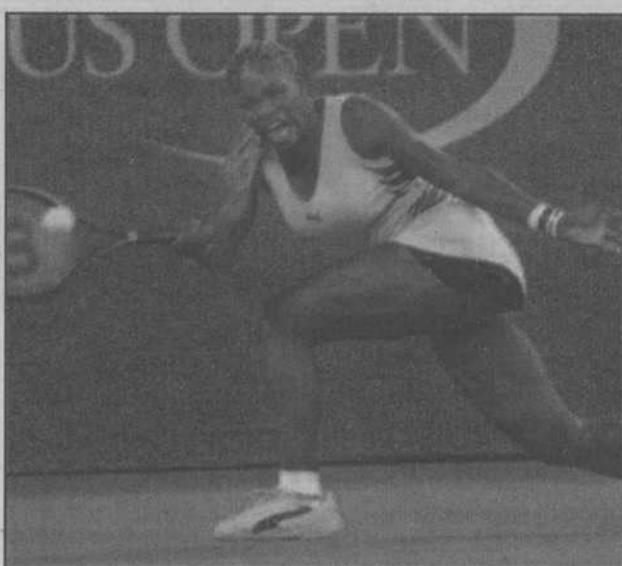


SPORTS



Williams sisters advance to semi-finals

Venus Williams (left) of the United States returns a serve by Kim Clijsters of Belgium during their quarterfinal match at the U.S. Open Tennis Championship, in New York Wednesday. Williams won 6-3 6-1. Serena Williams (right) hits a return on her way to beating Lindsay Davenport, of U.S.A., 6-3, 6-7 (7), 7-5, Tuesday.

(AP Photos/Ron Fehm)

Hewitt denies protest racially motivated

NEW YORK (AP)- Lleyton Hewitt, caught in a five-set battle Friday at the U.S. Open against wild-card James Blake, complained about an official during the match but denied it was racially motivated.

Hewitt, seeded No. 4 in the season's final Grand Slam, complained after being called for two foot faults by a black linesman and requested that the official be moved.

"Look at him," he said, gesturing at the linesman. "And look at him," pointing at Blake, one of the few black players in the field. After Hewitt, a semifinalist at the Open last year, won the match 6-4, 3-6, 2-6, 6-3, 6-0, he was asked about what he said.

"I don't think I said anything racial out there," the Australian said. "It was a conversation between me and the umpire. I come from a multicultural country. I'm not racial in any way at all. People can have their own opinions. That was between me and the umpire. There was nothing racial said out there at all."

"If people took it the wrong way, then I apologize because it wasn't meant to be in that way," he said.

Blake, who learned his tennis in Harlem and attended Harvard University, had Hewitt in trouble, leading 2 sets to 1 with the crowd cheering for the underdog. But the conditions began to drain his strength and Hewitt lost just three games in the final two sets.

It was the second time last week that racial issues were raised at the Open. Earlier, top-seeded Martina Hingis was asked about remarks she made in a Time magazine story, claiming that Venus and Serena Williams get more endorsements because they are black. In the same article, Martina Navratilova said the Williams sisters escaped criticism because comments against them might be perceived as racist.

The Williams sisters have won the last two U.S. Opens.

Black Hall of Fame inductees praised

NEW YORK (AP) - Former heavyweight boxing champion Evander Holyfield is grateful for heroes such as Muhammad Ali and Arthur Ashe, who opened doors for black athletes in America.

"Any time someone has paved the way for me to have hope and something to strive to be, it's important to see them honored," said Holyfield, who attended an induction ceremony Wednesday night for the National Black Sports & Entertainment Hall of Fame.

Ali and Ashe were among the first 24 members inducted into the hall, which also includes entertainers such as Louis Armstrong, Dionne

Warwick and 94-year-old jazz legend Lionel Hampton.

Induction ceremonies for 13 of the famous figures were held Wednesday night in Harlem, along with the presentation of an honorary award for boxing promoter Don King. Most of the inductees were not present at the ceremony.

Those inducted included athletes Ali, Jackie Joyner-Kersey, Earl Monroe, Ashe, Sugar Ray Robinson and Wilma Rudolph, and entertainers Warwick, Hampton, Hal Jackson, Tito Puente, Frank Sinatra, Tony Bennett and Joe Cuba.

"It is a great honor to be here, and it's great to be a

recipient after so many years" since I retired, said Monroe, a Hall of Fame player known as "The Pearl" during his career with the New York Knicks.

Eleven others were inducted earlier this summer. About half them are related to sports, half are from entertainment.

And not all the inductees are black. The group includes three white members who helped open doors for black athletes and entertainers: Bennett and Sinatra, for their support for civil rights causes; and Bill Gallo, sports cartoonist for the Daily News.

The actual hall has not been built. Organizers, who

operate in conjunction with the Greater Harlem Chamber of Commerce, hope to raise money and build a hall in Harlem that would be used as a memorial, museum and tourist attraction. A walk of fame also is planned for 135th Street between St. Nicholas and Fifth avenues.

Hopkins hurls insults before fight

Associated Press

Bernard Hopkins has angered Puerto Ricans by throwing down their flag at two news conferences with Felix Trinidad. He plans another national put-down when he and Trinidad fight for the undisputed middleweight championship Sept. 15 in Madison Square Garden.

Hopkins said he threw the flags because Trinidad showed "a lack of respect to a worthy champion. I had to stomp that fire because it was going to blaze into a real fire of disrespect. I'm not someone to play second fiddle to Felix Trinidad."

The IBF-WBC champion threw down a flag during an outdoor news conference in New York on July 9. He did it again in San Juan the next day, an act that drew a hail of bottles and chairs. Hopkins had to be hustled from the scene.

"I have absolutely no regrets," Hopkins said Tuesday, adding that if he were going to apologize, "I would have done that already."

The 36-year-old Hopkins is irritated that, although a champion since 1995, he has fought in the shadow of Trinidad, Roy Jones Jr. and Oscar De La Hoya, and young fighters such

as the much less experienced Fernando Vargas and David Reid.

Hopkins did toss a left-handed compliment to Trinidad.

"His biggest asset is his heart," Hopkins said. "He's determined to win, but he's a one-dimensional fighter. I beat up guys who have heart."

The chance for one of the two men to become the first undisputed middleweight champion since Marvelous Marvin Hagler in 1986 was set up when Hopkins retained the IBF title and won the WBC championship by outpointing Keith Holmes on April 14, and Trinidad won the WBC crown by stopping William Joppy on May 12.

It is one of the biggest non-heavyweight championship fights in 10 or 15 years. For Hopkins, it is The Fight.

Hopkins lost his pro debut on a four-round decision Oct. 11, 1988. He twice fought unsuccessfully for vacant IBF middleweight titles- losing a 12-round decision to Jones in 1993 and earning a draw with Segundo Mercado in 1994. He won the IBF championship by outpointing Mercado in 1995 and has won 13 championship bouts since.

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