



**Your on the
Street Reporter**



Uyless Black

Tennis: U.S. Open

Tennis: The U.S. Open

- I National Tennis Center**
- II Tennis: Power and Finesse**
- III Nadal vs. Del Potro**
Federer vs. Djokovic
Willimams vs. Clisters
- IV Ticket Resellers**
The Women's Doubles Finals
Federer vs. Del Potro
Another Look at Winners vs. Unforced Errors

Tennis: U.S. Open (I)¹

September 11, 2009

Hello from Your on the Street Reporter. Today, I am in New York City. In spite of wind and rain, I'm determined to watch some tennis. The U.S. Open is in town; I hope see Roger Federer, Rafael Nadal, Juan Martin Del Potro, and the Williams sisters in action. I am taking a chance by not attending the preliminary matches, as they might lose in the early rounds. But that's doubtful.

I've had to go to the scalpers for tickets, and I'm embarrassed to learn just how much I was scalped. I learned a lot this week about tennis tournaments and scalping tennis tournament tickets. I'll save the scalping report for later.

For many years, I have intended to come to this tournament. One of the items on my bucket list is to see all four tennis majors and a Davis Cup match. I've marked-off two of them (Wimbledon and Davis Cup). The dates of this U.S. Open coincided with other commitments. So here I am, in the Big Apple.

I arrived last night early enough to watch the first part of the men's quarter-finals between Rafael Nadal and Fernando Gonzalez (Thursday night, on TV at my hotel). In the second set tie-breaker, rain and winds forced them to call it a night. Nadal won the first set. The second set is now in the tie-breaker stage. Nadal has 3 points. Gonzalez has 2 points.

(I'll not spend time in these reports on basic tennis tutorials. For now, if the set reaches 6-6 in games won by each player, the players play a tie-breaker: the first to win 7 points (by a margin of 2) wins the set. It's a clever way to prevent a set from being played into the next millennium.)

Nadal has been injured, and several parts of his body are undergoing repairs. He has said he does not want to compete if his injuries make him tentative. It appeared he was pulling-up a bit during this second set. Maybe this break will be to his advantage. We'll see.

Most people are affected in their performance by injuries, and not just in sports---in everyday activities. I have had nagging pains in my groin for decades, and lately, my back shows signs of aging, perhaps from overuse. I sometimes find myself diverted from thinking about hitting the tennis ball cleanly (which is a rarity unto itself) because, in the back of my mind, a sensation of pain is finding its way to the front of my mind.

Anyway, I was surprised by the weather. I had checked the forecast two days before, and the predictions were for (only) clouds on Friday, with sun on Saturday and Sunday. The outlook was perfect for me. I had tickets for the men's semis and finals on Saturday and Sunday, as well as the women's doubles finals. I would "wing-it" on Friday and have good seats for Saturday and Sunday. Monday and Tuesday, I would attend to some business. Later in the week, I would visit friends in North Carolina.

¹ Most of the material in these reports is about men's tennis. I did see women's events, and will report on aspects of these matches. My favorite event is women's doubles, and I'll report on this (finals) match in these reports. Also, the image in the reporter's thought cloud on the cover is property of the USTA and cannot be used for commercial purposes without the consent of the USTA.

I woke this morning and tuned the TV to a local station. The first words I heard, “The area is under a flood watch.” No!” I had studied the weather forecast, but that was two days ago. Big mistake. I should have checked sooner, but I couldn’t easily alter my schedule.

I’m determined to wait-out the storm. As I write this sentence, I’m watching a TV shot of the National Tennis Center, the site of the tournament. It’s raining cats and dogs out there in Flushing Meadows. I don’t understand why so many people are walking around the grounds. I guess it’s because the tennis commentators have mentioned there might be a “window” later today to get-in some play.

I’m a tennis fan, and I love to play the game almost as much as I love my favorite sport of swimming. But getting to Flushing Meadows today might require taking-on my favorite sport. Okay, I’ll brave the water to make it to the subway and head for the Metropolitan Museum of Art. One reason for this trip is to do research for my “Confessions of a Modern Art Luddite” series. Today is ideal for this work. As we old sailors say, “Any museum in a storm.” The saying is trite, but if you think about it, it’s also on the mark. We often visit a museum when the weather is bad.

U.S. National Tennis Center

If you come to the U.S Open, you will find the U.S. National Tennis Center a great place to spend time. I was skeptical of the setup there, because it’s under the flight path of the New York airports, which seems to be a crazy place to construct a huge tennis facility. But for the days of the matches, the planes are diverted (in so far as possible) away from Flushing Meadows.

Figure 1 shows three scenes at the Center. The left photo is a view of the famous globe. It is located just outside the main gate. The middle photo shows the main arena, named the Arthur Ashe Stadium, in memory of the great tennis player and humanitarian. The right photo is a view from the highest seat in the stadium. Because I bought my tickets late, I watched the men’s semi-finals from this position. From this picture, you might think it would be impossible to see the ball and follow the action, but I could see what was going on. I would have liked to have been closer, but the scalping prices for a seat, say, 20 rows up from the court were going for close to a thousand dollars. (That was before the rains came and drove down the prices.) My tickets for later matches were much better, down in an area known as the promenade.

Some advice: If you decide to attend this tournament, buy your tickets in April. Join the USTA, and you will have first access to tickets, at a reasonable price.

