

# ON THE BASELINE

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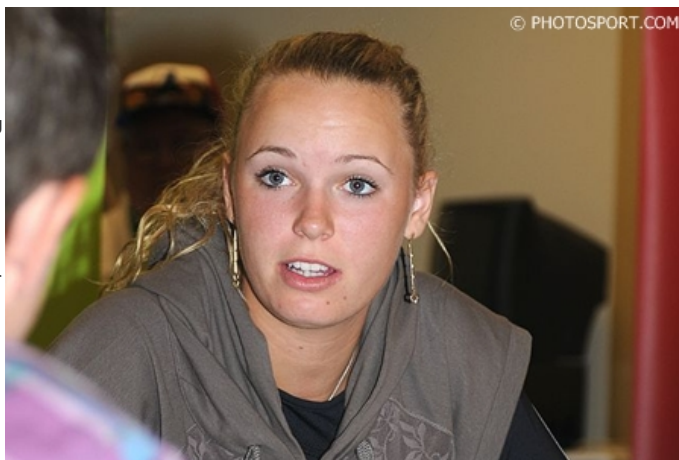
## Caroline Wozniacki: How Good Does She Have to Be?

By [Paula Vergara](#)

Updated: June 14, 2010

She's been called a pusher, accused of not being aggressive enough with her shots, and criticized for not approaching the net as often as she could. Yet, at age 19, Caroline Wozniacki has held the No. 2 ranking, earned seven career titles, and is the only teenager ranked in the top 25. Is the media being too hard on Wozniacki? Let's take a look at what's been happening with her game.

Wozniacki seemed to be on the right track, achieving a career-high ranking of No. 2 in March of this year, after reaching the final at Indian Wells. She won the title in Ponte Vedra Beach for the second year in a row. In mid-April, she suffered a serious setback during her semifinal match in Charleston, where she sustained a bad ankle sprain. As a result, her clay court game suffered during the European clay court season. Wozniacki ended up with early round



losses in Stuttgart, Rome and Madrid and won just one match in Warsaw, and retired in her next match due to ongoing ankle problems. Those losses pulled her world ranking down a notch to No. 3.

Fortunately, now that the grass court season is underway, Wozniacki seems to be back to full health, and has the potential to be a major threat at Wimbledon. Back in 2006, Wozniacki won the Wimbledon singles title as a junior (at age 15). Wozniacki's results from Wimbledon as a WTA Tour player have shown that she has taken the slow and steady route, advancing one additional round each year since 2007. Wozniacki has proven that her game is well suited to grass, winning Eastbourne in 2009, and making it to the fourth round at Wimbledon the same year. Wozniacki admits that she always feels good on grass, and it is by far, one of her favorite surfaces (next to hard courts). It will be interesting to see if she can defend her title at Eastbourne, and get past Kim Clijsters, who took the title there in 2005.

As an accomplished baseliner, Wozniacki hits with depth and has superb ball placement. She is also able to mix up the pace and spin with her shots. Consistency and mental tenacity are her strengths, along with footwork, speed, anticipation, and hard-hitting ground strokes. She rarely makes a large number of unforced errors, and she has shown up and fought through matches to the best of her ability, week after week, pushing through her injuries.

Wozniacki's ankle problems haven't allowed her to play at her best level in recent months, but she has shown a marked improvement, making it to the quarterfinals at the French Open. She has stepped out of her comfort zone at the baseline a bit more, and is slowly taking more risks at the net. The speed on Wozniacki's serve has also shown improvement, reaching speeds as high as 118 mph at the French Open, up from 107-110 mph at the Australian Open.

The question is, how good does Caroline Wozniacki have to be to win her first Grand Slam singles title and/or achieve the world No. 1 ranking? I agree that Wozniacki needs to develop more weapons, or, even one BIG weapon. She also needs to be the one dictating points more often than her opponent.

To fairly assess Wozniacki's game, you also have to look at those players who are currently ranked No. 1 and 2 in the world. What do Serena and Venus have that Wozniacki doesn't? Experience. Venus has been on the WTA Tour for 16 years, Serena, 15. Even Sam Stosur, who is having the best year of her career, has been on the Tour for 11 years. Serena didn't achieve the No. 1 ranking (for the first time) until 2002. By that point, Serena had been on the Tour for seven years.

