

Wheezin' and breezin'

■ **Serena gets pushed, then Venus romps as both advance**

BY JOHN JEANSONNE
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Williams-sister double features may feel thoroughly familiar at the U.S. Open by now, but Friday night was a reminder of recent divergent plot lines for the siblings. As in the first two rounds of this year's tournament, Venus cruised, and Serena had to huff and puff a bit. Literally and figuratively.

Venus, seeded 12th, whacked No. 21 seed Alona Bondarenko, a 23-year-old Ukrainian, shortly after the eighth-seeded Serena survived against No. 27 seed Vera Zvonareva, a more experienced, 28-year-old Russian.

Venus' match, a 6-1, 6-2 decision, lasted a mere 58 minutes.

Serena needed 1:59 to complete a 6-4, 7-6 (4) test.

Two months since claiming the Wimbledon title — her sixth major singles crown — Venus looks sharp and eager. Serena, eliminated from the Wimbledon quarterfinals and kept out of competition since then by a bad thumb, appears far from the form that won January's Australian Open, her eighth major championship.

Further, Venus has allowed herself to be a bit more perky publicly, compared with Serena's sighs of apparent weariness. Part of that, Venus said, is personality difference. "When push comes to shove," she said of her younger sister, "she shoves."

Venus' play has been fresher and her confidence higher, with her saying she wants "to take that experience from Wimbledon and bring it right here. I've done it a couple of times; I want to do it again." She has paraded out her new line of tennis gear, "called EleVen," she said, "because it's a step above 10. A step above the best."

Serena, on the other hand, lamented, "I don't think I've been



NEWSDAY PHOTO / J. CONRAD WILLIAMS JR.

Serena Williams needed nearly two hours to top Vera Zvonareva, 6-4, 7-6 (4), in the first of a Williams doubleheader.

Saturday's featured matches

Arthur Ashe Stadium Play begins at 11 a.m.	Shahar Peer (18)
Agnieszka Radwanska (30) vs. Maria Sharapova (2)	Stefan Koubek vs. James Blake (6)
Thomas Johansson vs. Andy Roddick (5)	Louis Armstrong Stadium
Roger Federer (1) vs. John Isner	Nikolay Davydenko (4) vs. Nicolas Pietrangeli (28)
Night session Play begins at 7 p.m.	Feliciano Lopez vs. Donald Young
Nicole Pietrangeli (13) vs.	Martina Hingis (16) vs. Victoria Azarenka
	Anabel Medina Garrigues (31) vs. Svetlana Kuznetsova (4)

practicing the greatest." Frustrated? "Not as frustrated as my other two rounds." Happier with her play? "I don't know if

I'm happy; I'm happy I was able to come through. I don't think I played well at all."

It didn't help her disposition

that she was instructed by the chair umpire to put away a small book, in which she keeps technical instructions to herself, during a changeover. "It's not like I'm Harry Potter and my dad can magically give me notes to read," she said.

In contrast to that mood, ahead in the sisters' half of the draw as the tournament unfolds, are two bubbly Serbs. Both No. 3 Jelena Jankovic, after a sluggish start against Frenchwoman Alize Cornet, and No. 5 Ana Ivanovic, with an easy time against Russian Vera Dushevina, won Friday. Plus, surprise Wimbledon final-

ist Marion Bartoli of France advanced in three sets over Czech Lucie Safarova. Then there is top seed Justine Henin — herself emoting a more relaxed, upbeat demeanor than in the past — who lost only two games in crushing Russian Ekaterina Makarova.

Meanwhile, the only non-Williams American who entered Friday's play still alive in the women's draw went down to defeat. Wild card Ahsha Rolle, a 22-year-old Floridian playing in her first major tournament, was beaten by No. 15 seed Dinara Safina of Russia, 6-4, 6-3.

ATP chair: We're ahead of curve on gambling

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The chairman of the men's professional tennis tour, bristling a bit under cross-examination regarding a gambling investigation, Friday insisted that his organization "saw this coming" and that "we've been ahead of the game here; we're way ahead of most governing bodies on this."

Etienne de Villiers, appearing at a morning news conference to

promote the Association of Tennis Professional's future scheduling, said suspicions regarding No. 4-ranked Russian Nikolay Davydenko, who withdrew from an early August match with a foot injury while some \$7 million in wagers was being placed on his underdog opponent, were being examined with due speed and efficiency.

"Every single rumor, we investigate," de Villiers said. "We live in a society where we don't cut people's hands off when we

suspect something. We need to be fair, thorough and comprehensive. People's reputations are at stake."

De Villiers took exception to an Italian reporter's skepticism of de Villiers' claim that a comprehensive ATP system of education, investigation and punitive action long has been in place yet "no player ever has been sanctioned under our program," de Villiers said.

"Thank you for your opinion," de Villiers snapped. He said

there are eight pages in the ATP rule book, laying out a zero-tolerance approach and "severe penalties" for any player, coach or member of his entourage found to be involved in betting. He said that former mob figure Michael Franzese, who gives regular presentations to college and pro athletes on the dangers of gambling, has talked to players and that the ATP has ongoing relations with 11 different online betting companies to alert the tour to unusual betting trends.

"We're not complacent," de Villiers said. "We've never stopped pursuing this. We hired two Scotland Yard investigators and we knew about this [Davydenko situation] long before it got into the press. And we've told the players, 'You can't look to us alone on this. It's our sport but it's your livelihood.' We're thinking of putting in a rule that, if you're heard of gambling and haven't told us about it, that's a violation of the code, too."