

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB LUNCHEON WITH VENUS WILLIAMS

SUBJECT: WIMBLEDON, THE WASHINGTON KASTLES AND HER NEW BOOK

MODERATOR: ALAN BJERGA, PRESIDENT, NATIONAL PRESS CLUB

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ALAN BJERGA: (Sounds gavel.) Good afternoon, and welcome to the National Press Club. My name is Alan Bjerga. I'm a reporter at Bloomberg News, and the President of the National Press Club. We're the world's leading professional organization for journalists and are committed to our profession's future through our programming and by fostering a free press worldwide. For more information about the Press Club, please visit our redesigned website at www.press.org. To donate to our professional training and scholarship programs, please visit www.press.org/library.

On behalf of our members worldwide, I'd like to welcome our speaker and attendees at today's event, which includes guests of our speaker as well as working journalists. I'd also like to welcome our C-SPAN and Public Radio audiences. After the speech concludes, I will ask as many audience questions as time permits. I'd now like to introduce our head table guests.

From your right, Kevin Keene, Senior Vice President of Public Affairs for the American Beverage Association; Rod Kuckro of Platts, McGraw, Hill. He's the Chair of the National Press Club's Mentoring Committee; Ann-Marie Adams, editor, *The Hartford Guardian*; Carlos Fleming, Executive Vice President for IMG, where he represents Venus Williams; Linda Kramer Jennings, Washington editor of *Glamour*; Isha Price, sister of the speaker; Andrew Schneider, associate editor for Kiplinger and Chairman of the Speakers Committee.

Skipping our speaker for the moment, Matt Mlynarczyk, President of the Advocatus Group LLC and the Speakers Committee member who organized this event;

Mark Ein, owner of the Washington Kastles and guest of the speaker; Cynthia Tucker, columnist for the *Atlanta Journal Constitution*; Michele Salcedo, editor for the Associated Press and President of the National Association of Hispanic Journalists; Bob Edwards, host for XM Public Radio; and Kelly Carter, coauthor of Venus's book, *Come to Win*. Thank you. (Applause)

Tennis player Venus Williams, for a decade and a half, has been a major force in her sport, becoming the first African-American professional tennis player to reach the number one world ranking in 2002. Venus was introduced to tennis by her father on the public courts of Los Angeles. By age 10, her serve topped 100 miles per hour. Already well known in tennis circles by age 14, Williams turned professional in 1994 and in her first match beat the 50th ranked player in the world.

In 1997, she became the first unseeded U.S. Open women's finalist in the open era, but lost that finals match to Martina Hingis. Coincidentally, the two will face each other again this evening here in Washington. In 2000, she won Wimbledon and the U.S. Open and defended both titles in 2001. Since then, Venus Williams has captured seven Grand Slam titles, including five Wimbledon championships, joining Martina Navratilova and Steffi Graf as the only women to have accomplished this.

But the accomplishments of Venus Williams don't end on the court. Last year, *Forbes* magazine named her one of the top 100 most powerful celebrities. After graduating with a fashion design degree from the Art Institute of Ft. Lauderdale, she launched her clothing line with a major national retailer and also founded V Starr Interiors, an interior design firm. The firm has designed the set of PBS's *Tavis Smiley Show*, the Olympic athletes apartment, as part of the recent U.S. bid for the 2012 Olympic games, along with private residences and businesses. Today, Venus will share her experiences from tennis and about how sports has forged her character, as well as her own exploration of how sports has contributed to the success of others. Please welcome to the National Press Club, Venus Williams. (Applause)

MS. WILLIAMS: Thank you so much, Alan, for that wonderful introduction. Thank you so much for all my guests who came today and such a wonderful panel up here on the table. And also, thank you guys for coming, listening and hope you enjoy what I have to say. If not, you can just pretend, make me feel good.

