

Serena Marches Into Open Quarters - US Open
Sunday, 02 September 2007

NEW YORK: Serena Williams has stepped it up. She is the first player in the quarterfinals of this year's US Open and she did it very smartly on the Arthur Ashe Stadium.

Seeded eight, Serena was playing Marion Bartoli of France. The last couple of months have been very positive for Bartoli. Just two months ago she reached the final of Wimbledon where Venus stopped her in straight sets. Since then she has been a quarterfinalist at Toronto and New Haven, so this was not expected to be an easy match.

Serena got on track pretty quickly and playing the type of tennis she is well known for. The ball was coming off her racquet strings cleanly and there was an air of calmness about her. She just seemed so comfortable on the court and it showed with her movement and ball striking.

It's such great fun to watch Serena in action when she plays like this. The returns she was hitting were heavy and while Bartoli is fine moving from side to side, she really doesn't like to move up and down the court. It was evident when Serena played the ball short which forced Bartoli to move in.

The match lasted 76 minutes and ended with the score of 63 64. Serena came up with 32 winners across the two sets and her first serve percentage was a high 73% and she won 75% of those points. She served ten aces of which the last one was on match point; when that happens it's just the best feeling. She threw her head back and raised her arms as a huge smile swept across her face.

"I think the key was definitely being able to hold serve," said Serena. "She has a good return and she was actually serving better, I thought today, than she had in maybe some Wimbledon, because I saw her play in Wimbledon. I thought her serves were much faster."

"I definitely felt a lot better on my serve today, especially against her because she's actually a really good returner. So I felt that my serve was actually a lot better today than had been in my previous matches. It's on track. I want it to just keep getting better with each round, especially now with the quarterfinals."

In the quarterfinals Serena will be up against top seed Justine Henin or Russian Dinara Safina. The indicators are that it will be Justine and she and Serena have quite a record. This would be the third consecutive Grand Slam that they've met. Henin won the last two occasions.

"At Wimbledon I couldn't hit a backhand, so I'm very confident in that fact that I'll be able to do that," said Serena. "I was really proud of myself to get that far because I had to take six weeks after, so I was thinking how in the world did I even play? Just having that confidence is always positive."

"She played well at the French. I don't think I played well, but I think she did and she was really focused. It's just a new start for me."

This match promises to be one of the highlights of the women's draw at this year's US Open.