

Clijsters seals dream US Open win

By Piers Newbery

BBC Online



Kim Clijsters completed an incredible return to Grand Slam tennis with a 7-5 6-3 win over Dane Caroline Wozniacki to claim her second US Open title.

The Belgian, 26, was a wildcard into her first Grand Slam tournament since 2007 after coming out of a two-and-a-half year retirement in August. In that time she gave birth to a daughter, and so becomes the first mother since 1980 to win a Grand Slam. She is also the first woman to win a major as a wildcard.

"This has been so exciting for me," said Clijsters. "This was not really our plan. I just wanted to start three tournaments just to get back into the rhythm of playing tennis and get used to the surroundings. So I have to thank the USTA for giving me the wild card to come back here." Clijsters was playing only her 14th match and third tournament since ending her 27-month retirement. As players need to have competed in three tournaments to gain a world ranking, the new US Open champion is without a ranking until Monday when she is expected to arrive inside the world's top 20.

And the fairytale nature of her victory was compounded when her 18-month old daughter, Jada, was brought down to the court to see her mother lift the trophy. Not since Evonne Goolagong Cawley beat Chris Evert to win Wimbledon in 1980 has a mother won one of the sport's four major titles.

The match itself was an entertaining contest despite windy conditions that led to more errors than either player would have expected. Clijsters' story

had overshadowed her opponent, especially as the Belgian had beaten American hopes Venus and Serena Williams on her way to the final, but it was also a landmark day for Wozniacki. The teenager, seeded ninth, was playing in her first Grand Slam final, having never previously been past the fourth round, and hoped to become Denmark's first major winner.

And after dropping her first service game it was the Dane who had the edge in the first set, twice moving a break clear as her measured retrieving game proved more effective in the wind. Clijsters struggled to control her attacking instincts, making regular errors, and looked in trouble when she slipped 5-4 down, throwing a ball away in disgust as she did so. But the 2005 champion, playing at Flushing Meadows this year for the first time since that triumph, managed to claw back the deficit and broke to love in game 12 to win the opening set. That seemed to calm any nerves in a player who had lost four of her five previous Grand Slam finals, and Clijsters got the decisive break with a brilliant returning game to lead 4-2 in the second set.

The Belgian had suffered from nerves in big moments during the early part of her career but this time around she remained steady, battling back from 0-30 down in both her remaining service games before taking the win with a smash at the net. A tearful Clijsters sank to her knees in celebration before heading into the stands moments later to celebrate with family and friends.

"I don't have words for how I'm feeling - I'm just glad I got to come back to defend my title from 2005!" she said afterwards. "It's been so exciting for me, I just wanted to get back to playing tennis. The support I've received has been crazy. Even from the first round, how warmly everyone welcomed and embraced me. It helped me keep fighting and stay focused." And she added: "We tried to plan Jada's nap time a little bit later today so she could be here. It's the greatest joy in the world. I can't wait to spend the next few weeks with her."

Wozniacki said: "She's such a great girl and I'm so excited that she came back. "Unfortunately she beat me today but she played a great match and deserved this trophy."

Story from BBC SPORT:

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