

# BNP Paribas Open

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## Venus Williams

Press Conference

N. KURUMI/V. Williams

6-4, 6-3

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

**Q. You walked out there after 15 years away from this place, and the crowd gives you one round after another of applause. What goes through your mind?**

VENUS WILLIAMS: I mean, obviously I saw Serena come back last year, so that was really a wonderful moment. Then just being here, just being on the practice court and on-site has been so positive and such a great experience.

It just shows that, yeah, you know, that you can always come back home, I guess. You can always go home (smiling.)

**Q. Did you feel at home here?**

VENUS WILLIAMS: Absolutely. The crowd rooted me on because it was a tough day and tough conditions and brutal out there.

It was wonderful to feel the love. You know, I would love to come on back.

**Q. How emotional was it? I know last year when Serena was on court she tried to hold back tears. Your hand on your heart to the crowd, how emotional was it?**

VENUS WILLIAMS: Yeah, I did get emotional. When we were doing the coin toss I got a little watery eyed. Your opponent, you don't want to give them any more encouragement. It was wonderful. I think I smiled the whole warmup. I had to get my game face on. It was tough to do.

**Q. I remember in Rome last year you said it was a possibility after what you saw with Serena, but when did you decide this was the time for you?**

VENUS WILLIAMS: I think after Serena came back last year and she had such a warm welcome, I definitely thought to myself, I've got no reason not to go anymore. It was time to be able to, just, you know, move on and let the past be the past.

Sometimes that's what you have to do. I think at this



point everyone has been able to move on.

**Q. Do you think back to the last time you were in that stadium? The stadium itself hasn't maybe changed much. Do you ever flash back to that?**

VENUS WILLIAMS: Is the stadium bigger? It looks really -- it's big. (Smiling.)

I didn't actually think back to that. I definitely live in the now and it was a long time ago. Serena and I have been able to do a lot of positive things in our lives since then. Hopefully those positive things have affected a lot of people.

That's what we focused on more than anything. I think when she came back it wasn't an easy decision. You never know what was going to happen.

But she had so much courage to do so. It made it so easy for me. I felt like when I came out here I was able to focus on the tennis and not on, oh, my gosh, what's gonna happen.

**Q. What's going to be your conversation with mom and dad, especially dad? Because he was in the midst of what happened 14, 15 years ago. Just kind of what would you tell mom and dad at this point?**

VENUS WILLIAMS: We don't really talk about tennis.

**Q. Okay.**

VENUS WILLIAMS: Probably we will talk about everything but tennis. We have a good relationship like that. I think sometimes you have to let the tennis go.

**Q. You have done such a fantastic job; so many years we have watched you. It's like, Wow. And I look at the girl that you played. Wow, she's like -- it's really fantastic. I'm just so proud of what you have accomplished all these years. Just wanted you to know we are just rooting for you all the way.**

VENUS WILLIAMS: Thank you.

**Q. What were you feeling in the days and hours leading up to the match? Was it excitement? Was it trepidation? What was going through your head?**

VENUS WILLIAMS: I think what I felt was I want to be

able to play well for everyone I think more than anything. Obviously I saw Serena's warm welcome. I just wanted to come out and play well and try to win that match.

So I think that's more than anything what I felt. But like I said, I was able to come and focus on the tennis. You know, I'm a person that's not into the spotlight so much, so I guess such a warm welcome I actually felt a little shy.

So, you know, it's been a wonderful moment. You know, 15 years later to have such a joyous return is more than I could have ever. It's such a blessing.

**Q. Do you feel like this was sort of one of the things that you needed to do? Not to say you're going to retire any time soon, but to come back here with your career, to move on with things?**

VENUS WILLIAMS: I hadn't really thought a lot about Indian Wells, playing here, until Serena thought she was going to come back. That's when I thought about it, obviously, after she played.

So before that I hadn't really -- it's not something I focused on, you know. In your life, especially when you try to accomplish things, you're focusing on what you can accomplish, not on what happened ages ago.

**Q. Were you thinking at all about, say, today, about sort of this deeper themes that are involved in your coming back here, reconciliation, forgiveness, things like that, beyond just coming back today?**

VENUS WILLIAMS: Absolutely, but I think it's a two-way street. We could have come back here and everyone could have picked up where they left off.

But everyone was welcoming, and also for us, we could have never come back. But we came back. You know, change your attitude and those sort of things. The change of attitudes on both ends isn't always easy, but it's definitely was a two-way street. For it to work, both parties involved, you know, both us and the fans and the city had to have a positive attitude towards toward it.

That how it worked.

**Q. You were talking about the fact you were smiling during warmup and things like that. When was the last time you had that sort of feeling before a match?**

VENUS WILLIAMS: During exhibition of some sort (Smiling.) When you get out there to play it's just no nonsense, you know. It was wonderful to be able to enjoy a moment. As an athlete you're so focused that you don't really realize the circumstances and how

awesome it is to play in big stadiums like this until it's all done because you're just so focused.

To have the moment and be able to enjoy it even for a few moments is worth a lifetime of memories.

**Q. When the sad events happened here you were just a very young person, just 20. Could you just share with us a little bit how over the years you processed that? Did you think about that often? The anger seemed to stay for a long period? How did it diminish?**

VENUS WILLIAMS: I'm definitely not an angry person, so I wouldn't characterize it as anger, but I would characterize it as, you know, if you feel like there is a place where you don't feel that welcome, then you can choose not to go somewhere where you don't feel comfortable being.

