

9-7-2003

## Heavy Drama at the U.S. Open Tennis Tournament

Richard C. Crepeau

University of Central Florida, [richard.crepeau@ucf.edu](mailto:richard.crepeau@ucf.edu)

 Part of the [Cultural History Commons](#), [Journalism Studies Commons](#), [Other History Commons](#), [Sports Management Commons](#), and the [Sports Studies Commons](#)

Find similar works at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/onsportandsociety>

University of Central Florida Libraries <http://library.ucf.edu>

This Commentary is brought to you for free and open access by the Public History at STARS. It has been accepted for inclusion in On Sport and Society by an authorized administrator of STARS. For more information, please contact [STARS@ucf.edu](mailto:STARS@ucf.edu).

---

### Recommended Citation

Crepeau, Richard C., "Heavy Drama at the U.S. Open Tennis Tournament" (2003). *On Sport and Society*. 207.

<https://stars.library.ucf.edu/onsportandsociety/207>

SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE  
September 7, 2003

The opening of the football seasons, both college and professional, can mean only one thing. It's time for the U.S. Open Tennis Championships.

This has been a difficult two weeks for the tennis officials, players, and fans at Flushing Meadows. With all the water washing across the courts this unfortunate name never seemed more appropriate. Rain played havoc with the tournament especially in the second week when it seemed that the finals might take place sometime later this month.

In addition the Williams sisters were unable to play and the luster seemed to be off the women's side of the tournament. This meant trouble, as for the past several years women's tennis has been much more interesting and glamorous than the men's game. This year the best U.S. players, Agassi and Roddick, were in the men's draw, not on the women's side.

The people at CBS were in a funk as they were going to have to show the Williamsless women's final opposite the plethora of college football games being shown across the nation Saturday, especially the high profile Florida-Miami match-up due to kick off at the same time as the women's final. The myopic American view of tennis was unable to foresee that an all-Belgian final might be as good, or even better, than a Williams redux.

In fact the salvaging of the U.S. Open began on Friday night in an epic three-hour match between Jennifer Capriati and Justine Henin-Hardenne. Not only did it go the full three sets with Henin-Hardenne staring down defeat over and over again, it was made even more memorable by the physical distress she had to overcome. Cramps in the upper thigh hampered shot making and made serving, particularly in the ad court, nearly impossible.

The heroic character of Justine Henin-Hardenne was a sight to behold. It was literally painful to watch her serve in the final set. It was positively euphoric to watch her shot making as she blocked out the pain. Between Henin-Hardenne's skill and her will, this performance was one of the best in the history of women's tennis.

It was also painful to watch Jennifer Capriati, who has never won the U.S. Open, as she self-destructed in the face of near certain victory. Capriati was within two points of winning the

match, ten different times. Capriati served for the match in the second set, and in the third set with Henin-Hardenne at an enormous physical disadvantage she could not match her opponent. It was the most interesting display of the power of the head and heart to send players in two different directions as you will ever see. It was almost as if Capriati had willed her defeat, and Henin-Hardenne had willed her victory. There will never be a more interesting, anguishing, and exhilarating three hours of sport.

For those lucky enough to tune to the women's final rather than college football on Saturday night, the reward was another fascinating match. Listed as "doubtful to play" in an afternoon press release, Justine came out smoking against her fellow Belgian, Kim Clijsters. She then faltered briefly, and finally ended with a flurry of magnificent shots. Clearly she was physically hampered, but again the power of the will was on display. For those who stayed away because the Williams sisters were not on the court, I offer my condolences.

On the first night of the Open, Pete Sampras, arguably the best men's tennis player ever, was honored in a ceremony for his many accomplishments. On Saturday in the semi-finals Andre Agassi was defeated by Juan Carlos Ferrero in four sets in just the kind of match Agassi has been winning during his ascendancy. Perhaps Andre is also nearing the end of his career.

It is time for the passing of the torch of American men's tennis to the next great player. For several years now tennis people have been talking about Andy Roddick as that player. At age 21 Roddick has been working under this burden of being next. First on Saturday and then on Sunday he gave every indication that he is ready to assume the burden. He may indeed be the next Agassi, Sampras, Connors, or McEnroe.

On Saturday he put on the kind of display that is expected of great tennis players. Losing the first two sets to David Nalbandian, and not looking particularly impressive doing so, Roddick came back to win the third set in a tie breaker, and then went on to win the final two sets. It wasn't exactly Justine Henin-Hardenne, but it was quite a gutsy performance.

Then today he came out to meet the man who sent Agassi home, Juan Carlos Ferrero. It was never a contest. Hitting the big serves in excess of 130 m.p.h. Roddick was nearly untouchable winning two and three points a service game with aces. Ferrero's only chance was to stop Roddick from getting his first serve in.

He was at Roddick's mercy. It was Roddick's first grand slam final and win. One would guess it is not his last.

After his victory Roddick was overcome by the emotion of the win, as he was again during the on-court interview. That too was a refreshing moment at this U.S. Open. It is not often enough that we see a professional athlete display such enthusiasm for the sport and the moment.

It is also why we watch.

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.

Copyright 2003 by Richard C. Crepeau