "If a player is hindered in playing the point by a deliberate act of the opponent(s), the player shall win the point. However, the point shall be replayed if a player is hindered in playing the point by either an unintentional act of the opponent(s), or something outside the player's own control (not including a permanent fixture)." Clearly Serena's "Come on" was not a "deliberate act" that hindered Miss Stosur in any way. The ball was out of her reach, and she barely got her racquet on the ball. She was clearly not "hindered". If miss Stosur had actually gone up to the umpire and lodged a complaint that the "come on" distracted her, or hindered her, I think that at most a warning should have been sufficient. If Serena then repeated a similar act during the remainder of the match, then I think a point penalty would have been appropriate. To assess a player a point penalty in a championship match for an act that clearly did not deliberately or intentionally "hinder" her opponent defies common sense, and was unfair. I think that the loud, and incessant grunting from Miss Sharapovia and many other players is really more distracting and a hindrance to their opponents. If the umpire was justified in assessing Miss Williams a point penalty in this situation, then all umpires must also start assessing point penalties to all the grunters who routinely distract, and hinder their opponents. As for possible further actions against Miss Williams, I think that would be outrageous. Her alleged "berating" of the umpire was tame compared to the many profanity laced tirades that Jimmy Connors, John McEnroe, Illie Nastase and many others including Andy Roddick in recent years have routinely dished out to umpires over the years with little or no reprimand or punishment. That would be a serious double standard."

If Serena violates a rule, she should be punished, which holds true for all players of the game. Regardless, Serena is the best female tennis player in the world today, a fact everyone must accept regardless of who you are or represent.