At the time I didn't feel comfortable. I wouldn't have felt comfortable coming back through those doors. The very next year would have just been too overwhelming.

So at the time it was just about being able to play in circumstances that are -- and we're not even talking about favorable, but just normal circumstances.

So that's kind of -- you try to put yourself in a position where, you know, you're not facing any adverse circumstances. So that's really what it was at the time. I wasn't angry. I'm not an angry person. I definitely probably hold on to stuff like anybody normal.

**Q. Each March would you just sort of turn away, or did you have some sorrow or regrets at not being here?**

VENUS WILLIAMS: I didn't think about that. I have watched the tournament on TV. Enjoyed the matches and thought it was a great tournament.

It just didn't seem like a tournament for me. That's more or less what it was. I didn't dwell on or boycott or not watch it and all those things. It wasn't like that at all.

**Q. You talk about being emotional and kind of enjoying the moment tonight. Then when you get into the match, how difficult was it to kind of get that edge back? Or did you ever get it back?**

VENUS WILLIAMS: It was hard, rough out there. She played really well. You know, everything was going for her. She's very competitive. Everything seemed to be comfortable for her. Even the shank shots kept going in.

I kept saying, How are these balls going in? Lord, how do I get some of mine in? And the conditions were

really brutal. Just serving, it was tough. Not ideal.

Thankfully it looks like it at least calmed down so when Serena gets out there it will be a tad bit easier. It was still a great day.

**Q. It's been quite a controversial week, if you like, for women's tennis. Over the years you have stood up and been a spokesman on several issues.**

**What's your take on the whole Maria business?**

VENUS WILLIAMS: Well, any time I have spoken up on issues is because I know the facts. In this case I don't. I guess they are finding the facts now. That's, I guess, a discovery period.

So what can you say? What I do know is that in the past she's been very competitive. I think she has been a role model for a lot of people. She has a ton of fans, and I think she's affected a lot of lives in a positive way. Hopefully that will won't be the end of that.

**Q. When Serena first told you, you heard she was going to come back here, what was your gut reaction?**

VENUS WILLIAMS: I guess I didn't really think she was going to do it. I didn't think she was really serious about it.

That's pretty much -- I thought, Wow, I didn't think she was going to do it. She was talking about it. I thought, I don't think she will. Then she was very serious about it.

I think when her entry remained in Indian Wells, I think that's when people really started talking about it. I don't remember exactly the chain of events of how it started, but I didn't think she was serious.

**Q. When you come back here, sometimes when kids go back to a place they grew up in, it looks a lot smaller than it was. This place, you haven't been here in a long time; it's a lot bigger. What's your impression of this tournament, the grounds, and everything here now?**

VENUS WILLIAMS: Yeah. It's a lot bigger. It's wonderful. It's a nice place for the players and the fans, and the excitement level here is just palpable. It's wonderful. As soon as I got back to the desert I was so happy. It felt right.

**Q. A couple times you came out to the desert for promotional things. Did coming out here for those, did that play any kind of factor for you or Serena?**

VENUS WILLIAMS: No. Those were definitely strictly for my clothing line. It wasn't really near the time of the tournament, so no one was thinking so much about tournament tennis. They were unrelated.

**Q. You just suffered a tough loss, but years from now, do you think this will be one of the really good moments in your career?**

VENUS WILLIAMS: It would have been an even better moment to have a win and share that moment with the crowd who have been so supportive and just so amazing.

But not everything can end fairy tale. It's enough of a fairy tale to be here. Sometimes there's a little bit of a glitch. Doesn't mean that I can't come back next year and try to do even better.

**Q. Was your father here today?**

VENUS WILLIAMS: No.

**Q. Do you think he will ever come back?**

VENUS WILLIAMS: That's a good question. You have to ask him.

**Q. Do you have any comments regarding this issue that's going on now? Anything you would like to say at this point?**

VENUS WILLIAMS: I really don't know any -- nobody called me and told me what the facts are so how can I comment? I don't know anything at all. I don't think anyone knows. I don't know.

**Q. How much do you think the rain delay affected you? Before the rain delay you were holding your serve okay. When you came back you weren't able to hold your serve. Was it tough on your body to come back? Tough conditions? Tough for you to hold serve?**

VENUS WILLIAMS: I think she really played well. I have to give her credit for that. She didn't really miss any balls. I don't think there were a lot of winners, but she was very consistent and moved the ball around.

It was very hard for me to serve in the wind. Unfortunately I didn't handle it as well as she did. It was hard to serve in that wind. That made it a little challenging, the whole serve. It's going to be windy sometimes.

**Q. Olympic year. I know how much that means to you. How will that affect the next five or so months going forward toward Rio?**

VENUS WILLIAMS: Well, I'm going to just try to qualify. At this point it looks good, but you can't just sit back. (Smiling.) I will be fighting every tournament and trying to make it happen.

**Q. Do you have anything special planned in your calendar, adjustments you have made different from a regular year?**

VENUS WILLIAMS: It would be a dream of mine to go to closing ceremonies. I have never been, and I have never been to another Olympic event. This will be my fifth Olympics. Those are kind of things you gotta try to do at some point. That would be awesome to do those things.

**Q. Do you have anything on the top of your list to go see?**

VENUS WILLIAMS: I don't care what it is, as long as I can be there. In Beijing they had the archery across the street. I wanted to go so bad and be a part of it. Whichever it is, wherever I go, I just want to see it.