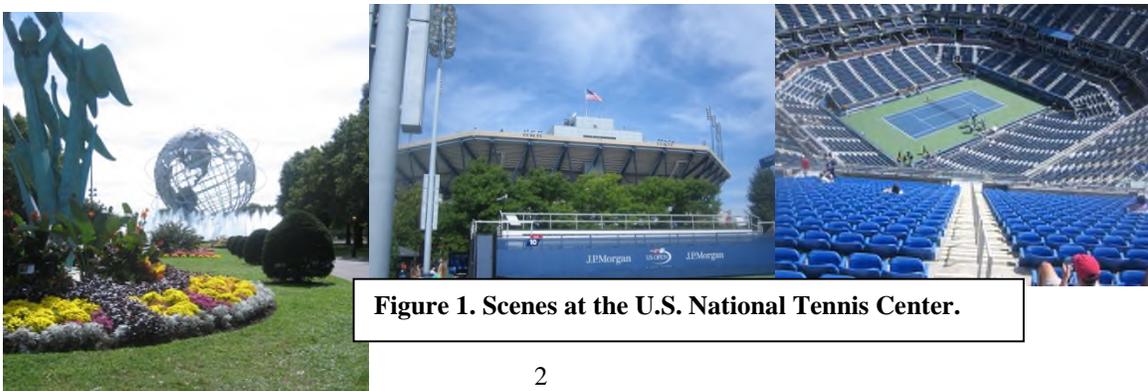


Figure 1. Scenes at the U.S. National Tennis Center.

Figure 2 shows two examples of large video screens that can be found throughout the complex. The screen in the left photo is located outside the main stadium, and is used by people who may not have a ticket to get into the match or for fans just milling around. The screen shown in the right photo is one of two that are placed inside the stadium. They show the TV camera's perspective. They also play back all the points.



Figure 2. Visual aids.

More later from Your on the Street Reporter.

Tennis: U.S. Open (II)

September 12, 2009

Yesterday was wind and rain in New York City. I spent the day at museums. All U.S. Open tennis matches have been moved forward by one day. I am lucky, as I was going to use this extra day to do research for other reports. I'll easily alter my schedule. Given the weather, I'm heading for the Museum of Modern Art to see a special exhibit of one of my favorite artists: Monet.

Just before I left, I tuned on the TV and saw Nadal easily win the second set tie breaker. I'll bet he wins the third set.

Afternoon

I've returned to the hotel from the Monet exhibit. I had intended to take the subway to the National Tennis Center and watch the seniors' matches. (Lendl is playing. I like the man and admire his skills.) But as I exited the museum, it had begun to rain. I escaped into a local bistro for some coffee and learned the matches were once again postponed. I also learned Nadal won the third set 6-0 and thus the match.

I'm starting to run out of time, but (as mentioned) I still hope to see the Williams sisters play. I look forward to seeing Nadal, Federer and the young up-comer, Juan Martin Del Potro play singles. He is an amazing player, and he's only 20 years old. Anyway, if the rain persists, as they say, "Any museum in a storm."

The Power and Beauty of Tennis

If you've watched tennis over the past few years, you've probably noticed it has become more of a power game. It used to be one of finesse play at the net. Now, with the improvements in string and racquet technology, it is difficult to exercise subtle returns if the ball is coming toward you at a hundred miles an hour. Granted, we duffers don't hit the ball with such velocity, but the pros do.

Also, watch how much top spin they put on the ball. As the ball goes over the net, it appears a giant gravitational force is pulling it down. That's top spin and it's deadly. Its effect is to allow the hitter to swing fast and forcefully, which places more velocity on the ball. It also leads to the ball "kicking-up" after it hits the surface.

I play with a buddy who puts so much top spin on the ball it often kicks-up to my shoulders. I have yet to learn how to hit the ball on "the rise," so I spend a lot of my time playing defensive tennis with him.

Ah, but to hit an occasional solid shot! To nail a rare service ace! Those times keep me coming back for additional punishment from my more talented friend.

The Injuries

This type of tennis leads to a lot of stress on the arm and shoulder. The hard surfaces take their toll on the legs, hips, and feet. Injuries are common in this sport.

I'm a prime example. Until about two months ago, I was playing six times a week (one to two hours per session). It was too much, and I've injured two muscles in my right forearm. I don't know when I can play again. I've tried to hit a couple times, but the injuries have made me tentative. (That's the only tennis thing Nadal and I have in common.) It's no fun playing if I can't play all-out. I'm not a happy camper about this situation, as my wife and dog will attest.

Each swing counts

My golf friends rib me about how much each swing of the golf club counts in relation to tennis strokes. In golf, a good player hits the ball only, say, 80 times in one match. In tennis, a player hits it hundreds of times. (600 – 800 times a match is a good guess.) My response is: That's one reason I prefer tennis to golf. Most of the golf game is waiting to play, whereas most of the tennis game is playing.

Anyway, my response to this jibe is to explain that the outcome of a tennis match is often decided by a very few points. Take a look at Figure 3. The total points won for one doubles team (Bryan and Byran) was 103. The total won by the other team (Dlouhy and Paes) was 101. These players hit the ball hundreds of times, but their point differential was only 2.

Match Summary		
	Bryan ^(USA) / Bryan ^(USA)	Dlouhy ^(CZE) / Paes ^(IND)
Aces	3	4
Double Faults	1	2
Unforced Errors	12	19
Winning % on 1st Serve	50 of 65 = 77 %	54 of 73 = 74 %
Winning % on 2nd Serve	21 of 34 = 62 %	19 of 32 = 59 %
Winners (Including Service)	37	51
Receiving Points Won	32 of 105 = 30 %	28 of 99 = 28 %
Break Point Conversions	1 of 9 = 11 %	1 of 4 = 25 %
Total Points Won	103	101
Fastest Serve Speed	135 MPH	127 MPH
Average 1st Serve Speed	115 MPH	105 MPH
Average 2nd Serve Speed	93 MPH	89 MPH

Figure 3. Summary of a U.S. Open doubles match.

