

5-29-1998

Karolj Seles

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Recommended Citation

Crepeau, Richard C., "Karolj Seles" (1998). *On Sport and Society*. 113.
<https://stars.library.ucf.edu/onsportandsociety/113>

SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE
May 29, 1998

I never have cared much for her as a player. The awkward looking two-handed shot was too easily contrasted to the grace of Chris Evert's two-handed backhand. And Chris didn't emit that god-awful grunt. It alone is enough to drive you from center-court at Wimbledon on a beautiful clear summer day.

Despite that I have been thinking about Monica these days. No, not Bill's Monica. Karolj's Monica.

Two weeks ago Karolj Seles died in Sarasota, Florida, at age 64, after losing a long struggle to stomach cancer. This week Monica Seles is back on the courts at the French Open still working on her comeback from the knife attack and now working in memory of her father.

Robin Finn of the New York Times called Karolj Seles "An oasis of congeniality in an era of overwrought and often irrational tennis parents," who "managed to steer his daughter to a stellar career without alienating her or her opponents." No small achievement for our times.

Now after fifteen months waiting and watching as her father lost his battle with cancer, Monica Seles has begun this memorial to him.

Her first comeback was in 1995 when she returned to the courts after twenty-seven months following the assault on her at the German Open in Hamburg in April of 1993. She returned to the courts in the Canadian Open in Toronto at the urging of her father who was instrumental as fought to overcome the fear that lingered after that attack.

Monica Seles won in Toronto. Since then she has been trying to piece her astounding tennis career back together and return to the form that had made her number one in the world at the age of seventeen. She has never been quite the same dominating player she once was, and now she will try again to reach the heights that her father had helped her attain.

It was Karolj Seles who taught his daughter the unorthodox two-handed shot that made her such a dominant player. It was Karolj who worked the long hours with her, and who made certain that through it all tennis would always be fun for his daughter. It

was Karolj who insisted that Monica Seles learn more than just tennis and become what he called a "complete, intelligent lady, one who can find her way in the world when she gets too old for tennis."

At age twenty-four Monica Seles now returns to the courts at Roland Garros Stadium ranked sixth in the world. She missed the Australian Open in January when Karolj's health deteriorated, but her father made her promise that she would not miss another Grand Slam event on his account. So less than two weeks after his death Monica Seles is back on the court.

At age twenty-four Monica Seles' resume is beginning to read like an epic struggle. With so many young spoiled athletes flaming across the stage of contemporary sport, seemingly oblivious to the realities of modern existence, Seles has accumulated enough emotional scar tissue for a lifetime.

When she came back from the long absence following the assault in Germany, one could not help but admire her courage and wonder how much this trauma had taken from her. Now as she returns to the French Open following the death of her father she seems like one of the older players on the circuit, when in fact she is only twenty-four. So after years of not caring much about the little girl from Yugoslavia, which also has suffered from assault and death, I watch the proceedings at Roland Garros hoping that Monica Seles will make a good showing, and perhaps even mount the victory stand one more time at this Grand Slam event where she has played so well in the past.

Roland Garros with its red clay surface has been the site of the French Open since 1928. Named after a French Aviator in World War I it was built in honor of the French Davis Cup team which defeated the Americans for the championship in Philadelphia in 1927. Rene Lacoste, Henri Cochet, Jacques Brugnon, and Jean Borotra returned the favor by winning the next five Davis Cups for France.

Like all the Grand Slam venues Roland Garros has its traditions and great moments. With its red clay surface, Roland Garros is so different from the other Grand Slam venues that it has often eluded the best hard court and grass court players.

In recent memory the amazing match between Ivan Lendl and John McEnroe in 1984 is still regard by some as one of the best in tournament history. McEnroe won the first two sets totally dominating Lendl and playing perhaps the best tennis ever played

at the facility. Then in an astounding reversal of form Lendl came back to win the match three sets to two.

This year as the grand old stadium celebrates its seventieth year of hosting the French Open, the three-time champion Monica Seles returns to the stadium on a special mission. Dressed in a black tennis dress she has played well in the early rounds under adverse circumstances.

If this should become the fourth French Championship for Monica Seles it will carry a special meaning for her, as it should for all. The man who taught her about tennis and about the vicissitudes of life will be there with her. She is her father's daughter, as well as a courageous young woman for whom such a victory would be the best of her career.

This next week I will ignore the grunts and cheer for sentiment. The ego inflated and money-encrusted world of sport needs these sorts of stories every now then.

On Sport and Society this is Dick Crepeau reminding you that you don't need to be a good sport to be a bad loser.

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