Most of you all know me as a tennis player. I'm from Compton, California and grew up playing tennis. I started at the age of four. All of us played tennis, it was a family thing. If you weren't playing, if you weren't hitting balls, you were picking up balls. And we used to drive to the courts every day after school with a big old shopping cart filled with balls. And as a kid, I used to love to hit every ball in the basket and if my dad didn't let me hit every ball in the basket, then I'd start crying. And there was a tradition. When we got to the last ball, he would say, "Last ball," and I would hit it and that made me so happy and we really just stopped saying that a few years ago. So started at four and all the way now I'm 30, we just stopped saying, "Last ball."

I want to say thanks, just right off the start, to my sister Isha. She's been one of the biggest supporters in my career on and off the court. Just even from the beginning, she was a wonderful tennis player, also. So it was really a family thing for us, starting to play tennis. Serena, as you know, is a tennis player also. First name basis, huh? You know what I'm talking about.

So we all grew up in, I think, a very unique environment, a unique home of kind of our dad being a visionary and our mother being a very, very solid person and our parents were our role models. Our dad taught us, and our mom, they taught us a sense of self belief and confidence, which I think is uncommon in the area that we grew up in, uncommon for women especially as more recently, women have taken definitely further strides. But as women, we were brought up to be very confident and to believe in ourselves.

And to have free thought. I think a lot of people are brought up to think the traditional way; go out, get a job, fit in into society. Our parents taught us to go out and make your own path. Make a difference in your own way. And I think that has made a huge difference for the way we do things, even on the court. Kind of different style of tennis, a different way of approaching life. Just kind of let who you are shine through. I definitely credit my parents for where we are today. They were our role models growing up, and still are. I turned out just like them, so hopefully that's good, you guys think so.

Tennis has taught me a lot of lessons. I think what I'd like to talk about mostly today is how sport mirrors life and life mirrors sport. You learn so many lessons in sport that are so important for life. I encourage everyone to play sports. And even if you aren't going to that professional level and making it a career choice, as I have, it teaches you so many lessons, a few I'd like to talk about today.

Focus and drive, you have to be focused, you have to be disciplined. You have to be willing to show up every day if you want to be good, if you want to perform well when you get into competition. You have to be focused during the whole practice. You can't let your mind wander, you can't have those lapses. And that translates over into life, when you're in school and when you're at work, when you're trying to achieve something. Whatever it takes, you have to stay focused.

Discipline is huge. You have to be disciplined. Often, Serena and I will say, "You know what? On the court today in my match, I had no discipline. I didn't make myself do what I needed to do." And it's the same thing in life. You have to have discipline in order to put the work in. And it's not always easy. It's something that comes with time. And as a young person, sports does teach you how to be disciplined. It teaches you how to apply yourself and how that really does make a difference.

And at times, it's just a lesson that especially when you have good coaches around you, like I had my mom and my dad, good coaches and good people around you who instill that into you, to make it fun without you even realizing that these are the lessons that you're learning.

Success and failure. Sports prepares you for life in terms of learning how to succeed and also failing. I've had failures, that's sports, failing and it helps you to be successful. I turned pro at age 14 and that's kind of common in women's tennis. It doesn't happen as much anymore because there's rules now that kind of keep you off the tour. But I did turn pro at 14. I didn't play a lot of tennis, I was mostly in high school. I had to turn pro just to be grandfathered in so that way I could play when I wanted to, because they were changing the rules as far as age eligibility. So, I went to high school and kind of was a regular kid, besides the fact that I trained five hours a day after school.

But, I turned pro and finally I started playing my first full year probably around '97, I turned pro in '94. So of course I had a lot of hype around me and a lot of expectation. And I went out there and started hitting the ball and beating players. And I think that first year, I started at around 200 and I think I ended the year in the top 20 because that was my goal. We were always setting goals, we were always taught to set goals and write them down. My dad said, "Don't have it in your head, always have it on paper." And I find that becomes something very important. When you see it with your eyes, it somehow goes into your head and becomes visual and becomes something real.