Even when hitting hundreds of shots, *every* shot counts. Many of them are used to set up the next shot, and the next, to eventually win the point. All are designed to create an error from the opponent.

The player (or players in doubles) who wins the most points usually wins the match. But not always. The Bryan brothers lost the match against Dlouhy and Paes, yet they won two more points. What happened? They lost some of the points at inopportune times. They may have won one game game-0 (four points to zero points), yet lost another by 30-game (two points to four points).

The Serve and the Return of Serve

I have been under the impression that the serve is the most important part of a player's game, especially with the new string and racquet technologies. I have been watching the Tennis Channel less-and-less because it appears a point is being determined more-and-more by a single hit: the serve. In this year's Wimbledon, I turned off the TV during the fifth set because it became a duel between Andy Roddick and Roger Federer of who could outlast each other by serving the most aces (a clean winner on the serve). I forgot the final number of points played in that tie breaker, but it set a record for a major.

Finesse. A Dying Art on the Court. John McEnroe is a consummate ass on the tennis court (and a fine tennis commentator). I saw him bully a (voluntary) line judge at a seniors match in DC a few years ago for a call Mr. McEnroe didn't like. It's wasn't a Jimmy Connors bad-boy rant. It was malicious and ugly. McEnroe's face showed petulance and meanness. I've stopped watching him play. He seems to be having no fun, nor am I when I watch him.

I regret our divorce because of all the tennis greats John McEnroe displayed finesse with the racquet that no one else matched. His net play was sensational. The joke about his doubles play was this: Question, "Whose going to win the doubles in the tournament?" Answer, "McEnroe and whoever his partner is." It was a pleasure to watch him play a point, and a downer to watch him between the points.

So, back to the server. Today, I would bet a finesse player of McEnroe's caliber would not go very far.

I have been using the present tense in this part of the report because according to a study, I'm wrong about the serve. The study states, "The serve, relative to the return, has diminished in importance."² I'll wager a can of tennis balls that my readers who play tennis are surprised by this statement. I am.

The study claims the most accurate statistical barometer for predicting a top 10 year-end ranking comes in two categories: Points won in returning first serve, and break points converted. These stats are different from ten years ago. Back then, the most accurate barometer for success were three categories: service games won, most aces, and second serve points won.

Roger Federer, no slouch in the serves department, offered this comment in the *USA TODAY* article, "Players used to attack. Now they defend more. (The analysis) just confirms what the feeling is of everybody."

Okay, I was incorrect, but what if a player is a weak server? It means the opponent will defeat the serve with the fast return, which muddies the water about this study. It's fair to say one can't win if one can't serve, and one can't win if one can't return serve. Shortly, we'll look at some of the matches and return to this subject.

Apart from these studies, I suspect another telling statistic is the ratio of a player's hitting outright winners vs. hitting unforced errors (in comparison to the opponent's ratio). From

² Douglas Robson, "Way to the Top: Return Trumps Serve," *USA TODAY*, September 10, p. 10C.

watching the Tennis Channel lately, it seems the person who is the more aggressive wins the match. If that is true, why not work your way to the net every time? Why not try to hit a winner every time? Because it takes skill to set up a net play, and it takes skill to position the opponent to be vulnerable to a winner. Maybe this ratio simply reflects which player has been playing all the points better. We'll look at these ratios for the matches we analyze this week.

Whatever the statistics tell us, there's still something missing now. The game has become a baseline marathon. Most points are won by staying deep and hitting the ball with as much force as possible; placing so much top spin and angle shots on the ball that the opponent will make an error, or give up because of boredom. In the 2008, Wimbledon final Nadal defeated Federer in five sets. Nadal did not come to the net behind his serve until the final game.

By the way, that match lasted 4 hours and 48 minutes, and entailed each player hitting the ball as hard as possible hundreds of times, and running in between each swing. These players are in fantastic shape. Two months ago, so was I. I could eat and drink as much as I wanted, and did not gain a pound. I've now gained ten. I'm having a lot of trouble doing ten hours a week on a boring treadmill vs. ten hours of tennis. It shows on the scales. It's time to cut back on the rum buns.

To conclude this segment, take a look at Figure 3 again. It appears the telling statistic for this match was who had the most break points (that is, who broke the other's serve the most). The winners and losers both had one each. But look again, the losers squandered their opportunities. They converted only one out of nine opportunities, and the winners converted one out of four opportunities. (A break point opportunity is when the server is down a point (say 30-40) and loses the next point. A two point difference in the score gives that person the game.)

I used the statistics in this match because they do not reflect what usually happens in a typical match. On paper, the Bryan brothers won the match. On the court, they lost it.

I'm hoping for sun tomorrow. If you are enjoying these reports, hope with me.

Your on the Street Reporter.

Tennis: U.S. Open (III)

September 13, 2009

Hello from Your on the Street Reporter. It's sunny for a change. I'm headed for the National Tennis Center in Flushing Meadows. The men's semis are starting in a couple hours.

If you attend the U.S. Open, I suggest you use the subway to come to Flushing Meadows. Take the #7 toward Queens and get off at the "Mets" stop. You will find yourself a few hundred feet from the National Tennis Center. It's about a thirty minute ride from downtown Manhattan, which is shown in Figure 4. I took this photo from the top of the stadium---the location of my seat for my first day there. The tennis court was only slightly closer to my seat than the Empire State Building.



Figure 4. View of downtown Manhattan from the National Tennis Center

I am back at my hotel and still in a state of disbelief about the high quality of tennis I witnessed today. I have not seen a live high-level tennis match for over a decade. The game has changed. Let's analyze some of the matches that were played.

