

'I just have more

I'M a bit more mature and I'm more relaxed. I'm a better player... obviously. I'm not stressed out there as I used to be," said Serena Williams after winning the U. S. Open. Here are excerpts from the interview.

Question: You've got the French, Wimbledon, now here. If you win Australia, is that the Grand Slam or a Serena Slam?

Answer: It's a Serena Slam. I have to start over when I get to Australia.

● If Venus had won, there still might have been some debate about the No. 1 since you had two Grand Slams. You seemed to have erased all doubt with this win as to who the best player in the world is. How does that feel? How is it winning your first Slam as the No. 1 ranked player in the world?

Gosh, I didn't think about that. It's very exciting winning my first Slam, being No. 1. I really wanted to stay No. 1 because I like it here and I knew that everything was on line. But I'm gonna have some fun next year, that's for sure.

● Your sister has a serve that comes with its own vapour trail. It's harder than most of the men's serves. Most of the women here can't handle it. You crack it back right at her feet almost as fast as it came in. How do you do that?

I love to return. It's my specialty, so... Sometimes I'm not as well as I would like to be on it, but I just practice with Venus so much and I practice with a lot of guys who hit these 120s. I just have a method. I just hit it. I just turn it ... I guess like Andre. just kind of get it and hit it back. That's how I do it.

● What's the difference between the Serena who won here in '99 and the one here in '02?

I'm just happy to win here again. It's been a long time since 1999. Almost nearly forgot how it felt.

But the difference is I'm a bit more mature and I'm more relaxed. I'm a better player ... obviously. I just have more fun with what I do. I'm not as stressed out there as I used to be.

● Do you feel at all badly for Venus? You won three majors this year. She hasn't.

I mean, if you put it that way...

But I'm sure she's gonna come back and probably win the US Open.

● Is there more pressure playing against your sister in the final as opposed to another player?

No, not at all. If anything I prefer to play Venus because that means that we have reached our maximum potential and that we'll both go home winners. So for me ... I always want to see Venus do well. I never want to see Venus lose. For me, I'm happy to play her in the final.

● You don't mind beating her though?

In the end, we're all competitors. Ten years from now, I hopefully can look at tapes and films with my kids and say, "Look, mom did a good job." I don't want to have it any other way.

● It's one thing if you girls are dominating the game and trading titles and one of you plays well. Should one of you start to dominate the other, do you think it would create a situation where you may have to pull apart a little bit or something in order to get your competitive juices back?

I can't say that's true. Venus kind of dominated me for a long time, so ... and we always stay close, we



fun with what I do'

always stay together. I can't necessarily ... 'cause, like I say, always in my press conferences, family comes first for us. That's what matters most.

● **Speaking of family, if you ever had children and they come up in sort of an obnoxious mood and say, "Mommy, I want to see one tape from the 2002 season," would you pull out the French Open, Wimbledon or this one?**

I would pull out Wimbledon.

● **Why?**

Because... it would either be Wimbledon or Roland Garros. Because... Wimbledon. It was such an opportunity. To hold that trophy was just amazing for me. I was very happy. I just... it's just so much history there. To see my name go up on the board the next day, then to win the doubles, it was just a feat... that was my goal this year, was to win Wimbledon. And to reach that goal, I was very happy.

● **You've become a member of the All England Club there?**

That's a lifetime membership. You can't become a member, for normal people unless you, you know... It's very tough.

● **What's the big perk here, winning the US Open?**

The \$900,000, for sure (laughter).

● **Do you feel an extra satisfaction to beat your big sister? I know you feel good just beating her. Is it an extra in your soul?**

I can't say it is, no. I love to win, I love the battle. But I also like to see Venus very happy all the time. I love my sister very much. I love seeing her happy, and so I can't say I feel extra "yeah," no, not at all.

● **You seemed like you were in control of the match the whole time. Did you feel threatened at any point?**

I felt very threatened and very lucky because Venus was serving so well, especially... I was up 40-love. There was plenty of

times I didn't have... I don't know how many break points I had. Venus was just serving unbelievable. I was just ... especially when I got down breakpoint, she would... when I had a breakpoint, she'd always hit a huge serve. Even when I had a matchpoint, she hit a second serve ace. That just shows why Venus is a champion, why she's able to do that.

● **There's been talk previously that when you and your sister play in a big match, it doesn't live up to the hype. Do you think you were able to reach the maximum effort?**

I did. I was kind of beat after that second set. I think I played my best match tonight, and I think Venus played very well also. So I think Venus can play better, but Venus... I think I can play better.

● **Are you glad she didn't play better?**

I'm happy she didn't play better.

● **Venus said before that she would like to live more and more a normal life. What about you? Do you think your life is normal, or do you like more the glamorous side of being No. 1?**

I guess it's like a double-edged sword. I like the side of being No. 1. I like the glamorous side. I like the pictures and everything. But at the same time, I don't like to... that I can't go anywhere. Life is very difficult like this, so...

● **Can you talk about what it means to be mentioned in the same breath as people like Margaret Court and Monica Seles? Only five of you, I think, have won three Slams in a year?**

I didn't even play the Australian Open... Shucks.

● **What does that mean to you?**

It's unbelievable. It means a lot to me. Those are people that when I was younger I grew up admiring and hoping that maybe I would even be able to be on that level... not even just... just hoping. So for me, I'm 20, I'm kind of young. So it's exciting.

● **When your mom was asked what quality that she likes the most, that gives her the biggest kick about you, she said your laughter. Is that important to you, that you're always smiling and laughing? Does that help you get through all these ups and downs and deal with your position?**

Yeah. That's definitely... Yeah. I found that sometimes it's best to be sarcastic about life and just laugh your way through it. It's a lot easier than being stressed about it or sad. It's just best to laugh. So I think that's a quality that I possess and do very well.

