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Tennis

Is time starting to catch up with Serena?

[1st February 2016](#) [admin](#) [0 Comment](#) [Article by Ros Satar](#)

The women's singles at the Australian Open has produced a new champion in the German Angelique Kerber. Yet, inevitably, the post-match questions were all about the beaten finalist, and particularly, what will Serena Williams do next?

After her preparations shuddered to a painful halt at the Hopman Cup with knee inflammation, there were pre-tournament concerns about whether she would be able to begin a new quest for a career Slam. But such was the perception of Serena's dominance of the women's game that her route surely led to a final against spirited adversary and two-time champion Victoria Azarenka.

Instead it was Kerber who prevented Serena equalling Steffi Graf's record of 22 Grand Slam singles titles, and in one of the most competitive finals seen in the women's game.

The famous Williams intensity, the volume, the raucous yells and the squeals of indignation, were all present and correct. But as her final forehand sailed long, and her opponent dropped to the ground in disbelief, Williams walked around the net to congratulate her, and remained dignified and sporting in the most painful part of defeat – the runner’s up speech.

When asked if, because it was a great final, it made it easier to absorb the loss, Williams gave a rare insight into the isolation at the very top of the game. She said: “It’s interesting. I mean, every time I walk in this room, everyone expects me to win every single match, every single day of my life. As much as I would like to be a robot, I’m not. But, you know, I do the best that I can. I try to win every single time I step out there, every single point, but realistically I can’t do it. Maybe someone else can, but I wasn’t able to do it.”

During the two weeks of the opening Grand Slam of 2016, Serena also revealed her sense of isolation has intensified in Melbourne. After her quarter-final against Maria Sharapova, she talked about her more contemplative side. “I have been spending a lot of time learning about myself this trip,” she said. “It’s been kind of sad. I have been alone a lot. It’s been kind of boring. I think I hate being by myself. As much as I always am, like, “I want to be alone”, I don’t think I like it so much. It’s just been [so] long. I feel like I have been here for three months.”

The question is whether this bout of self-reflection, or self-analysis, marks the crossroads between the desire to continue chasing elusive dreams, or to accept that she is coming to the end of a magnificent career.

Serena said: “I told myself that I’m here to have fun now. I’ve done everything that I wanted to do, you know. I didn’t think I would have done as well as I have. Everything from here on out, every match, is a bonus for me. I don’t have to win this tournament or any other tournament for as long as I live. I really want to enjoy being a professional tennis player and playing on Grand Slam courts, moments like this.”

She has nothing more to prove. She has held all four titles at the same time twice, has four Olympic Gold medals (three doubles, one singles). What more is there to aim for? It is time for Williams to reset. Another ‘Serena Slam’ is gone for this year. She is still a Grand Slam win behind Graf’s 22, and three adrift of Margaret Court’s all-time record. They remain in her sights, as well as another shot at Olympic glory, and maybe even a Fed Cup title.

Whatever, it has been a golden age of women’s tennis. Once both Williams sisters step down, it is unlikely there will be such a combined dominant force for a long time. Enjoy it while it lasts.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ros Satar qualified as a journalist at News Associates, and has been working as a freelance tennis and sports writer since 2013. She co-founded Britwatch Sports with a fellow graduate, looking to give new journalists a platform, when not following the tennis tours around the world, she follows Athletics, Rugby & Formula 1, and her golf handicap is currently her bag of clubs. [Ros’s latest articles](#).

<http://www.themixedzone.co.uk/women-shouldnt-kneel-men/>

Why women shouldn't kneel before men

22nd March 2016 admin 0 Comments Article by Ros Satar, Photo credit: WTA



Ros Satar was in Indian Wells to cover a tennis tournament when the latest Battle of the Sexes broke out. Here, for The Mixed Zone, she pieces together the sexism controversy that overshadowed the final day's events on court

You have to doubt that female tennis players would be going down on their knees every night, as has been suggested, to “thank God that Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal were born because they have carried this sport”. Serena Williams offering prostrate thanks to a graven image of Rafa? Extremely unlikely and very wrong.

Tennis, after all, is a sport for men and women, sometimes men and women on court at the same time, and not a cabal of blokes who see women as second-class performers and citizens.

Yet until he was forced into a swift retraction, the tournament director at Indian Wells who insisted that the women's game “rides on the coattails” of the men's, resurrected the old images sexism and misogyny that many thought were dead and buried. He compounded the controversy further by singling out players Garbine Muguruza and Genie Bouchard for special praise. “They are,” he said, with a hint of slavering, “both physically and competitively attractive” (notwithstanding the fact Bouchard is ranked 42 in the world).

Not surprisingly Raymond Moore then spent the final day of what should have been a celebration of an elite men's and women's tennis tournament he had overseen, under fire from all sides, if not from Novak Djokovic, who also jumped in with both feet.

The silly thing is, Moore didn't even need to reignite the equality question that has almost burnt itself out. To put it in context, Moore was speaking at a media breakfast before Victoria Azaranka beat Serena Williams in straight sets in the singles final. He had been served a fairly gentle lob, but instead of putting it away down the line, he turned it into a hand-grenade with predictable results.

