

Sports

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THE BATTALION

Thursday, September 6

Venus Williams, Capriati will face off in semifinals

NEW YORK (AP) — Venus Williams was erratic, Jennifer Capriati was ecstatic. Now the winners of the year's first three Grand Slam titles will meet for a spot in the final of the fourth major.

Not a whole lot went right for Williams at the U.S. Open on Wednesday — the 43 unforced errors, the 48 percent of first

"The Open has really blown up a lot, and tennis, in general is so popular.."

— Jennifer Capriati
No. 2 seed

serves that missed the mark, the eight double-faults. Just enough did go the defending champion's way, though, to add up to a 6-3, 6-1 quarterfinal victory over Kim Clijsters.

Then the No. 2-seeded Capriati went out and pounded her way to a 6-3, 6-4 victory

over No. 8 Amelie Mauresmo to reach the semifinals here for the first time since 1991, before her well-documented decline.

"Everything's kind of changed. Look at how the U.S. Open has changed. They've got a brand new huge stadium. The Open has really blown up a lot, and tennis, in general, is so popular. I'm glad that 10 years later I'm able to be part of it," Capriati said.

"I'm very happy, joyous, ecstatic. It's a great sense of satisfaction — and I'm very grateful, also."

Williams and Capriati have been alternately dominant in 2001, and they're the only two women who have not dropped a set so far at the Open. That will change in Friday's semifinals.

"It's going to be pretty tough. She's been playing well, but I've been playing well," said Capriati, who this week has a chance to take over the No. 1 ranking for the first time in her career.

"Hopefully, I can come out and play my best tennis."

Venus' younger sister, 10th-seeded

Serena, will play No. 1 Martina Hingis in the other semifinal. They advanced Tuesday.

Capriati's renaissance blossomed at the championships at the Australian and French Opens this year; Williams took her straight title at Wimbledon.

"She's a very strong player. She hits everything well. She hits the ball quite hard. Williams said, scouting her next opponent, "Nowadays, I don't really try to hit the ball hard anymore. Maybe I don't hit as much pace on every shot as she does."

Williams has won all three of their previous meetings, including twice this year in hardcourts. That includes their most recent encounter, in the final of the Ericsson Open in March, when Capriati frittered away match points.

She and Mauresmo slugged it out on the baseline Wednesday, trading powerful strokes and rarely resorting to tactics. Capriati managed to limit the number of errors better than Mauresmo.

Williams did not limit hers, but she

Leaf signs on as Dallas' QB

IRVING (AP) — Ryan Leaf never saw the welcome the Dallas Cowboys had planned for him. He failed a physical because of a wrist problem and remains one of the NFL's many unemployed veteran quarterbacks.

Leaf's name and the number 16 were written in black on a strip of white tape over a locker in the Cowboys' clubhouse Wednesday. Three pairs of shoes with 16 printed on the heel, a white practice jersey, a helmet and several unused hangers awaited him.

"It was an injury that concerned us enough that we couldn't make a decision to put him on the roster," Cowboys' owner Jerry Jones said. "I know he was disappointed, I don't know that he was surprised. There's no question he was surprised it would impact our decision as much as it did."

Jones said that after an initial evaluation discovered the problem, specialists were brought in to give it a further look. He declined to give any more specifics.

Leaf left the team's headquarters without talking to reporters, ducking in the front

seat of a van to avoid being photographed.

"Ryan was excited with the Cowboys opportunity and he couldn't be more disappointed about how it turned out," said David Dunn, Leaf's agent. "I think right now, we're going to explore all our options. The most important thing is his health and getting his wrist right."

Dunn said he hopes the two sides can strike a deal once Leaf is healthy.

"I think Ryan thinks the world of Jerry and the Cowboys organization. My feeling is Jerry feels the same way about Ryan," Dunn said.

Leaf, the second overall pick in 1998 draft, was waived by San Diego in March and by Tampa Bay on Monday. The status of his once promising career is in limbo.

The Cowboys were interested in Leaf as their third stringer behind rookie starter Quincy Carter and second year backup Anthony Wright. They were initially interested in Leaf in March, having considered him to replace Troy Aikman. But they could not afford him then.

Refs consider offer NFL increases offer to officials

NEW YORK (AP) — The NFL Referees Union has a day to consider a new offer by the league before replacements are assigned to work the opening week of the regular season.

The NFL increased its offer to the locked-out officials Wednesday but rejected a call by the union for arbitration in a meeting that lasted just a half-hour.

Then union negotiator Tom Condon flew home to Kansas City. He was due to discuss the offer in a conference call late Wednesday night with the union's four-member executive committee — Ed Hochuli, Bill Carollo, Jeff Bergman and Ben Montgomery.

The NFL offer includes a 60 percent increase in salaries this year, compared with the 40-percent jump in the NFL's last offer. But the rest of the package remains the same, with officials' salaries doubled by 2003.

Even the new offer is far below what the union has demanded.

League spokesman Greg Aiello said the league had to know the union's response by Thursday in order to make plans for the weekend.

"We hope the members will consider it and respond favorably," Aiello said.

Hochuli, the association president, told Fox Sports he believed the board would reject the offer and the replacement officials would work this weekend.

Messages left for Hochuli by The Associated Press had not been returned Wednesday.

Last week, the league locked out its officials, who have been without a contract since March. Commissioner Paul Tagliabue said the NFL didn't want to start the season without a contract, which would allow officials to walk off the field at any time.

Last week's final exhibitions were worked with replacements, most from college or the Arena League, and there were no major gaffes. The league clearly was concerned that once the game counted, small mistakes would be magnified.

Talks resumed Tuesday and reconvened Wednesday morning, when the league put its new offer on the table. Over the long term, however, the two sides remain 50-75 percent apart.



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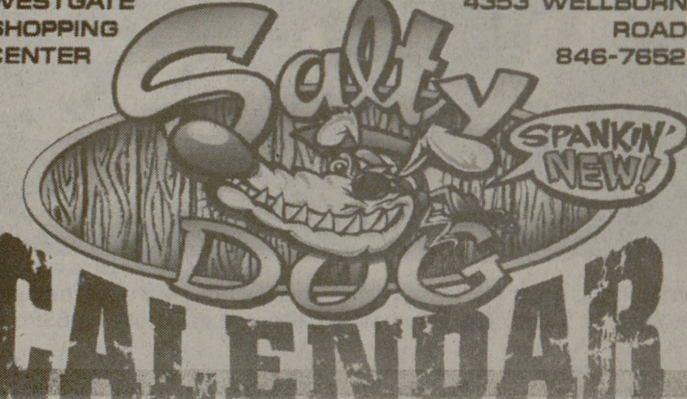
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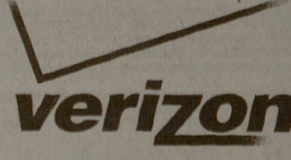
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