● **You were waving after you won. Did you know where your family was sitting?**



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Yeah, we have the two boxes. Each was... not each, but my dad, he was taking his pictures. I seen him once walking down the stairs. But just our family was in both the boxes.

● **When you were a kid, was there anything you beat Venus at consistently?**

I can't say. I mean, we really didn't compete that consistently. We just played tennis. Obviously, she was faster than me, because we used to run track. I never really enjoyed running track, to be honest with you. I was kind of lazy.

I didn't reach my maximum potential, I didn't push myself enough.

● **It's been a tremendous weekend for tennis so far. We had an all-American women's final and an all-American men's final. What does it mean to be a part of that here in New York, one year after September the 11th?**

It's definitely something that's very special for me and Venus and Pete and Andre, I think. We just... what they've accomplished at this time in their careers is really exciting. What Venus and I are accomplishing in our careers is really exciting. It's going to be an all-American thing, both women and men. So it's just... It's perfect, especially that it's happening here in New York also almost a year from 9/11. It's almost a dream come true.

● **Aretha Franklin, what was it like to hear her sing? Did you have a chance to say hello to her?**

I met her. So I was very, very happy. She's the queen of soul, is what people say. She definitely is. I'm definitely a huge fan of hers.

● **You talked about the return game and how you thrive on that. Since you practice so much with your sister, is there anything she can show you in a match serving-wise that you haven't seen from her before? Does she have any tricks up her sleeve?**

Oh, I don't think so. Nor do I think... we've been playing with each other for 16 years, so that's a long time. I think we know each other very well. Maybe she does. I don't think so.

● **Knowing her so well, until one year ago, everybody was saying that you had a better forehand and she had a better backhand. I don't know if that is true or not. It seemed that your backhand also was better than hers. Do you agree on that? Did you make progress on that shot? Or is it just an impression?**

Obviously, if you have a... something that's not as strong as another side, I always try to improve on it. My backhand is a great shot... just in case you guys were thinking it wasn't (laughter).

No, seriously, so many people hit to my backhand that I think it's just gotten so much better. I think it really... at Wimbledon also my backhand was perfect. So... People say... I have no problem when they hit there, to me.

● **At what point this year did you realise you had no holes in your game?**

No holes? See, I'm a perfectionist. I'm pretty much

insatiable. I feel there's so many things I can improve on.

● **At what point this year did you get to the point that if you played within your capability, you could win three Slams?**

I tell you, I got tired, I was just tired of losing. It's not that I thought I could win all three, I just said, "I'm tired of losing. I'm not going to lose anymore." I did have a hiccup in LA. I think Chanda Rubin was just playing unbelievable that day.

But, you know, it comes a point in one's life where they get tired, whether it's with losing or with, you know, whatever the case may be, just at this point I was tired. Life was passing me by (Laughing).

● **Could you sort of track your confidence during the year, take us through it, how it's obviously increased.**

I think confidence is key. When I first came here to the Open, I had lost in Los Angeles. Then I kind of pulled out of the Toronto. Then I was practicing in Bradenton, Florida, my practice wasn't good. My confidence was down. I was slamming my racquets. I'm thinking, "I'm never going to be able to compete at this level if I keep playing this way."

Then I had a very, I think, bad first-round match that I played.

At this point, for me, it's... if I play a good match, my confidence is back. So when I played my second-round match, I just thought, "Okay, I'm No. 1 in the world. I need to stop thinking that way. People would pay millions of dollars to play the way I play." For me, it goes like that.

● **You kind of are in a space of your own now this year. What do you see as a big challenge for you in terms of sustaining this or having the mindset to be able to sustain it?**

I think my biggest challenge would be just be the mindset. I learned a lot from Venus. I was like, "How were you able to defend your Wimbledon title and U.S. Open title?"

She said, "Well, I didn't think about points, I just thought about winning another Grand Slam."

That's what matters most. Grand Slams kind of add up.

So that's what I look for next year when I try to defend some points.

● **Venus said that she hasn't worked her hardest yet, sometimes she said she might be a little bit lazy. Have you outworked her to get to this point?**





I hardly work... No, I work hard. I think I could definitely work harder, and I think we both can to maintain our level of play. I think we might want to work harder.

● **Don't you think that's why you're both No. 1 and No. 2 and the best in the world? You both have said before you have other things. I know Venus has said tennis isn't everything and you want to do other things. Does maybe that balance things for you, so it's not the end-all, be-all, tennis?**

I think it keeps a balance. If you get too involved

in... whether it's tennis or whatever you may do ... I think it can become crazy. Like if you guys are writing, you're not sleeping it, thinking about writing ... I hope not, waking up, thinking about it. I just think if you think that much about it, you can go crazy and it can shorten your career.

For tennis, like I said, you never know, anything can happen. As an athlete, you need your legs, your body. Anything can happen to your body. So I try to do other things and I keep my life.

● **Is winning the Grand Slam next year beyond you? Do you have the type of focus for you to go to Australia, Paris, London, U.S. Open next year?**

I have that focus. When I'm in a Grand Slam at the end of the tournament, I'm so mentally exhausted because I put so much mental work in it. As long as I'm physically ready and as long as I'm able to win the matches, I think that would be... I don't think I'd have any problems mentally.

● **Is that something you'd want, that you would work towards?**

It's definitely something I'd work towards. My goal now is to go

down under, at least me or Venus to win this tournament. That's the only one that's been alluding us.

● **How frustrating is it in hindsight that but for injury you might have won the Grand Slam this year?**

You know what, I never thought about that till you just said it. So I try not to bring negative thoughts in my mind.

Oh, I could have, huh? Maybe it was meant to happen this way, because now when I go to Australia I can just gain tons of points. So just start over. I'm still young. ■