

Venus Williams wins 4th Wimbledon title

WIMBLEDON, England (AP) - Improbable as this year's Wimbledon title might have seemed, Venus Williams knew it could happen. Far away as that trophy might have appeared only last week, Williams knew she had the game and the grit to grab it. Oh, how her serves and strokes sizzle on the grass of Center Court.

With a dominant run through the latter rounds, Williams became the lowest-ranked woman to win Wimbledon, beating Marion Bartoli of France 6-4, 6-1 Saturday for her fourth championship at the All En-

gland Club.

"I was really motivated because no one picked me to win. They didn't even say, 'She can't win.' They weren't even talking about me," said Williams, who reached No. 1 in 2002 but entered Wimbledon ranked No. 31. "I never would doubt myself that way."

Even after missing time with a left wrist injury? Even after being two points from defeat against a teenager ranked 59th in the first round? Even after trailing 5-3 in the final set against someone ranked 71st in the third?

There really wasn't a smidgen of surprise that she once more got to clutch the Venus Rosewater Dish, as the Wimbledon champion's plate happens to be known?

"For me? No," she said. "I just have to go out there and execute. I have the experience and everything to do it."

It was similar to the performance turned in by Williams' younger sister Serena in January, when she won the Australian Open while ranked 81st. Clearly, rankings mean nothing when it comes to the Williams siblings. Nor does recent form.

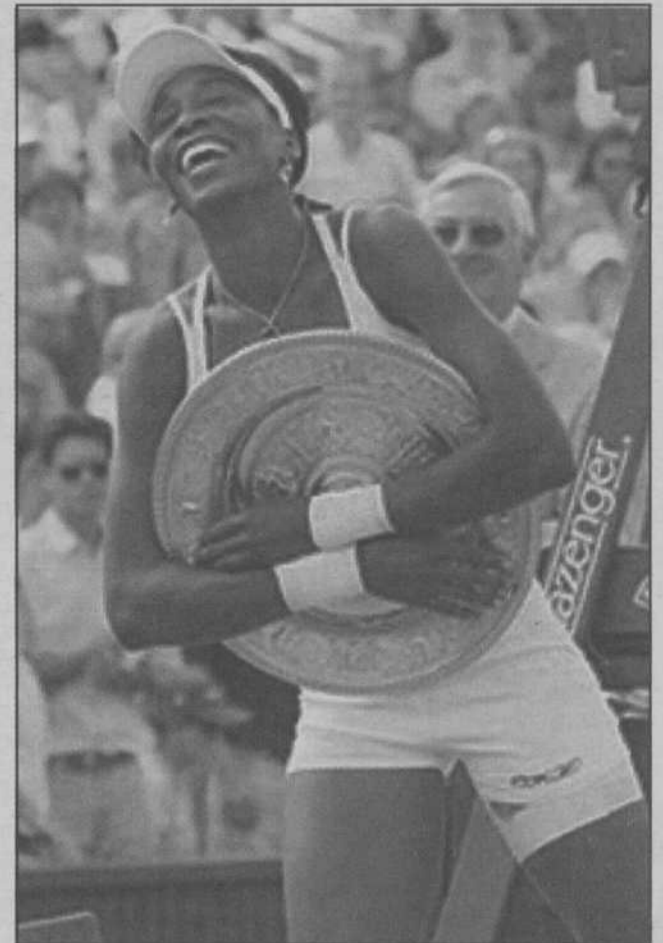
If they are in a tournament, they can win it.

"As long as we're fit," the 27-year-old Williams said, "we just have so much more to give on the court."

Bartoli, who hits two-fisted forehands and backhands, learned that lesson quickly.

She hadn't faced Williams anywhere, let alone on grass — where balls skid more than they bounce — and Bartoli quickly discovered it was like nothing she'd ever experienced on a tennis court.

By the end, she was flexing her wrists and shaking



Venus Williams has been to six Wimbledon finals in the past eight years, winning four.

her hands, trying to alleviate the sting from Williams' serves at up to 125 mph.

"I'm not playing against girls every day hitting the balls like this," Bartoli said. "I mean, it's not possible to beat her. She's just too good."

Williams was forced to play her last four matches without a break, and she dropped a grand total of 22 games while beating No. 2 Maria Sharapova in the fourth round, No. 5 Svetlana Kuznetsova in the quarterfinals, No. 6 Ana Ivanovic in the semifinals, and Bartoli.

It was a remarkable display of shotmaking, court coverage and consistency,

match after match. Not only did Williams whip perfectly placed strokes from all sorts of angles, she repeatedly tracked down opponents' apparent winners and got them back.

Against Bartoli, she compiled a whopping 27-9 edge in winners and won 13 of the 18 points that lasted at least 10 strokes.

"I know how to play this surface," said Williams, the first woman to receive the same paycheck as the men's champion at the All England Club. "If there's a surface to pick, grass at Wimbledon's not a bad choice."

Right from the start, Williams (See Venus, Page 11)

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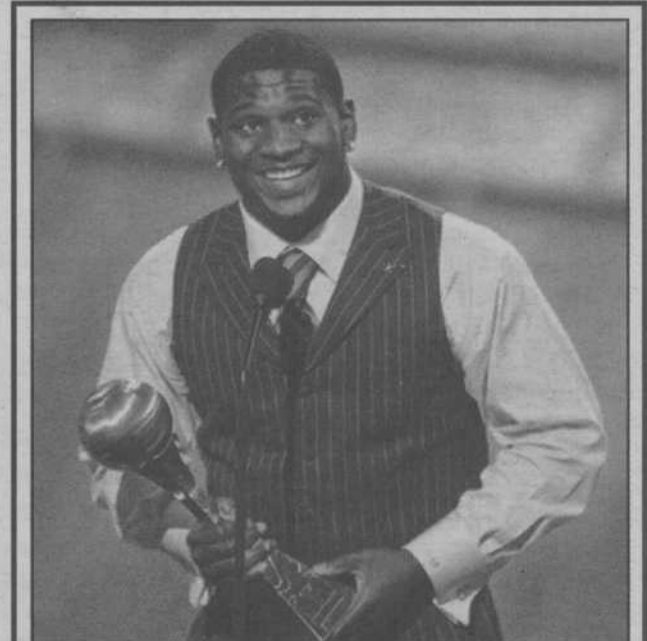
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