

Serena Begins Australian Open Title Defense  
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By Craig Gabriel

MELBOURNE: She's back, looking great and feeling at ease with everything. Serena Williams has opened the defense of her Australian Open crown with a comfortable result in just 62 minutes. Serena was facing a 20 year old of Slovakian heritage but just a month ago became a naturalized Australian; her name is Jarmila Gajdosova (pronounced: Guy-dos-ova).

Wearing a white dress with hot pink shorts to match her headband, Serena advanced 6-3, 6-3. She lead 3-0 in the first set but then the young Australian rallied back to level the set. However there was never any doubt about Serena advancing. She crunched down a first serve percentage of 65%, hit eight aces and won 79% of first serve points. Only once did she not convert a break point and she had five of them.

"It definitely feels good to be back," said Serena. "I think I was a wee bit nervous out there. But, you know, it's good to be back. I think everyone could probably tell I was a little scratchy. But, you know, it's the first round. Just moving forward."

This Australian Open has a bit of a new look. After 20 years using Rebound Ace, the cushioned hard court which was colored green, from this year the pen has moved to a more convention hard court and its bright blue. It's a change that Serena is comfortable with.

"In the past, I've really liked the surface (but) I like the surface this year as well," she said. "I like to play in the heat. I do well in the heat. I like the crowd. I don't know. I don't know why I play well here. But I think some of those have definitely factors to it. The only thing I feel different is it's not as bouncy, so I don't have to worry about tearing my ankle apart, so that works in my favor."

On an issue off the courts, Serena the other day expressed how much respect she has for Lindsay Davenport who has made a return to the circuit after giving birth to her son Jagger last June. After her match, Serena was asked if she thought we'd see more playing mothers on the tour.

"I can't personally imagine it. I mean, I love tennis. But, I mean, I just the recovery level and the workout regime," said Serena. "When I see pregnant women walking, I'm like, How do they walk? My back hurts looking at them. It's just like I have so much respect for those players, those people. So I just, you know personally, I don't know whether I could do that. But, you know, I just have so much respect for Lindsay. It's incredible."

Mmm, its certainly tough for motherly love to be translated into love games and sets.