

Serena prepares to bid farewell

AFP, NEW YORK

After a glittering 27-year professional career in which she became one of the greatest players of all time, Serena Williams is preparing to bid farewell to tennis at the major where it all began.

The 40-year-old sporting icon ended the guessing game surrounding her future earlier this month by revealing that the “countdown” to her retirement had started, with her final Grand Slam appearance expected at the US Open in New York starting on Monday.

“There comes a time in life when we have to decide to move in a different direction,” Williams wrote. “That time is always hard when you love something so much.”

The announcement sets the stage for what will be an emotional farewell for Williams, who faces unheralded world number 80 Danka Kovinic in Monday’s first round at the Arthur Ashe Stadium.

Williams won the first of her 23 Grand Slam singles titles as a 17-year-old at the 1999 US Open, beating



Martina Hingis in the final.

That breakthrough victory confirmed what had become apparent ever since her professional debut four years earlier: that Williams, alongside sister Venus, was a rising force in women’s tennis.

While 1999 marked her first singles Slam, by then Williams had already won mixed doubles titles at Wimbledon and the US Open in 1998.

Her win in the 1999 singles final would light the touchpaper for the most dominant career of any female player in the Open era, her 23 Grand Slam titles second only to Margaret Court’s 24.

While a record-equalling 24th Grand Slam singles title is likely to remain beyond her next week, Williams has nevertheless produced a collection of records that in all probability will never be broken.

With Williams not expected to mount a sustained challenge, all eyes will be on Poland’s world number one Iga Swiatek in the women’s draw.

The 21-year-old was the form player in women’s tennis earlier this year, reeling off victories at the Qatar Open, Indian Wells and Miami Open before claiming wins on clay in Stuttgart and Rome en route to her second Slam singles title at the French Open.

However, Swiatek has struggled to recapture that dominance during the North American hardcourt season, making early exits at both the Cincinnati Masters and Canadian Open.



Can Nadal dethrone MEDVEDEV?

AGENCIES

A talented men’s field is set for the 2022 U.S. Open, beginning on Monday. Flushing Meadows hosts the event with Rafael Nadal operating as the headline-grabbing player on the men’s side.

Nadal, the all-time leader in grand slam titles with 22, is the No. 2 seed and looking for his third grand slam win of the year. Novak Djokovic is not taking part in the event, as he remains unvaccinated and unable to compete due to travel restrictions. Nadal is joined at the top of the draw by No. 2 seed and 2021 U.S. Open champion Daniil Medvedev.

Nadal targets a fifth US Open and 23rd Grand Slam title in New York with his path to the title no longer blocked by Novak Djokovic.

Medvedev won last year’s tournament by beating Novak Djokovic in the final. The Russian will be keen to defend his title but the likes of Rafael Nadal, Carlos Alcaraz, and Stefanos Tsitsipas are also capable of contending for the title.

Nineteen years after making his debut, the 36-year-old Nadal drags his injury-prone body into a tournament he won in 2010, 2013, 2017 and 2019, the year of his last appearance.

The Spaniard has had to sit out the US Open four times in his career and there are once again fresh doubts over his physical ability to survive a gruelling two weeks at Flushing Meadows.

Nadal has become accustomed to overcoming setbacks, winning a 14th French Open in June despite playing

the whole tournament with pain-killing injections in his foot.

An added incentive for Nadal is the opportunity to reclaim the world number one spot from defending champion Daniil Medvedev, the man he defeated in the



2019 final.

With Roger Federer still absent from the tour and with question marks over Nadal’s fitness and Djokovic’s absence, the race for the men’s title is likely to be as open as recent years.

Marin Cilic, Stan Wawrinka, Dominic Thiem and Medvedev have all broken the New York stranglehold of the “Big Three”

since 2014.

Medvedev will be especially fired up having been banned from Wimbledon along with all other Russian players following the invasion of Ukraine.

World number two and 2020 runner-up Alexander Zverev misses out through injury while fourth-ranked Carlos Alcaraz, a quarter-finalist in 2021, looks to convert potential into a maiden Slam triumph at 19.

“I feel stronger and more prepared than the last year,” Alcaraz said.

Apart from Felix Auger-Aliassime, a semi-finalist last year, the rest of the current top 10 have endured a bittersweet relationship with New York.

Stefanos Tsitsipas, Casper Ruud, Cameron Norrie and Hubert Hurkacz have all yet to make the second week.

“The rivalry against Rafa (Nadal) is really I feel like heating up in a way. Twenty-two, 21 (Grand Slams), a joke of a number,” Medvedev said referring to the number of major titles won by Nadal and Djokovic respectively.

