

Clijsters claims No.1

Tennis

AFP, Los Angeles

Belgian Kim Clijsters took over the world's No. 1 ranking for the first time in her career by winning the WTA Los Angeles tournament on Sunday.

Clijsters defeated former world No. 1 Lindsay Davenport 6-1, 3-6, 6-1 to capture her 16th career crown and pocket \$97,000 dollars in first place prize money.

"I don't know how to feel, I am a bit confused," said Clijsters.

"It is great having my first No. 1 ranking."

Serving to close out the match in the third set, Clijsters jumped out to a 40-15 lead and then took the title when one of Davenport's shots sailed long.

"It is a feeling I can't describe," said Clijsters.

"On the court I had butterflies and goosebumps. This is incredible."

Clijsters said she will cherish this moment for a long time.

"It reflects on the great season I have had so far. I have been able to be No. 1 in doubles and singles now, and no one will ever take that away from me. This is something I will always have on my resume."

The 20-year-old Clijsters, who has reached the semis or better in all 14 tournaments she has played, is having her best season of her career with six singles titles this year.

She supplanted the injured Serena Williams atop the world rankings. Williams will be out of action until after the US Open recovering from knee surgery. Williams had spent 57 weeks as No. 1.

But unlike the other 11 former number ones, Clijsters is the first woman to reach the top spot without having won a Grand Slam tournament. She made it to the semi-finals of the Australian Open and

Wimbledon this year.

Clijsters also passed Belgian compatriot Justine Henin-Hardenne for most singles titles this year. Henin-Hardenne has five.

Clijsters and Davenport were an equal 6-6 in career matches heading into Sunday's final but Clijsters

has now won six of the last seven meetings.

"I started off well and that motivated me to keep going," said Clijsters.

"In second set she played really well."

"Then in third set once I broke

her I felt good and I felt like I could move her around. When I saw she was limping I tried to be more aggressive."

Clijsters, who also won two weeks ago in Stanford, California, boosted her record this year to 68-6.

Davenport also knows how it feels to be No. 1. She first reached the position in October 1998 and held it for 37 weeks.

"It is a huge accomplishment, and she earned it," said Davenport.

"I am sure she wants to start winning slam titles."

Clijsters said her boyfriend Lleyton Hewitt was monitoring the progress of her match from Cincinnati where he is getting ready to play in an ATP event.

"He was on the golf course and writing (text) messages to my parents," she said.

Her parents were watching the match on TV from their home in Belgium.

The match was broadcast live to Belgium, where it caused a stir in her hometown of Bree.

"Everyone in Belgium has been watching it. In my town there was a performance, and band or something was playing, and no one showed up," said Clijsters.

Clijsters won the first set easily, breaking Davenport in the second and fourth games then holding serve in the next game to jump out to a 5-0 lead.

Davenport rallied in the second set winning the crucial seventh game to break a 3-3 tie after Clijsters had battled back from a 3-0 deficit.

After winning the marathon seventh game, Davenport broke Clijsters serve in the eighth game en route to a 6-3 win.

Clijsters took command of the third set in much the same way she did in the first. She grabbed a 3-1 lead and never looked back.

She had five aces and hit 33 winners while Davenport had just three aces, 27 winners and made 36 unforced errors.



PHOTO: AFP
WRITTEN IN FLOWERS: Belgian Kim Clijsters celebrates her new number one ranking after winning the JPMorgan Chase Open final on August 10.

Florida-based family prior to next week's Masters Series, had to endure another weather setback.

That one lasted an hour and came as the American led a set and 4-2 with Nalbandian complaining of

slippery lines. That forced the contest off court for drying which took another hour.

The second match delay only postponed the inevitable as Roddick returned to repeat the victory he took over Nalbandian at the Canadian event last year in the quarterfinals.

Roddick spent just a few more minutes in clinching the title, improving his Canadian match record to 14-2.

The American struck six aces and broke Nalbandian five times. The Argentine produced 27 unforced errors.