So, that was one of my goals that year, was to get in the top 20 and to be the *Tennis* magazine Player of the Year, and the WTA Newcomer of the Year, to see my name on that ranking list in the top. All these different little things that happened that were so exciting. But, of course I played well, but I hadn't won a major yet. So by 2000, I was coming back from an injury and I had-- actually, let's back up to '99. And Serena and I were both in the U.S. Open final, so I'm sure you guys are familiar with the U.S. Open. And we both were in it. I'm sorry, semifinal, and she played her match really well, and I played my match. I just didn't make the right decisions, and I got nervous and I made-- incidentally against Martina Hingis. I just wasn't able to make the right choices, and that was a huge failure for me because it could have been an all-Williams final and it would have been huge. Both of us in our first final against each other. So that failure made me realize that I had to do whatever it took on the court and stick to what I knew and execute it and not kind of start backpedaling because you get a little nervous or doubt.

So I credit that failure to my successes for the forward. So that is a lesson in failure in sports and how it really can propel you. And sometimes, you have to have that big loss, that eye opener that really takes you to the next level. But at the same time, as much as you can learn from failing, succeeding is equally as important, and learning how to succeed and learning how to win and knowing how to be a winner and having that winning attitude and having that attitude of positivity, doing whatever it takes to win. At the same time as being a good sport, most of the time. Until the cameras turn off, right? (Laughter)

Confidence, there's nothing like pushing yourself physically, mentally and emotionally to the place that you never thought you could get to or get past. And you learn so much about yourself. You strengthen your character, you learn that you really can do anything you put your mind to. And that's a lesson that I always try to instill in

young people that I talk to about sports and how it gives you that confidence. That hey, I did this on the field, or I did this when I was in varsity X sports. And I can do this in the classroom, I can do this in life.

I think also learning to compete. It's not always a natural thing. I think I'm a good competitor, I think I have a lot of talent. But early on, I don't think I had that huge, huge heart. And I think Serena and I, we play off of each other. She learns something from me, I learn something from her. And I recall, she was really just a young kid, she was about 16 years old and she was playing maybe against the number one player in the world and she's not even in the top 100 and she's just coming out on tour. And I don't know if you guys know tennis scores, but she was basically down 6-2, 5-1, double match point. And that didn't mean a thing to her because she won the match. (Laughter)

And I remember, we were in Sydney, Australia, so there was this headline that said, "White City's Great Escape," because that was the name of the tournament, White City, so she posted it on her wall and we would read it every now and then, we were really young. So I would read it in an Australian voice. We'd recall those moments and I remember when I won my first tournament and it was the same year a little later, and I was playing this player, I don't know if I should say any names. I won't. Maybe after my career, but I'd lost to her three times. She always got the best of me. And I recall I went on the side on the changeover and I put the towel in my hands and I started crying, to be honest. I didn't want anyone to see, "I can't lose to her again. This is destroying my career. I can't have this happen."

So after, you know, the 30 seconds and my cry was over, I got up and I thought about how Serena, how she'd gotten through and how I needed that same heart. And I think that's the day that my heart grew. So, even if you don't know how to compete in the beginning, sport will teach you how to compete, how to fight back, how to come back from that loss or how to win. So I've learned a lot of lessons in sport.

And I think one of the most important ones is being humble. I think sports keeps you humble because it doesn't matter how good you are, it doesn't matter if you're number one in the world and you've won 50 matches, you're going to lose and you're going to lose a big one that hurts. And you're going to have to learn how to come back from that. And you are going to have to learn how to deal with people saying that you might not make it back, even though you are number one. And you're going to have to learn to deal with criticism and take it all in stride, either from outside sources or from coaches, or even from yourself, the criticism that you-- I think all of us are our hardest critics. So you're going to have to learn how to deal with all of that.