Medvedev rolls into the U.S. Open after a handful of uneven performances, winning at Los Cabos before suffering a shock early exit in Montreal. He reached the semi-finals at Cincinnati, where he has often thrived. Read full story

His hunger for a second major title is as fierce as ever after losing a five-set thriller to Nadal in the Australian Open final. The six-foot six-inch, power-serving Russian said he wanted to try “something big” in New York.

Ruman Sana excluded from IOC scholarship

SPORTS REPORTER

Country’s ace archer Ruman Sana was surprisingly not among the five athletes who were awarded a two-year long scholarship last month under the International Olympic Committee’s (IOC) Paris 2024 Olympic Solidarity Scholarships.

The recipients of the scholarship, given as part of preparation for the forthcoming Olympic Games, are archers Diya Siddique, Hakim Ahmed Rubel, Abdur Rahman Alif, and shooters Rabbi Hasan Munna and Nafisa Tabassum.

Bangladesh Olympic Solidarity Committee has proposed to hand each athlete 40,000 takas per month from last July as the IOC will provide each athlete 1,562 US dollars per month as part of wages of athlete, coaches, instruments and participation fees for the qualifying tournaments of the Paris Olympic, informed Bangladesh Olympic Association (BOA) general secretary, Fakhruddin Haider.

However, the selection of the 16-year-old Alif ahead of Ruman Sana -- who was awarded the same scholarship for Tokyo Olympics before he qualified for the Olympics directly as the second-ever Bangladeshi athlete -- raised the question recently and the Bangladesh Archery Federation general secretary, Razib Uddin Ahmed Chapal, said that performance was prioritised over experience during the archers’ selection.



Premier League at its entertaining best

REUTERS, MANCHESTER

Liverpool matched the record for the biggest ever Premier League win with a 9-0 thrashing of Bournemouth on Saturday while Erling Haaland got his first Manchester City hat-trick and Manchester United ended a run of seven straight away league defeats.

Arsenal preserved the Premier League’s last remaining 100% record as defender Gabriel went from villain to hero to earn a 2-1 victory over Fulham with a late winner on Saturday.

Liverpool had failed to win in their opening three games, including Monday’s 2-1 defeat at United, but talk of a sluggish start to the season was soon forgotten as they took a 2-0 lead within six minutes and added three more before the break.

A second-half goal from Bruno Fernandes was enough for United to win 1-0 at Southampton and earn a second straight victory to end their miserable streak of form away from home.

Champions City were 2-0 down inside 21 minutes at home to Crystal Palace but after some tactical adjustments from Pep Guardiola early in the second half they roared to a 4-2 win with new signing Haaland providing a reminder of his goal threat. The former Borussia Dortmund forward now has six goals from his opening four league games and Guardiola, whose side are in second place level on 10 points with Brighton& Hove Albion, said he was simply showing his ability.

Raheem Sterling’s first two goals for Chelsea led the 10-man west Londoners to a 2-1 home win over Leicester City as Thomas Tuchel’s side overcame the early dismissal of Conor Gallagher. They are sixth in the standings on seven points.

Anderson hails clarity in leadership

AGENCIES

James Anderson hailed England’s all-round improvement and called inspirational captain Ben Stokes a “freak” as they thumped South Africa by an innings and 85 runs in the second Test at Old Trafford on Saturday, setting up a series decider at The Oval.

Seamer Anderson was at his very best, taking match figures of 6-62 with his swing and guile bewildering the South African batsmen as they were bowled out cheaply twice following their victory by an innings and 12 runs at Lord’s last week.

Anderson said the leadership of coach Brendon McCullum and Stokes provides the side with the confidence to take the opposition on.

“Everyone is clear on their role and what the captain and coach expect of them,” Anderson said. “That is a massive help, it takes away any doubt and allows you to focus on your job.”

“It sounds simple but things can get clouded, there is so much to think about from a technique point of view.

“I have really enjoyed the last few months; the way Ben and Brendon want us to play. My role has become a little bit different. I’m not a defensive bowler anymore, they want me to think about taking wickets all the time.

“We are enjoying it. I think I’ve smiled more than I ever have on a cricket field.”

Anderson also praised the work of Stokes on the pitch, after the captain scored a century in England’s innings and then bowled a 14-over spell to see them to the new ball on Saturday.

“He is an absolute freak, how he does that day-in and day-out. He just got a hundred yesterday, batting for however long and then putting in that spell. It made a huge difference.

“You can go into panic mode when these things happen, but the coach (Mark Boucher) and I are not those types of guys. We are here to win a test series and we’re still in a position to do that.”

South Africa captain
DEAN ELGAR

He is a machine.”

Meanwhile, Stokes said England’s emphatic victory has set the “benchmark” for the team.

“Cricket is about how you bat, bowl and field and I think that the way we batted, bowled and fielded this whole game is like the benchmark of the standards of what we set,” said Stokes.

The teams will now meet in the series decider at The Oval from Sept. 8.

