

Serena Starts French Open Quest
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By Craig Gabriel

PARIS: Bonjour! Paris in the spring time can be quite eye catching, that's if the weather holds out. The sun is a bit softer and the gardens, or as they say in French, jardins, are in bloom. The park across the road alongside Roland Garros, with its wonderful glass conservatories, looks like a place to relax and maybe meditate. It's almost like a painting by Claude Monet.

At this time Paris also comes alive with one of the nation's biggest annual sporting events, the French Open which is played at Roland Garros. The facility is almost like a triangle in shape. On one side is the Avenue de la Porte d'Auteuil (pron: dah-toy) which separates the stadium from the Bois de Boulogne, a massive public park, on the other side is Boulevard d'Auteuil and the third road is Avenue Gordon Bennett, the official street address for the Stade Roland Garros.

This year is the 80th anniversary of the French championships being played at Roland Garros and the event is being promoted as "80 years of emotion".

It was in 2002 that Serena Williams was able to experience that emotion when she won the championship and held the Coupe Suzanne Lenglen high. It was three years earlier in 1999 she and Venus won the women's doubles there.

Serena opened her quest for a second career title by playing compatriot Ashley Harkleroad. The evening sky was drawing over quickly as this was the last match on the court. Just before them Andy Murray and young French player Jonathan Eysseric played a five set marathon.

Harkleroad got the early advantage when she broke Serena's serve in the first game but then Serena corrected things and turned the match around and overwhelmed Harkleroad who won just one more game. Serena closed it out with an emphatic ace 62 61.

"I'm definitely happy with getting the result today," said Serena. "I feel like I ultimately could have played better. But, you know, first round just want to get it over with and work your way in the tournament. Today I was a little nervous. I woke up and I felt like I have a chance to do really well, so why be nervous now? Just may as well get through it."

In the second round she will take on unheralded French player Mathilde Johansson who defeated her better known compatriot Camille Pin 64 46 62.

Serena is in the bottom half of the draw which is regarded as the tougher of the two sections. That second includes her sister Venus as well as the two Serbian girls, second seed Ana Ivanovic and third seed Jelena Jankovic.