And I feel that sports keeps you humble, because each and every time, you know you have to be prepared. You know that you have to give your best, or else it could be that day that you lose a match that you really want to win. So, it keeps you humble enough that you know you have to keep working hard. You can't let up or else you know the consequences of that.

So those are the lessons learned I learned in sport. I could keep going on and on and on, lots and lots of stories, especially about my losses. I think those are the most funny, to be honest. Who cares about the wins? It's so funny, Serena and I, we don't ever talk about tennis, really, though when we do we always talk about the mistakes we made and we laugh at them. We don't sit around talking about, "Oh, did you see that great shot? It was epic." (Laughter) We say, "Did you see that bad shot? I'm so embarrassed, I almost had to leave the court." It's interesting.

As an athlete, I think it's important to be a complete person. And as much as I'd like to say, "Oh, tennis doesn't consume me, I'm not just a tennis player, I'm a full person," tennis is my life. I've gotten up every day, and that's what I think about, especially as I got to be an adult and it was my responsibility to make sure my career went the way it was. And as athlete you get up and that's all you think about. How am I going to play, how am I going to prepare, how am I going to stay healthy? Everything is around the sport and it's like a marriage. Some people say, "Do you want to get married?" I'm like, "I'm already married." And sometimes, it's not easy. I have to make this relationship work.

So, as much as it's consuming, if you can imagine something that you're obsessed with, and it's been 20 years, plus 20 years, you're obsessed with, it's easy to lose who you are in that sport and not know who you are outside of it. And I think our parents were very smart to make sure that we pursued other things. So that way, we would know who we were. So that way, when it was all over, when it was all said and done, or God forbid we had a career ending injury, we're not just flailing, wondering who we are and what do we do with the rest of our lives with more than half your life to live. So I think that was important.

Education, they always stressed education. If we didn't get good grades, we weren't allowed to go to practice. So, we got good grades. I don't recall if I wanted to go to practice, it was just something-- that was my life. My parents started us, we got up, we went to practice, that was that. I didn't think if it was good or bad. That was me, I was a tennis player.

Our dad tricked us, to be honest. He tricked us into thinking that we'd be champions. It wasn't about whether we make it, "Oh gosh, I hope," or "Maybe as a junior, that could happen." "Oh my gosh, I hope," it was like something that would-- he would always say, "And one day you're going to win Wimbledon and you're going to be number one and two in the world." He had us brainwashed. It was really just a matter of getting old enough, not even good enough. And obviously, we trained at the right things, we worked hard and maybe some extra talent in the genetics, all of that really helps. But we were literally brainwashed.

So my dad would say, "Okay, now pick a tournament that you want to win and say you're going to win that more times than any other person who's ever played tennis." So Serena was the younger sister, so she always copied me. She would, of course, want to wear the same things I wanted to wear and couldn't make up her mind what she wanted to

do what I did. Not much has changed. (Laughter) So we'll be in the locker room, she'll say, "Are you going to shower first or just go straight home?" And if I say, "I'm going to go straight home." "Okay, I'm going straight home." "No, I'm going to shower first." "I'm going to shower first." It's like, "Please, make up your mind." Still the same.

But I would say Wimbledon, I wanted to win Wimbledon. And Serena would say Wimbledon, she said, no. Even my dad said, "No, you can't do that, you have to pick your own," so she picked the U.S. Open. So he had us thinking already from the beginning that we would win these major tournaments. So often when people ask me, "Well, how should I train my kids?" And I say, "Well, make sure it's fun, first of all. And second, tell them that they can do it, tell them that they would win."