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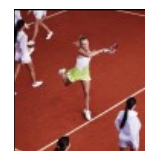
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Wozniacki definitely has more match experience than she had a year ago, but with so many players who have so many more years of experience under their belt, it's understandable that Wozniacki's game, by comparison, may not seem to be where it should be. But in tennis, when you weigh experience vs. age, experience usually wins. In time, Wozniacki will be as good as she has to be.

*Paula Vergara is a freelance tennis journalist, covering the WTA and ATP tours. Paula's publishing credits include On the Baseline Tennis News, Tennis.com, USTA New England Magazine, and Bob Larson's Tennis News. Paula is also a member of the United States Tennis Writers' Association. To view her work, visit [www.paula-vergara.blogspot.com](http://www.paula-vergara.blogspot.com).*

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## 7 LEGACY COMMENTS



**Angel**

June 14, 2010 at 9:16 am

Serena didn't play Juniors, nor did she play anywhere near a full schedule and she already had won a slam at Wozniacki's age. I really dislike selective stats.

Wozniacki is a pusher and a point chaser. Liking her personality or trying to say she's committed to playing even when it's ill-advised for the longevity of her career and health doesn't change that.



**Marine**

June 14, 2010 at 10:49 am

Wozniacki is a great player who has proven her qualities. Media these days undermine everyone who has not won a slam as if other tournaments meant nothing. I find the accusation of being a point collector totally ridiculous. To "collect" those points a player has to actually win a lot of matches and go pretty far in tournaments. Caroline works very hard and not just at grand slams to earn points and then withdraw with one reason or the other. In addition she does not play that many tournaments as some say.



**The Fan Child**

June 14, 2010 at 11:52 am

I'd like to see Caroline take it to another level. She's pretty charismatic out there and she's got the rare ability to not get too invested emotionally in her matches. I was very impressed by how she fought to get by Pennetta in Paris, especially given that she's been suffering from injuries.

Now that she's gotten this far, I'd like to see her find another gear.

Does she really want to be the best in the world? Or, is she content just to make friends and be a part of the tour as "one of the top girls?"

As Paula mentions, she's the only teenager in the top-25 – that's nothing to scoff at. She deserves a lot of credit for getting to the top of the WTA's food chain. But she can go higher, and I think that is what many of us want to see, which is why we tend to be hard on her.



**Pistol Pete**

June 14, 2010 at 2:07 pm



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They use smaller and faster balls for French Open than all the other slams, so it's useless to compare service speed from Australian Open with the service speed French Open.

Before the 2002 season ITF decided to increase the ball size by 7% to slow down the game and reduce the number of aces especially on the men's side. But not for French Open, because it's already a slow surface.

If you look at the all time service records, a lot of them was set at French Open, simply because they use smaller and faster balls than other tournaments, even other clay court tournamnets.

**Sunny nine**

June 16, 2010 at 4:53 pm

Fan Child I don't think Wozniacki can find that extra gear if she doesn't take care of herself to peak for the big titles (Majors, Mandatory Premiers and the Premier 5) She played Indian Wells, Miami and then won a small title in Fla. Maybe she shouldn't have played in Charleston. If one is tired then it is easy to get injured. Also after the injury she continued to play every week. If she had stopped a couple weeks maybe she would have been ready to go even further at Roland Garros. She said that the doctors said the ankle wouldn't get worse playing on it but not getting worse does not mean getting better. She is already out of Eastbourne. She has drive but now she needs to mature about her schedule. When del Potro on the men's side made his move in 2008 with several wins in a row, his points rose. But the next year he didn't worry about defending the smaller tournaments but focused on the Masters and eventually won the US Open.

**Marine**

October 2, 2010 at 1:19 pm

"To take care of herself" meaning throwing matches or withdrawing from scheduled events due to "injuries"? That's a fraud. The best players should work hard at all kinds of events they enter and try to win. Caroline has a fair attitude, she does stick to the commitments of the tour and plays well consistently.

When someone wins a grand slam playing well all year is a sign of being an elite player, avoiding match play to save energy for a big-wallet tournament is something completely different (and less worthy).

**LJLam**

October 12, 2010 at 11:53 pm

She has to be way better than she is...she's only #1 because she has no real contenders. With the W girls out...anybody can be #1 for the time being....All of the best players are gone or injured. WHAT!??