

Serena Makes Olympic Return
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By Craig Gabriel

BEIJING: It has been eight years since Serena Williams has played the Olympic Games. In Sydney she played doubles with Venus and won the Gold Medal and here in Beijing she has made her singles debut at the Games.

In hot and humid conditions Serena finally got to finish her match with the Belarussian player Olga Govortsova. The match was started the day before but after one set it was suspended because of incessant rain. On returning Serena closed out the second set for a 6-3, 6-1 result and will play the Australian Samantha Stosur next.

"It brings back memories from Sydney," said Serena. "I didn't remember too much because I didn't go to Athens. But, you know, I was a little nervous going out there yesterday because, you know, it's the first time you played singles at the Olympics. And, you know, obviously I wanted to win and I wanted to do well."

"Like, you know, it's a great thing going out there playing for your country. It's cool. You get to play and see all these other athletes. You think about it, it's like, my God, it's the Olympics."

The Olympic Games has certainly been gaining more and more importance with the world's tennis players. Tennis only became a full medal sport in 1988 in Seoul so it's still quite new. Serena was asked about the atmosphere difference between a Grand Slam and the Olympics.

"Well, for me, my whole life as an athlete, I've been working to win Grand Slams," said Serena. "As a tennis player, you never work to win a gold medal. But my gold medal is the only trophy that I really, like, want to show to people. It's my favorite thing that I have. So it's hard to say."

Serena is more than used to having fans from around the world asking for an autograph or wanting to have a picture taken with her, so it's been sort of strange for her to find other elite athletes being the autograph hounds this time around.

"It is weird when someone from, like, Australia or all these other countries that are doing so well, they come and ask you for an autograph or a photo," said Serena. "It's like, you know, Okay, you're an athlete, you're doing well, too. So, if anything, it's such a big compliment to myself, it makes me feel really, like, cool."

"I went to the village the other day. I was bombarded with lots of people and lots of photos. It was a lot. I can't count. But it was cool, I guess. I mean, these athletes sometimes don't get to see other athletes in such an intimate way."

"Who would I like? I like taking pictures of everybody. I mean, Michael Phelps, because I think he does so well. So that would be kind of cool."

She says she is incredibly impressed with what Beijing has achieved in hosting the Games of the 29th Olympiad. In fact she described it as "awesome" but what she enjoys most of all are the "Olympic Lanes" on the roads so official vehicles avoid the traffic jams.

"It's so cool," she said.