First, a bit more about the strategy of watching a tennis match. In the past, when I planned to attend tennis tournaments, I bought tickets for seats at the end of the court. I considered it a better way to view the game from the player's perspective. I still like the end view, but I learned the best overall spectator position is at the corner of the court, and about 20 rows up. Being close to the court allows the spectator to hear the players' grunts and squeals, but this proximity makes it more difficult to follow both players at each end of the court. Anyway, if you have yet to attend a tennis match, give it some thought.

Nadal vs. Del Potro

My tennis buddies have been telling me Juan Martin Del Potro will be the next big star. I've been watching him play, and I've come to agree. He dismantled Rafael Nadal in the men's semifinals today, 6-2, 6-2, 6-2. He's only 20 years old and is already in the top 10 rankings.

The audience was taken aback by the lopsided victory, but it appeared Nadal was going to be in trouble from the start of the match. On his first two service games, Nadal was at break point three times. He lost the match for three reasons: His serve was not as strong as Del Porto's, the backhand of Del Porto's continuously kept Nadal off balance, and Del Potro changed his forehand, alternating from a top spin stroke---to a flat hit.

Some players can't execute a flat forehand consistently with much force, as the ball often goes into the net. But Del Potro is 6'6" and he executes the stroke with great power and accuracy. He is able to hit the swing with more of a downward motion than shorter players. His backhand is very good, but I think his most powerful stroke is his flat forehand.

Figure 5 tells the tale. Nadal could not break Del Potro (0 of 5 opportunities). But Nadal's serve was broken 6 times (and he was at break point 16 times). Total points: 75 for Nadal; 100 for Del Potro. Del Porto won 49% of the serves he received. Nadal won only 34% of his received serves. Del Potro had only one more unforced error than Nadal, but had fourteen more winners.

After the match was over, I made a note, "Del Porto---able to handle service." If he returns service in other matches like he did against Nadal, his opponents had better get most of their first serves in, and they had better be placed into the deep corners of the service area.

	Nadal ^(ESP)	Del Potro ^(ARG)
1st Serve %	70 of 90 = 78 %	56 of 85 = 66 %
Aces	4	6
Double Faults	4	3
Unforced Errors	27	28
Winning % on 1st Serve	40 of 70 = 57 %	44 of 56 = 79 %
Winning % on 2nd Serve	6 of 20 = 30 %	12 of 29 = 41 %
Winners (Including Service)	19	33
Receiving Points Won	29 of 85 = 34 %	44 of 90 = 49 %
Break Point Conversions	0 of 5 = 0 %	6 of 16 = 38 %
Net Approaches	13 of 20 = 65 %	17 of 24 = 71 %
Total Points Won	75	100
Fastest Serve Speed	119 MPH	134 MPH
Average 1st Serve Speed	107 MPH	116 MPH
Average 2nd Serve Speed	84 MPH	95 MPH

Figure 5. Summary of Nadal/Del Potro match.

It was not much of a contest, but Rafael has not recovered from all his injuries. When he heals, it will be fun to see how he handles Juan Martin. After this match, even with Rafael hurting, I'm placing even money on the next contest.

Speed, Power, Strength, Stamina, Speed---and Angles

For the readers who have never seen a live tennis match between top rated players, I hope you will see one before your bucket gets kicked. The game seems fast on TV. It is actually much faster. On some of the rallies between the players, the ball is coming across the net so quickly, it seems to blur. Granted this image from this writer has been captured by a set of faulty eyes, but the idea holds.

One of the biggest differences between a good and great player (I am neither) is footwork---having the body in place to hit the next shot. Because the ball is coming back so quickly, the player must begin his move to the ball almost the instant it leaves his opponent's racquet. This aspect of tennis is what separates the Uyless Blacks from the gifted players.

Another big difference is the ability to vary shots and place them at angles that require the opponent to run to the ball. Trust me, if you try to overpower a good player by simply hitting

hard to the (safe) lower part of the net, he will start angling shots, and you will lose the point. This aspect of the game can be observed by watching a match on TV, but it can't be fully appreciated until the spectator is able to watch the full court and both players at the same time.

I'm not over-stating when I say I watched Nadal and Del Potro play a game that is so far removed from my abilities, I was in awe. But I had seen nothing yet! The second men's semi-final game was the main reason I came to New York: to see Roger Federer.

Arthur Ashe Dedication and President Clinton's Speech

Today, Arthur Ashe was inducted into the USTA Hall of Champions. The Hall is located on the grounds of the National Tennis Center where each member has a picture and a write-up commemorating the player's greatness.

I was confused about this event. The largest tennis arena in the world is located here, and it's named the Arthur Ashe Stadium. He has an entire stadium named after him, yet he had not been part of a celebrated group of players whose collective photos line a park that is located next to the stadium. What gives? I asked a woman at the Arthur Ashe Foundation booth about this contradiction. She replied, "The Hall of Champions is controlled by the USTA. Any other questions?"

Not wanting to show my ignorance about tennis politics, as only five minutes before, I had joined the USTA for the first time, I replied, "I see." Anyway, I suppose it is part of organizational rivalry. Maybe I'll learn more as USTA begins sending me junk mail.

Former President Clinton was the main speaker for this ceremony. He gave a short talk, and parsed the "is" verb without error. Ms. Ashe said a few words, as did a few USTA officers. It was time to watch the match between Roger Federer and Novak Djokovic.

Federer vs. Djokovic

Federer won the match in three straight sets: 7-6, 7-5, 7-5. I was surprised by Federer's serve. My notes read, "His first serve is not working. His toss: height looks OK...not far enough in front?" I know those symptoms all too well.