The discussion had been about whether Indian Wells should be upgraded on the men's circuit to somewhere between a Masters 1000 tournament and a Grand Slam. He was then asked if, on the women's side, it too should be elevated from one of the four Premier Mandatory events, alongside Key Biscayne, Madrid and Beijing, to a super-category.

He replied: "No, I think the WTA – you know, in my next life when I come back I want to be someone in the WTA, [laughter] because they ride on the coattails of the men. They don't make any decisions and they are lucky. They are very, very lucky. If I was a lady player, I'd go down every night on my knees and thank God that Roger Federer and Rafa Nadal were born, because they have carried this sport. They really have."

A little later, he acknowledged that the tennis tours had superstars, including Williams and the newly suspended Maria Sharapova (pending an investigation over a failed drugs test at the Australian Open). But by now he had the shovel in his hands and he continued to dig.

"But you know what? I think the WTA have a handful – not just one or two – but they have a handful of very attractive prospects that can assume the mantle. You know, Muguruza, Genie Bouchard. They have a lot of very attractive players. And the standard in ladies' tennis has improved unbelievably."

Very attractive? This, of course, begged the question: physically attractive, or competitively so? "No, no, no, I don't – I mean both. They are physically attractive and competitively attractive. They can assume the mantle of leadership once Serena decides to stop. I think they've got – they really have quite a few very, very attractive players."

If ever there was a clanger of a double-fault, that was it. Thankfully the two women who had just contested the final came into their post-match press conferences and handled the inevitable questions with class.

Williams said: "Obviously I don't think any woman should be down on their knees thanking anybody like that. I think Venus, myself, a number of players have been – if I could tell you every day how many people say they don't watch tennis unless they're watching myself or my sister, I couldn't even bring up that number.

"I think there are a lot of women out there who are more – are very exciting to watch. I think there are a lot of men out there who are exciting to watch. I think it definitely goes both ways. I think those remarks are very much mistaken and very, very, very inaccurate.

"Get on your knees, which is offensive enough, and thank a man, which is not – we, as women, have come a long way. We shouldn't have to drop to our knees at any point."

Azarenka typically dealt with the situation with humour before really getting to the crux of the subject – that this is an issue women have to handle every day, in every walk of life, and not just sport.

She said: "I think it's something that, again, we have to work through as women. Men don't get those comments. I don't want to address or insult anybody like we got a little bit. But I have just spoken to [Moore] and he apologised. My thing is, I don't understand any man's comments in general towards women, because as simple as that, every single person on earth was born by a woman, right?

"From my perspective, if we rise above that and keep working hard in everything we do, we're better. We're better at taking opportunities and being graceful. Why do you have to make the comment? Who cares? Who cares? Simple as that.

“I mean, if that makes that person feel better or bigger or whatever, it’s a pretty sad person, I think. Because if you’re happy you don’t care what other people do. You just take care of you. I think that’s more important to focus on us. That’s what women players and examples like Venus and Serena and other players have been doing for – you know, we got it from Billie Jean King where she proved everybody, ‘Hey, look at me. I started something, so let’s go after it’. So I think it’s our duty to keep just working hard through whatever comments there is. We’ve got to rise above that.”

Just as disappointing as Moore’s were the comments of men’s champion Novak Djokovic, inexplicably bringing equal pay into the debate when he was asked about the controversy brewing. “Women deserve respect and admiration for what they are doing,” he said. “You know, equal prize money was the main subject of the tennis world in the last seven, eight years. I have been through that process as well, so I understand how much power and energy WTA and all the advocates for equal prize money have invested in order to reach that. I applaud them for that. I honestly do.

“They fought for what they deserve, and they got it. On the other hand, I think that our men’s tennis world, ATP world, should fight for more, because the stats are showing that we have much more spectators on the men’s tennis matches. I think that’s one of the, you know, reasons why maybe we should get awarded more. But, again, you know, we can’t complain because we also have great prize money in men’s tennis.”

Moore tried to walk his comments back, releasing a statement: “At my morning breakfast with the media, I made comments about the WTA that were in extremely poor taste and erroneous. I am truly sorry for those remarks, and apologise to all the players and WTA as a whole. We had a women’s final today that reflects the strength of the players, especially Serena and Victoria and the entire WTA. Again, I am truly sorry for my remarks.”

It may only have added petrol to the fire. Steve Simon, who had stepped down as Moore’s predecessor to become CEO of the WTA, gave their official stance. “As the tournament director of one of the pre-eminent events in professional tennis, the comments made today by Raymond Moore were extremely disappointing and alarming. The WTA stands on its own and was founded on the principles of equality and empowerment.

“I am proud of all of the strong athletes on the WTA who put in hard work and sacrifice every single day. Tennis as a whole is enriched by the contributions and accomplishments of every player, both male and female.”

Tennis has been bruised already this year by allegations of match-fixing and the Sharapova affair. Now here we go again with a fight for equality. Does Djokovic, having earned \$100 million in career prize money, really have to worry about the men earning more than women at Wimbledon and the other Grand Slam events where both sexes share the stage? Share is the operative word. The argument of Mr Indian Wells is ultimately mean, sexist and divisive.

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