

## Serena Williams sheds cape, finds form once again at U.S. Open

From *The Washington Post*, adapted by Newsela staff

Required Annotations		Student-Created Annotations		Summary / Questions / Reflection	
----------------------	--	-----------------------------	--	----------------------------------	--

Student-created	Required (bold)
-----------------	-----------------

The occasion was so loaded with emotion that it joined with the heat rising from the hard court and made the very air around Serena Williams seem heavy. It was all so much: the **ceremonial** entrance, the blazing lights, and the weighty tributes to the all-time great made her seem prematurely a monument rather than a person. She was still a player in full motion trying to win a first-round match. Just one match. There was the not-ridiculous hope that if Williams could do that. If she could fight her way past this round of the U.S. Open in New York, it might be the start of a great ending.

"The atmosphere was a lot," she said later. "When I walked out, the **reception** was really overwhelming. It was loud and I could feel it in my chest. It was a feeling I'll never forget. I was just thinking, 'Is this real?' And at the same time, I was thinking 'I still have a match to play.'"

It was a very big ask. Williams, 40, came into the tournament having played just four matches in 14 months, three of which she had lost. Still, maybe she could find the old inner vibration, the competitive rage that powered her to 23 Grand Slam titles. Williams had always been a player who could lay down the racket for months at a time and then pick it back up and bang off the rust with the sheer fierceness of her flailing.

"I'm the kind of person who, it just takes one or two things, and then it clicks," she said three weeks ago during a tournament in Toronto. "So, I'm just waiting on that to click."

She came out of the Arthur Ashe Stadium tunnel on August 29, 2022, for the last big occasion of her career. She wore a **mock** black evening gown, but she had on the black shoes of a boxer. Her competitive instincts clicked back in, and her elbows started flying.

### That Competitive Rage

Williams has always had a special love for the Open, not just for the high, hard bounces of its acrylic courts, but for everything else that's hard about it. The environment was like an opponent in its own right. It was as though she enjoyed meeting its toughness with her strength, answering its noise with her deep competitive howls and its hassles by punching the lights out of Danka Kovinic, 6-3, 6-3.

Her will to win cut straight through the noise of rumbling subway cars, blaring sirens, and the sound of jets from nearby LaGuardia Airport vacuuming the sky. Her tennis was louder than all of it, and the appreciative roars built from the crowd.

She wrote in *Vogue* magazine in her retirement announcement, "There were so many matches I won because something made me angry or someone counted

me out. That drove me. I've built a career on channeling anger and negativity and turning it into something good."

Farewell retirement tournaments are emotionally tricky for the greatest of the greats. In 1989, when Chris Evert played her final Grand Slam tournament at the U.S. Open, the praise almost got in her way. It threatened to turn her head away from the job at hand. "I'm out there to win a match," she said then.

Williams voiced a similar **ambivalence**. "I'm not looking for some ceremonial, final on-court moment," she told Vogue. "I'm terrible at goodbyes, the world's worst."

### **"I Can't Change Time Or Anything"**

Just a couple of months ago, Williams had seemed so down after a first-round loss to unseeded Harmony Tan at Wimbledon that she sounded already retired.

"Today was what I could do," she said after that match. "At some point, you have to be able to be OK with that. And that's all I can do. I can't change time or anything."

Nevertheless, Williams found a way to rewind the clock for 90-some minutes. Williams had not worked as hard at the game recently as she once had. She was splitting her court time with mothering a 4-year-old daughter and nurturing her investments. Her game has always relied on supreme fitness and **physicality**. She said it best in 1999 when she won her first U.S. Open. "I have to go sweat in the sun every day when I could be at the pool with some lemonade."

### **That Big, Powerful Backhand**

At first, it seemed as if it was too much — she was overwhelmed, too tense. She lost three games in a row to trail 3-2 in the first set. But then it happened — a big, windmilling backhand made her a winner — and the mood in the stadium and the speed of her serves improved. She ripped off the next 11 points.

When she took the first set, concluding it with a barrage of 100-mph serves, she issued the old trademark shuddering scream, "Comme onnnn!"

By triple match point, the crowd was on its feet — and it stayed there, roaring, this time not in tribute to the past champion but to a player who, for the moment, was still very much present.

## Questions

1. Which section from the article BEST explains why Williams does not want to make a big deal about her retirement?
  - a) introduction [paragraphs 1-5]
  - b) "That Competitive Rage"
  - c) "I Can't Change Time Or Anything"
  - d) "That Big, Powerful Backhand"
2. Read the paragraph from the section "That Competitive Rage."

Her will to win cut straight through the noise of rumbling subway cars, blaring sirens, and the sound of jets from nearby LaGuardia Airport vacuuming the sky. Her tennis was louder than all of it, and the appreciative roars built from the crowd.

What conclusion is BEST supported by the paragraph?

- a) Williams does not enjoy playing in New York City.
  - b) Williams is able to focus during distractions.
  - c) Williams is not looking forward to retiring.
  - d) Williams prefers the U.S. Open to Wimbledon.
3. According to the article, why did Williams scream "Commme onnnn!" during her match?
  - a) She fought from losing three games in a row to winning the first set.
  - b) She was celebrating the end of a very successful career.
  - c) She was upset that she was losing in the first round of the tournament.
  - d) She won the match and wanted to make the crowd more excited.
4. Why was Williams overwhelmed walking into her U.S. Open match?
  - a) Her daughter was in the stands.
  - b) Her opponent was very strong.
  - c) She had not played tennis in a while.
  - d) The crowd welcomed her loudly.