Lately, I've watched Federer on TV (including his victory over Roddick at Wimbledon), and his serve has been consistent. I didn't download his stats, but I would guess in his last two victories, his first serve success was around 70%. Today, it was only 58% in comparison to Djokovic's 68%. However, as the *USA TODAY* study claims, the ability to handle the incoming serve is now a key point of a match. Federer won 37% of the receiving points; Djokovic won 29%. (They had the same number of unforced errors (33), but Roger had 49 winners to Djokovic's 31.)

A Shot for the Ages

We tennis bums will be talking of the "shot" for as long as we can talk. It will be akin to, "Where were you when Neil Armstrong landed on the moon?" For this event, "Where were you when Federer made that shot at the U.S. Open?" Of course, most all answers will be, "In front of my TV set. "Not this fan! Okay, I won't gloat.

I pulled this piece off the U.S. Tennis Open Web site:

Roger Federer punctuated his latest U.S. Open victory Sunday with a shot he called, quite simply, the greatest of his life: a between-the-legs, (his) back-to-the-net, cross-court winner from the baseline.

Federer was in trouble on the point. Djokovic had brought him to the net, then hit the ball back to the baseline. Roger ran after it. It bounced near the baseline. He then swung his racquet between his legs, and the ball went across the net at an angle that Djokovic might have put away----*if* he thought Roger would have executed it. Djokovic seemed perplexed and bemused. He was probably thinking, "What's next?"

Federer was asked in a post match interview if he practiced this shot. He replied, "A lot, actually," he said. "But they never work. That's why, I guess, it was the greatest shot I ever hit in my life."

Serena Williams vs. Kim Clisters (Women's Semi-final)

I watched the women's semi-final match between Serena Williams and Kim Clisters on television at the hotel. It received a lot of world-wide press because the unranked and unseeded Clisters upset the best female tennis player in the world.

Clisters won the women's single championship at the U.S. Open in 2005. She retired, had a child, and has been absent from high-level tennis for over two years. I read today that she started her comeback four weeks ago! If any of our readers have more information on this time frame, let me know. If the statement is accurate, I consider this victory to be one of the greatest athletic feats ever. Four weeks? It's astounding, but the press clippings about the upset did not spend much ink on Ms. Clisters' tennis history in the majors (see Figure 6). I think Williams underestimated her opponent.

The other reason the match gained a lot of attention was because of the way it ended: Williams lost the last point (and the match) because she forfeited a point for unsportsmanlike conduct toward a linesperson who called a foot fault on her serve. I'll say. I watched the replay. I would have been shaking in my Nikes if I had seen that hunk of muscle coming at me swearing and pointing at my head with her Wilson racquet. (I'll bet the Wilson people were equally impressed.)

An article in one of the papers noted the call of the line judge was unusual, as foot faults are rarely called at that stage of a match. Really? Is there an unwritten rule when foot faults are not called? A foot fault is a foot fault, and a line judge is not doing her job if she does not call it. Otherwise, why have a line judge in the first place?

Williams later apologized. Let's let it be. Serena has shown class on the court. This outburst was an aberration. However, because of the threats she uttered, she should be suspended from some events. Her behavior is akin to basketball player Kobe Bryant threatening a referee with bodily harm because the official called a foul on Bryant during the final seconds of a play-off game.

GRAND SLAM SINGLES RESULTS:

Year	Australian Open	Roland Garros	Wimbledon	US Open
1999	-	-	4TH	3RD
2000	1ST	1ST	2ND	2ND
2001	4TH	RUP	QF	QF
2002	SF	3RD	2ND	4TH
2003	SF	RUP	SF	RUP
2004	RUP	-	-	-
2005	-	4TH	4TH	WON
2006	SF	SF	SF	-
2007	SF	-	-	-

GRAND SLAM DOUBLES RESULTS:

Year	Australian Open	Roland Garros	Wimbledon	US Open
2000	1ST	1ST	2ND	3RD
2001	3RD	3RD	RUP	-
2002	3RD	-	-	QF
2003	QF	WON	WON	2ND

Figure 6. Kim Clisters' Performance in the Majors.

Serena was being beaten badly anyway. She seemed frustrated with her inability to take control. (Williams had 31 unforced errors; Clisters had only 18. Clisters won 70 points to Williams' 57.) Perhaps Serena's petulance was due to her opponent's baby daughter being in the stands.

In the first set, Serena was penalized for unsportsmanlike conduct after she had smashed one of her racquets into pieces. After the racquet destruction and the racket pointing at the line judge, rumor has it Wilson will continue to supply Serena with tennis racquets, but the company is sending them to her without Wilson's **W** imprinted on the strings.

How spectacular can this upset be? Retiring from tennis; having a baby; gearing up in four weeks; and severely trouncing the best female tennis player in the world. Great news if you're a Clisters fan, but not so great if you're a Williams fan. I'm a fan of both women, but for what Kim did at the U.S. Open, she should be on the cover of *Sports Illustrated*.

Today is over. For tomorrow: the women's doubles finals and the men's single finals. I'll be back with you soon about these matches.

Tennis: U.S. Open (IV)

September 14, 2009

Hello again from Your on the Street Reporter. Today, at the U.S. Open I saw the women's semifinals and the men's finals.

Ticket Resellers (AKA scalpers)

As mentioned in earlier reports, I made the mistake of buying tickets for this tournament only a week before it began. Ticket sales are managed by the USTA. Its Web site informed me I was out of luck. Seats for the last three days were sold out. I surfed a few more sites and discovered several companies who offered tickets for resell. Resellers purchase tickets from the USTA or from individuals who have previously purchased them. In turn, they sell them back at a higher price.

