

In The Fast Lane for Serena
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By Craig Gabriel

BEIJING: Serena Williams had said that her favourite part of the Olympic Games in Beijing was the "Olympic lane" which avoids traffic delays so wonderfully. Well the fourth seed at the XXIX Olympiad took things to heart and created her own Olympic lane as she charged past Australian Samantha Stosur 6-2, 6-0 in just 44 minutes.

Serena was on a mission as she won the last ten games to set up a meeting with the rising French player Alize Cornet. Cornet defeated one of the local hopes Peng Shuai 6-2, 6-2.

"It was clean and my way of improving on it is to keep it up," said Serena. "I played really clean matches in the past, the next one would be kind of streaky. I don't want to do that any more. I just want to keep playing the same consistency."

"I thought my returns started to get more consistent. I mean, she started out serving really well, and then I just felt like, okay, they started getting better. You know, I wasn't blasting every one; I was trying to place it. I think it worked out."

It was an early start for Serena. The match was the first of the day and started at 10.30am. It's not too often, in fact quite rare, that one of the world's great players is on court before lunch time but Serena appears not to be put out by that. She was saying that the time difference in flying to Beijing from the United States has meant that she is waking up at about 5am, so playing an early match is not an issue.

She is really excited about being in Beijing. The city has such a buzz about it. There are banners all over the city as if anyone needed reminding that the greatest sports show is in town.

The two most iconic sites are the Bird's Nest which is the national stadium and host for all the athletic events and across the parking lot is the "Water Cube" where the swimming, etc is on show. These are truly remarkable facilities.

The tennis centre is a fantastic legacy for the tournaments it will be used for from 2009. The inside of the stadium court it is not unlike Court One at Wimbledon or the centre courts in Sydney and Athens, the previous two Olympic cities; that's because the same man designed all the facilities.

"Playing for the Olympics, you're playing for your country and you're playing to get the medal tally on your country higher," said Serena. "It's an awesome experience."

"I've never played singles at the Olympics, so this has been really cool for me. Every time I walk out there, it's like I'm playing in my match, but at the same time, you know, I have the whole U.S. team on my side. It's good. I really like that feeling."

Serena says she gets excited to watch the swimming and the gymnastics and she even watched the archery yesterday.

"I'm able to stay focused 'cause, you know, it's just like watching TV. It's awesome to be at a big arena where it's not just about tennis," said Serena. "For me it's purely about athletes. It's just every athlete of every sport brings their best. And it doesn't get better than that." How very true!