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Making Sense of Women's Tennis

By [Paula Vergara](#)

Updated: May 28, 2011

I admit it. I didn't hit the snooze button Friday morning thinking that world No. 1 [Caroline Wozniacki](#) would lose in the third round of the French Open. Did anyone? Especially not to [Daniela Hantuchova](#), who, despite being a dangerous player, hasn't beaten Wozniacki in three attempts. Nor did I think that the 2010 French Open runner-up, [Sam Stosur](#), would crash out in three sets to [Gisela Dulko](#). Same goes for Thursday, when the No. 2 seed, [Kim Clijsters](#) lost to No. 114, [Arantxa Rus](#) in the second round. So much for prognostications. If the tennis rankings as well as the seeding process are supposed to help us make sense of the tennis "hierarchy", then why does it seem so nonsensical?



There's a First Time for Everything

According to the WTA, the 2011 [French Open](#) is first time in the Open Era that neither the No. 1 or No. 2 women's seeds have made the round of 16 at a Grand Slam. Chances are, it won't happen again. But, it's not so easy to believe that this is a one-time thing. Early round victories at Grand Slams are typically foregone conclusions for the No. 1 and No. 2 ranked players, but *typical* doesn't seem to apply to women's tennis anymore.

Comparatively Speaking

So here's everyone's favorite subject: The Slam-less No. 1. Whenever we see Caroline Wozniacki lose in a Grand Slam, we have to replay the Slam-less No. 1 broken record, over and over again. It is an inevitable comparison to those players who have set the bar higher than where it currently sits. Even the most skilled player holding the No. 1 ranking will always be seen as less skilled compared to those who have won a Grand Slam. Wozniacki has mastered the art of winning on smaller stages, but a Grand Slam win continues to elude her. And the volume on that broken record seems to be getting louder.

When Less is More

I am likely not the only one who thinks that Caroline Wozniacki would have been wise to have skipped the inaugural Brussels Open, where she won her first title on red clay. The downside of winning the Brussels title--she only had two days to recover for the French Open.

She has faced a similar predicament in the past, playing the New Haven Open at Yale (formerly the Pilot Pen), a US Open warm up. She has won this tournament three years in a row, giving her just a few days of rest before the start of the US Open. She lost in the final of the US Open in 2009 against Kim Clijsters--the same year she won her second title in New Haven. Is she simply making bad choices about which tournaments to play? Is she inadvertently sabotaging her chances to win a Grand Slam by racking up too many titles at smaller tournaments? It makes you wonder if she could

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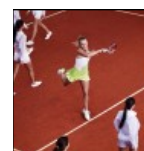
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have won the 2009 US Open had she skipped New Haven. It's a tough choice, for sure. But despite her seemingly endless supply of energy, something tells me Wozniacki might have to make more sensible choices moving forward. Pacing herself a bit more carefully might be a good start.

Tough Day for Sam

Australia's No. 1 player and 2010 French Open runner-up, Sam Stosur was expected to at least get through the first week of the French Open, but Gisela Dulko had other plans. Stosur had been suffering from a bad head cold, which likely was a factor in her third round loss. Regardless of the reasons, Sam's loss at Roland Garros is more disappointing than surprising, given the year she's had so far. Looking ahead, the grass court season is probably not something that Sam is looking forward to, since her game is not well suited to grass. We may have to wait until the hard court season to see Sam get her game and head back on track.

Kim's Crash

Kim Clijsters' second round defeat at the hands of Arantxa Rus had to be the biggest surprise upset of the French Open. Especially after Kim was leading 6-3, 5-2, and had two match points before losing the match 3-6, 7-5, 6-1. Kim really didn't look like herself out there, and admitted in her post-match press conference that self-doubt had crept in. Her ankle seemed fine, but Clijsters has never really enjoyed playing on clay. And it showed.

Seizing the Opportunity

There's always opportunity to be had from someone else's misfortune. And that's just what Sharapova, Jankovic, Azarenka, Zvonareva, Kuznetsova, and Schiavone are hoping for, as they advance further into the tournament. Marion Bartoli is also keeping hope alive for a French champion. Li Na, who had a rough time after the Australian Open, seems to be back on track.

Amidst the wave of top seed crashes, there has also emerged an opportunity for some of the less experienced, up-and-comers to establish themselves as credible threats. Kvitova, Petkovic, Pavlyuchenkova, and Gajdosova are a few that seem to have a fighting chance at the title.

Don't Look Back


As tempting as it may seem, there's no sense in thinking that it's possible to recapture the past, especially if you try to go back to a time when Serena was ranked No. 1. Or a time when Serena and her sister Venus were dominating every single Grand Slam they entered. The reality is, both Venus and Serena have put in 15-16 years on the WTA Tour. Venus will be turning 31 in a few weeks, and Serena will be 30 in September. Having won 20 Grand Slam singles titles between them, the sisters simply have nothing left to prove. That's not to say tennis wouldn't greatly benefit from their return. Remember those days when everyone yawned at a predictable all-Williams final at Wimbledon? I wouldn't mind seeing that predictability return to tennis. There is a chance they might play Wimbledon again this year, but beyond that, I can't see either of them playing much after the 2011 US Open, other than the 2012 Olympics. Even if they do, it's not likely that they can return to their peak playing ability. But then again, for the die-hard Venus and Serena fans, it doesn't seem to matter how well they play. As long as they play.

So what have I learned about women's tennis over the past few days? It seems that if there's anything for sure, it's that there's no sure thing. That makes sense.

Paula Vergara is a contributing writer at On The Baseline Tennis News. You can follow her on Twitter here: @paulavergara

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 **The Fan Child**
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I think in a weird way it all makes sense. There's so much depth but nobody to replace Serena, Venus and Justine. Those are some pretty tough acts to follow and it will take time. Somebody will step up, but from the looks of things, it won't happen this year.

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