Until now, I had never used a reseller market for tickets for any venue. Football games; plays, musicals, boxing matches, etc.: I bought them early enough to buy them directly. I had no experience with ticket resellers. I mention this fact because I am exposing my stupidity to you. I am writing about it because my experience might save you some money.

(Note: My scalped prices for tickets were quite modest in comparison to some sporting events, such as the Super Bowl and the Kentucky Derby. It is the relative increase in the price of a resold ticket to the original price that is of interest.)

My seat to watch the men's semifinals was located in the third-to-last row in the stadium. It was seventy rows from the court, and it came with oxygen masks, as seen in Figure 7. I paid \$179 for the ticket. The original price was \$82. The seat for the next day was still pretty far away, about 35 rows from the court, also noted in Figure 7. Its original price was \$300. I paid \$753. Figure 8 (a photo of the women's doubles finals) shows the locations for my seat for the last day of the tournament.

Seats were being resold that were located only a few rows from the court. One of them is noted in Figure 7. They were available in the price range of two to several thousand dollars. I did not write down the exact prices during my research, as I did not want to stay on the Web page for too long to be tempted. Just joking, I had a better view from the corner at row 35 than I would have had from row 12 at midcourt. And I still had some money in my wallet for: a \$5 bottle of water, a \$15 hot dog, and a \$12 shot of Grey Goose. Priorities must be set for certain things in life.

Reselling tickets? Nice work if you can get it. Buying from the resellers? As your reporter, it was my duty to somehow get a ticket to write these reports. Right. George Bernard Shaw said, "When a stupid man is doing something he is ashamed of, he always declares that it is his duty."³ I did not realize how stupid I was until I arrived in New York. The bellman at my hotel had tickets for resell. I showed him my seat location for the finals, and he asked what I paid for it. I

³ George Bernard Shaw, *Caesar and Cleopatra*, 3, 1899, in Leonard Roy Frank, *Quotationary* (New York: Random House, 2001), 832.

told him. He had similar tickets for about \$350 and suggested I not tell anyone in the city what I paid for my ticket. I asked why. He laughed and replied, “You don’t want to embarrass yourself!”

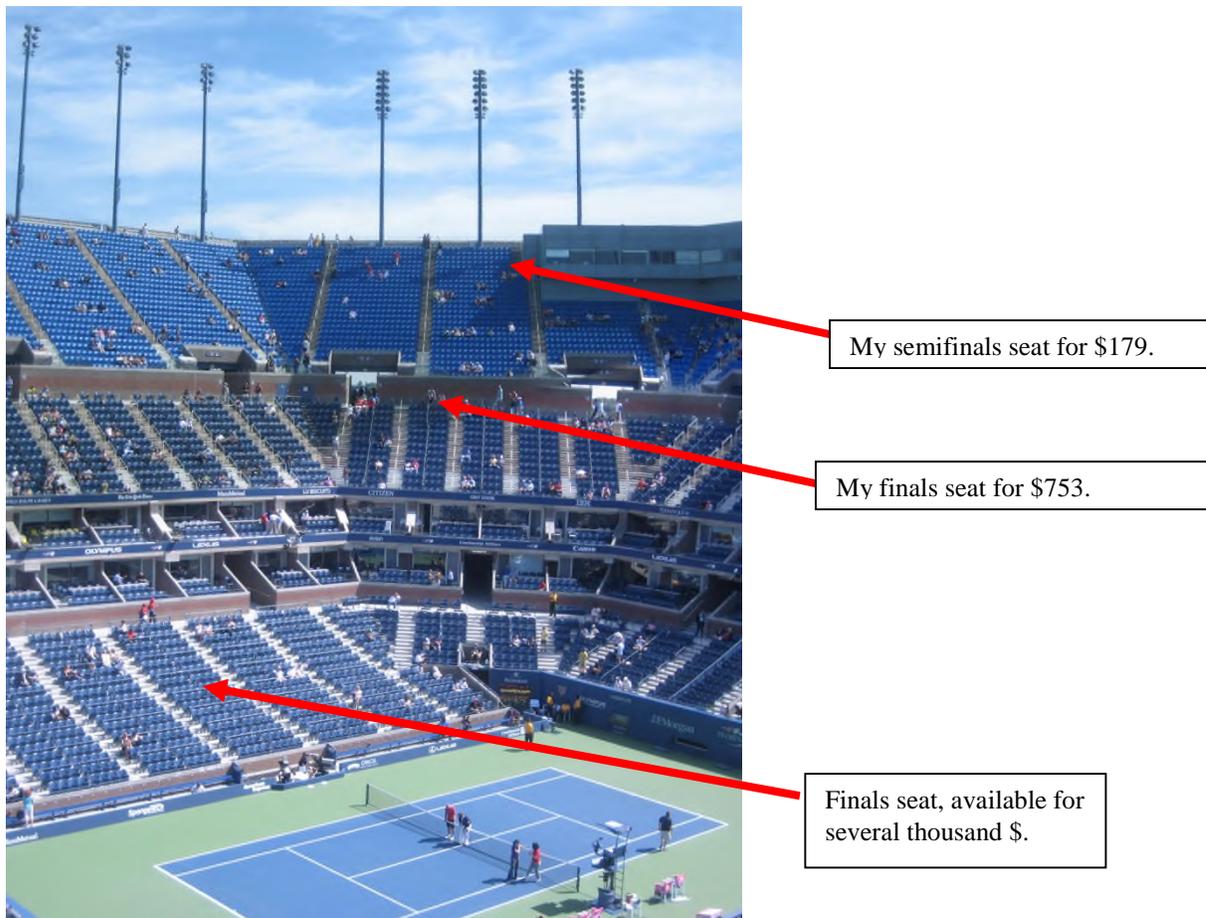


Figure 1. Top row seats come with oxygen masks.