"I tried to keep going. I thought we needed to stop in the second set, it was getting too slippery," said the South American.

"I didn't play my best tennis, I couldn't get my game going, it didn't work too well today."

Roddick won \$40,000 dollars and a skydiving bet with new coach Brad Gilbert, who now has to jump out of a plane. Roddick has done that four times -- Gilbert is afraid of heights.

"Brad's scared to look off a second-floor balcony," said Roddick.

"This should be fun -- he might mess his pants."

Roddick's other titles in 2003 have come at St. Poelen, Austria, Queen's and Indianapolis.

"I feel excited, this is my first Masters title," said the winner.

"I played well this week -- it's pretty simple." Despite the one-way scoreline, Roddick added: "It never feels easy."

Nalbandian, without a title this season, is the fourth consecutive unseeded player to reach a Canadian final after compatriot Guillermo Canas last year -- who beat Roddick for the title -- Romanian Andrei Pavel in 2001 and Israeli Harel Levy, a 2000 finalist against Marat Safin.

However, Pizarro, 24, has been in scintillating form, netting in the opening two matches of the German season while Brazilian forward Elber, who bagged 21 goals last season, has yet to open his account for the 2003/04 campaign.

Bayern coach Ottmar Hitzfeld has been singing the praises of former Werder Bremen forward Pizarro after he found the target in the 3-1 win over Eintracht Frankfurt and Saturday's 3-3 draw with

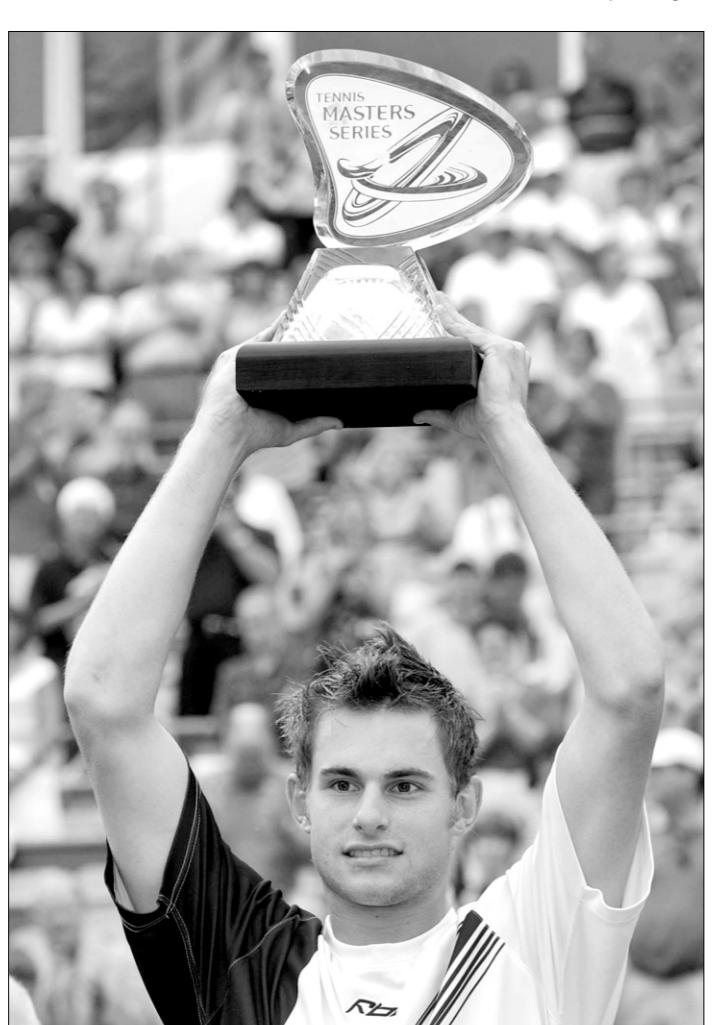


PHOTO: AFP
Andy Roddick holds up the trophy after defeating David Nalbandian at the Montreal Masters on August 10.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

