

Serena Wins Nail-Biter to Reach Last 16
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By Craig Gabriel

MIAMI: The conditions have really warmed up in Miami. The sun was beating down on the green hard courts at the Crandon Park Tennis Centre. The venue for the Sony Ericsson Open where Serena Williams is the defending champion is a leisurely drive from downtown Miami.

You cross the Rickenbacker Causeway with the dramatic skyline of Miami on one side towering over a mini bay that is as smooth as glass. On the other side is a long strip of beach with the ocean that changes colour from pale, play blue to aqua.

On a day like this the single road that passes through the keys is full of cars. People relaxing on the beach or taking their boats onto the water driving just a bit further to the tennis to watch the world's best players, and of course Serena.

But by the time it was Serena's turn to walk on court and continue the defence of her title; the clouds had started to drift across. White clouds were prevalent as Serena got things going and created a comfortable 5-1 lead in the first set against Flavia Pennetta. The Italian has been playing some very good tennis this year, even if it has mainly been on clay.

However, gradually those white clouds began to make way for dark angry looking ones. Thunder was rolling in and there were some flashes of lightening. It seemed it was at that moment that the games were running away from Serena and the Italian came back to take the first set.

Serena was then in a bit of trouble because Pennetta had broken serve in the second and was leading 3-0. A few large drops of rain began to fall and the players were sent off court. IT allowed Serena to speak to both her parents.

"I talked to my mom on the phone; she has a way of talking to me and I talked to my dada as well," said Serena. "They pretty much both said the same thing. Mom was just like you need to this blah, blah, blah. And I was like okay. Are you listening? Yes I'm listening.

"She knows my game really well. She was like stay up, don't get behind the baseline. I'm like are you here? Are you watching on TV?"

"She's like, no, but I know you. So I was like okay. So I just tried to listen more than anything."

On returning Serena tightened her focus and she clawed her way back as one would expect her to do. She won six games in a row, playing one point at a time.

In the third Pennetta held serve in the first game but then Serena won the next three and by the end won 12 of 14 games to close the match 6-7, 6-3, 6-2 in two hours 26 minutes.

In the fourth round Serena will take on Kaia Kanepi of Estonia; she defeated Patty Schnyder 6-0, 6-1.