Because of the rain delays, many ticket holders left town and did not see the final day. A scalper at the Mets subway stop would have sold me a finals ticket for \$100. Of course, this situation was unusual. Nonetheless, I got the reseller-ticket shaft because of my ignorance of the market. So, if you go to the U.S. Open, first join the USTA (\$29). You will have access to tickets about one month before they go on sale to the public. You will be able to buy them at their original prices.

Women’s Doubles Finals

The women’s doubles finals pitted Serena and Venus Williams (seeded 4) against the team of Cara Black and Liezel Huber (seeded 1). Figure 8 shows Serena preparing to serve in the first game of the match. (Notice the empty seats---because of the rain delay.) I had this view for the entire Monday (the last day of the tournament). As you can see, I was a lot closer to the action than yesterday. Again, seeing the full court at an angle offers a more realistic view of what is taking place.

The sisters took it to the number 1 seeds by a score of 6-2, 6-2. The balls coming off Venus' and Serena's ground stokes come close to the velocity of those of the male players. Likewise, their serves are fast. For this match, their average first serve speed was 111 MPH, and they averaged 81 MPH on their second serve. In contrast, the Black/Huber team's average first serve speed was 89 MPH, and the second serve was 76 MPH.



Figure 8. The women's doubles finals.

Black never held her serve. (She and I have two things in common: Our last names and our serves.) She was the fourth in the sequence to serve. As indicated from the 6-2, 6-2 score, her duo might have had a chance if she could have held serve. But was it her weak serve or the sisters' strong return? Probably a bit of both.

As I claimed earlier, the character of the match (and its outcome) can also be evaluated by comparing the ratio of unforced errors (hitting out of bounds from an "easy" shot) to winners (executing a stroke that the opponent cannot come close to returning). For most matches, it appears the person or team who has the most winners also has the most unforced errors. *But* compared to their opponents, they hit more winners than unforced errors. I have not studied the data enough to make this claim categorically, but the idea held up for this match:

	Black/Huber	Williams/Williams
Winners	+21	+43
Unforced errors	-10	-15
Difference	+11	+28

The sisters won 79 points to their opponents' 23 points. Not much of a contest from the number 1 seeds

During the awards ceremonies commentator Patrick McEnroe interviewed both teams (Figure 9). He asked Serena about the incident with the line judge. He was out of order. This occasion was not the time to bring up the subject. After a couple questions---which Serena politely deflected---the crowd started booing. Venus took the microphone to suggest Mr. McEnroe move on. He did.

The winners and losers said thanks, that they loved everyone, and everyone loved them. They told everyone the U.S. Open was their favorite tournament (after several others at which they make similar vows of fidelity), and that they were looking forward to coming back again---to experience this “wonderful New York crowd.” I suppose the last declaration was okay, but I would have preferred this “wonderful New York and Idaho crowd.” But what should I have expected from buying a ticket for a seat positioned just below the top of Mt. Everest?



Figure 9. The women’s singles award ceremony.

Federer vs. Del Porto (Men’s finals)

Federer lost a five set match to Juan Martin Del Porto. (See Figure 10.)The scores were (Federer’s are listed first): 6-3, 6-7, 6-4, 6-7, 2-6. He should have won the match. Here’s why he did not.

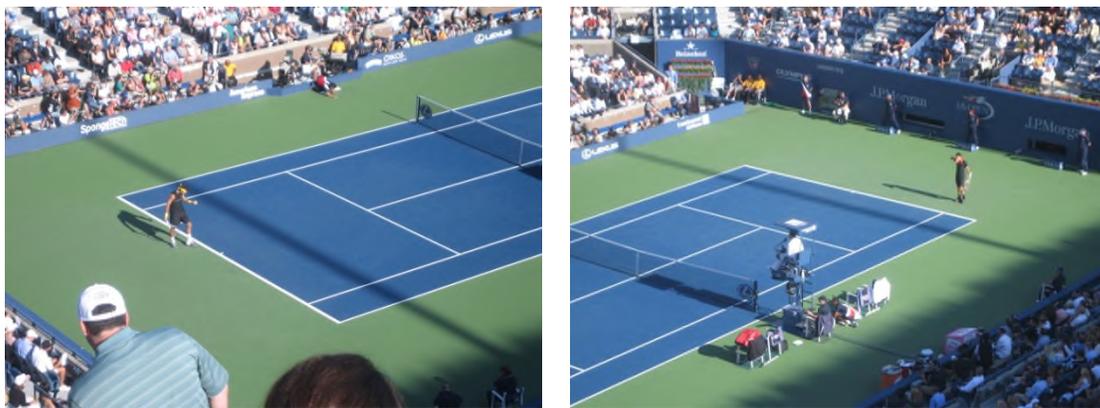


Figure 10. Del Potro preparing to serve to Federer.

For most of the first two sets, Roger dominated Juan Martin. Federer’s strokes were varied: hard hits, soft placements, top spins, and slices. He was confusing his opponent. He would hit two or three backhand slices, a top spin backhand, then run around his backhand and hit a winner down his forehand side. In short, he was making mince meat out of his opponent.

The score was 6-3, 5-4 in favor of Roger, who was serving for the third set. He won the first point to make the score 15-0. His next serve was a good one, but Del Porto made a great return to seemingly put Roger on the defense. However, Roger hit a beautiful winner to end this point and

take the game to 30-0. Two points away from Federer going 2-0 in sets. Very rarely does a player overcome a 0-2 disadvantage. I suspect no one has done it against Federer. Like Tiger Woods, he is a devastating front runner.

