

On A Night of Respect Serena Starts Up Her US Open - US Open
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By Craig Gabriel

NEW YORK: It was a night to remember for the more than 23,700 people that were sitting in the Arthur Ashe Stadium and it was a night to remember for those that took part in the celebrations on court. But while Serena Williams was able to watch some of commemoration that happened on the court, she had to remain focused for the match she was to play later in the evening.

It was an amazing sight to see so many great African American women assembled to honour a woman that was a trailblazer. It was 50 years ago that Althea Gibson became the first player to win the US Championships (forerunner to the US Open) and she was inducted into the US Open Court of Champions. This brave and remarkable woman opened doors for African Americans of the future including Arthur Ashe himself and more recently Serena and big sister Venus.

Leading the entertainment was another immortal, Aretha Franklin who sang her signature song the oh so appropriate "RESPECT".

"I remember I talked to (Althea) after I won here in '99," said Serena. "I just remember her saying something to the gist of like she finally was able to see a black person win a Grand Slam. I remember her saying that. She didn't say that verbatim, but that was basically what she said. I was so happy at the time. I was so excited to talk to her. Yeah, it was a great moment."

When it was time to play tennis Venus was on court first and she moved past Kira Nagy and then on went Serena, wearing a black Nike dress with a pink band that was accented with a bow. She was playing the young German Angelique Kerber and in the second set Kerber lifted her level of play. Serena was pushing herself to the limit to get over the line and after one hour 17 minutes she did 63 75. This was her first match since Wimbledon when she had the thumb injury which she says is now fine.

"I think she definitely played a tough game, but I just think I made a lot of errors," said Serena. "I didn't feel I moved my feet well. I felt like I was just flat-footed. I felt like I was just heavy. I just didn't -- I don't know. I didn't feel pressure to win. I just don't want to lose in the first round. I'll be better the next match."

In that next match she will play the Italian Maria Elena Camerin.