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Mario Lemieux, Jennifer Capriati

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE
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The comeback of Mario Lemieux with the Pittsburgh Penguins has converged very nicely with that of Jennifer Capriati. In the past week Capriati completed her long climb back to the top of women's tennis, and in the middle of his latest comeback Lemieux was voted NHL player of the month for January.

For Lemieux this is at least the second comeback of his remarkable career. The first calamity struck in January of 1993 when Mario was diagnosed with a form of Hodgkin's disease. Radiation treatments ravaged his body and he was unable to perform normal everyday tasks, let alone play hockey. After sitting out the 1994-95 season he came back and performed better than ever continuing at the record breaking pace of points and goals that once made him a legitimate threat to challenge the scoring records of Wayne Gretzky.

Continuing medical problems and unhappiness with the style of play in the league led him to retire after the 1997 season although his connections with hockey in Pittsburgh did not end. As the franchise struggled Lemieux joined an ownership group which purchased the team in September of 1999 becoming the first player of the modern era to buy the team for whom he once played. A little over a year later Lemieux announced his second major comeback.

Since returning from three plus years in retirement his success has been phenomenal. At the age of thirty-seven no one anticipated what he has been able to do. Lemieux has scored 32 points in his first sixteen games. He has been playing inspiring hockey leading the Penguins to a winning record since his return.

Chosen for the All-Star Game Lemieux scored a goal and added an assist and moved closer to Wayne Gretzky's record for goals in an All-Star game. If this comeback, which now will continue into next season, should result in a Stanley Cup for the Penguins there will not be enough superlatives and comparatives in the English or French languages to tell the story.

At almost exactly the same time that Mario Lemieux was beginning his comeback from Hodgkin's disease, Jennifer

Capriati was starting a long and arduous climb back to the top of Woman's Tennis. A phenom at thirteen, a star at fourteen and burned out at 16, Capriati at age 24 won her first grand slam event at the Australian Open last weekend. Although lost in the Super Bowl hype Capriati's achievement may be more impressive than that of Lemieux.

Jennifer Capriati's tennis career started with a run of successes. She was the youngest to reach a grand-slam semi-final, the youngest to win a Wimbledon match, and the youngest to reach the semis at Wimbledon. In 1992 she won the Olympic Gold Medal. She was flooded by endorsement opportunities which brought her \$5M annually.

Unfortunately it was not all strawberries and cream. Like many young tennis players she was driven by a "tennis father," although her biggest problem may have been that she was a teenager. "I wasn't happy with myself," she said. "I didn't like anybody else and I felt like no one really was able to listen to me or understand me." Being a sixteen-year-old is never easy, and being a sixteen-year-old millionaire performing in the public eye where people comment on your weight is even worse.

Early in the 1993 season Capriati said that if things didn't improve she would retire. They didn't and she did. Following a first round loss in the U.S. Open Jennifer Capriati walked away from the tour. Within months she was back in the news, arrested in Florida for shoplifting a cheap ring. Six months later she was booked by Miami police on a misdemeanor charge of marijuana possession. Rumors of heroin use circulated in the tennis world and Capriati slipped off into the grunge scene.

In the spring of 1994 she entered a drug rehabilitation program. At Paris in 1996 the twenty-year-old was ready to begin her comeback on the tennis courts, just about the same time that Mario Lemieux was completing his first comeback from Hodgkin's disease. She pulled a muscle in Paris and had to postpone her comeback until the next week in Essen, Germany.

1997 was plagued with injuries as was early 1998 although she did reach the Australian Open finals in 1997. She won her first tournament in early 1999, her first title since January of 1993. She advanced to the fourth round of the French and U.S. Open that year and improved her ranking to

sixth in the world. Finally last week at the Australian Open the comeback was complete. Eleven years after turning pro and seven years after dropping out, Jennifer Capriati defeated the number one player in the world, Martina Hingis, 6-4 and 6-3.

One of the more remarkable comebacks in sport was now complete. The darling of American tennis in the early 90s was back on top, her rehabilitation a success. Her father was there to share the moment, but the moment clearly belonged to her.

Difficulties come in many forms and pain wears many faces. Mario Lemieux and Jennifer Capriati both offer excellent examples of how high profile athletes can and do endure and overcome. For that each has earned both the admiration and respect of many.

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

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