After this last hit, I watched Del Porto. He looked down to his feet and made a shrug to himself. The shrug wasn't, "Oh well, I'll get the next point." It was, "What's next?" Roger had him on the ropes. Two more points and the match was likely over.

The turn-about was strange. Federer lost *the next four points* to bring the set 5-5, and then lost the tie breaker. He won the third set, but it seemed he was not the same player---not in the same frame of mind. His earlier dominance was not there. As the last two sets wore on, it seemed Federer wore out mentally. I think he was realizing his colossal mistake in his failure to close out the second set (serving at 30-0). I think he was disgusted with himself.

Tennis is a game of mental momentum. Once lost, it is difficult to gain it back. Playing for over four hours is a physical challenge. Coupled with the fact that one or two points might decide the match adds tremendous pressure to the mix.

The other key part of the match dealt with challenges. During each set a player is allowed to make three challenges to a line call. If successful, the player's challenge total is not reduced. To review the challenge, the last part of the point is replayed through a wonderful video setup that shows exactly where the ball landed. It is a fine innovation to the game, and has made an outcome much fairer. But Federer does not like the use of electronic challenges. I don't know why. I think it's because it disrupts the flow of the game. Again, I'm not sure. I went to his Web page to find out, but was required to sign-up to use it and rebelled.

Anyway, I had been paying keen attention to the challenges because on TV, I could never figure out the amount of time the player was given to issue a challenge nor exactly what he said or did to signal to the chair that he wanted to challenge. I learned the challenge is issued by the player raising his racquet or speaking to the chair, and it must be done immediately after the point is over.

Del Porto took his time. On a couple occasions, he walked around the spot where the ball had landed, thus hesitating a few seconds before making his challenge. As I recall, he was not denied a challenge because of his delays in making them. Roger became *very* upset about this situation and had harsh words to the chair umpire during a change-over. (Including a four letter word that I will not repeat here, but it begins with shit.)

Because of my particular interest in this aspect of the game I think Roger was correct to be upset (In my notes: "Why the walking around? (Del Porto). What's going on?")

Roger seemed to have not only lost his momentum, but his interest in the match. I don't mean to say he simply gave up. His self disgust with tanking the second set, coupled with the chair's inconsistent management of challenges put him in a frame of mind that kept him from playing his best tennis. Something like an injury. In this case, a mental injury.

But his funk was abetted by Del Potro's play. Roger had two more unforced errors than Juan Martin. His receiving points won were 33% to Del Potro's 36%. His winners were 56. Del Potro's were 57. The match was so close that it was decided by a point here-and-there, at least for the first four sets. Figure 11 provides a summary of the match.

Match Summary		
	Federer ^(SUI)	Del Potro ^(ARG)
1st Serve %	91 of 181 = 50 %	111 of 171 = 65 %
Aces	13	8
Double Faults	11	6
Unforced Errors	62	60
Winning % on 1st Serve	65 of 91 = 71 %	81 of 111 = 73 %
Winning % on 2nd Serve	50 of 90 = 56 %	33 of 60 = 55 %
Winners (Including Service)	56	57
Receiving Points Won	57 of 171 = 33 %	66 of 181 = 36 %
Break Point Conversions	5 of 22 = 23 %	5 of 15 = 33 %
Net Approaches	31 of 47 = 66 %	23 of 34 = 68 %
Total Points Won	172	180
Fastest Serve Speed	129 MPH	138 MPH
Average 1st Serve Speed	116 MPH	116 MPH
Average 2nd Serve Speed	95 MPH	91 MPH

Figure 11. Summary of Federer/Del Potro match.

I was leaning toward cheering for Federer. Each time he wins a match, he sets a record. He has won more majors than any player in history. He holds so many records we won't dwell on them. I was pleased to have been able to see someone who is the absolute best at what he does. He is better at tennis than anyone who has lived (perhaps with the exception of Rod Laver), or who is living. My experience watching Federer compose his strokes on the tennis court would be akin to an astronomer watching Einstein compose his equations on the blackboard.

But I was also in Juan Martin's corner. He's a gracious, humble man, mature beyond his years. His comments during his semifinal and final victories were polite and elegant. For the men's finals ceremonies, he closed his remarks with a few statements in his native tongue. I'm sure the fans in his country in Argentina appreciated this gesture.

Winners and Unforced Errors

Let's close our visit to the U.S. Open by revisiting the subject of winners vs. unforced errors. I downloaded the statistics about this ratio on all the matches covered in these reports. See Figure 12. As suspected, the winner of a match usually has more unforced errors than the loser, but has even more winners. There's really nothing surprising about this fact. It reflects the overall play of the opponents.

It's been fun watching and writing about the U.S. Open. I hope you enjoyed the trip as well, if only vicariously. I'm thinking of covering the French Open, so we may do more tennis next year. Besides, it's a good excuse to visit Paris.

Your on the Street Reporter

The data below represents the differences between a player's number of winners vs. unforced errors. For example, winners (say, 37 (a plus figure)) and losers (say, 12 (a minus figure)) yields a total of +25.

Bryan/Bryan (+25) vs. Dlouhy/Pres (+32): Match won by Dlouhy/Pres.

Nadal (-8) vs. Del Potro (+5): Match won by Del Potro.

Djokovic (-2) vs. Federer (+16): Match won by Federer.

Williams (-5) vs. Clisters (-4): Match won by Clisters.

Williams/Williams (+28) vs. Black/Huber (+11): Match won by Williams/Williams.

Federer (-6) vs. Del Potro (-3): Match won by Del Potro.

Figure 12. Comparisons of winners (+) vs. unforced errors (-).