I recall once, I was about eight years old and I had this coach, his name was Paul Cohen, and-- not a coach, I would go see him maybe once a week and my dad would come and he would give us some lessons. And he also worked with John McEnroe. So one day, he had it set up that-- actually, Pete Sampras before he won the U.S. Open, so he came out and he let us hit with Pete and McEnroe. And so McEnroe, if anyone's seen his game, it's very eccentric. It's all about touch and feel, he doesn't hit the ball hard, but he puts you in these bad positions. So I saw that he wasn't hitting super-hard and after we went back to the-- we were in Brentwood, it was a lesson, we went back to Compton, in the bus, went back to practice. I was explaining to my dad how I would beat John McEnroe. It's like, "Dad, I'd hit it here, I'd hit it there and I'd beat him." And at first, he was telling me, "Now Venus, you can't beat John." But after a while he thought, "Wow, this girl really thinks she can beat John McEnroe. I think I'm going to tell her she can." So he said, "You know what? You will beat him, you can." So it was definitely a positive, positive environment growing up.

Our parents also taught us to work for ourselves and think for ourselves and to be entrepreneurs. They always said go to college and get a degree, have your own business. So my dreams always were to do those things outside of tennis, also. But when you turn pro at 14, you're touring 10, 11 months of the year. Maybe it's not an option to do those things. But I managed to go to school and it took me eight years to graduate, and I threw my hat the highest and I thought, "Well, you know, I didn't graduate at the top of my class, but I had the best shoes." (Laughter)

So, you know, it would go on with the gown and my outfit, it was all about the sparkly shoes and it was a great moment for me to do what my parents asked of me, because I've never wanted to let them down. And also I started my own business, fashion design, because that's what I went to school for with EleVen, which is about being better than a ten. So it's all that philosophy of being your best. And I have a whole lot of fun wearing my clothes on the court.

And I have a design company called V Starr Interiors, which Alan mentioned a little bit earlier. So, I love design, interior design. It's my obsession outside of tennis because I like to make things perfect. So I do it over and over and over again until it's right.

On the WTA tour, I'm a player council member and that means that I sit on the player council for top players and we help to make decisions in the sport. And I've been on that council for ages, at least 10 years, maybe 12, but that makes me look old, so 10 years sounds better. And there's some important things that have happened in women's tennis lately, making the schedule shorter so that way players can play longer. Making it more healthy, and it was an interesting move because that was something that Serena and I had always done early on, maybe not play as many tournaments, play a schedule that made sense so that way we could be healthy and enjoy what we do and hopefully do it as long as possible.

And equal prize money for women at the major championships. (Applause) That was a definitely important goal for the tour in the last few years. It was since the open era, since tennis players became professional and got paychecks, women had always been paid less than the men. And there were arguments of whether or not we should play the same amount of sets or whether women's tennis had as much value as the men. Historically, sometimes maybe men's tennis was more popular, sometimes it's women. There's ups and downs in popularity, it just happens.

So it was like the players would go into the Grand Slam meeting, the WTA representatives and present the case and every year, the stamp of rejection. "No, we don't think we should have equal prize money for women." So in the last few years, when we did get it before that, we had a campaign that was very organized. Instead of just kind of having that one meeting per year, really having a plan on how to get the equal prize money. Because we felt like we're the premier sport for women around the world. And so we're role models and so what kind of example are we setting if we were not being paid as much as the men? And it wasn't the principle of making more money because the discrepancy really was small. If it was even 1 percent less, it was probably less than 1 percent less.

So, I went into one of the Grand Slam meetings, and of course they were all men. Men are good people, but not to discriminate and say that-- they were mostly men. And I knew I had to say something that was important to them. So, I asked everyone to close their eyes and whether or not they could tell the difference between the person next to them, whether they were a man or a woman. And that all our hearts beat the same way and in the same rhythm. And that if they had a son and a daughter, would they want to tell their daughter that, "No, you should get paid less because, hey, you're a woman." And I also told them no peeking.

So hopefully that speech made a difference, along with our campaign and so Wimbledon announced there would be equal prize money, it was-- after 35 years, when it actually gets announced long before you think that it would happen, we thought we would be campaigning for years and years and years, it was just an amazing moment. And then it was only the French Open who was last about equal prize money. A week later, they said, "Us, too." Like, oh really? I could put my picket sign down? I wasn't quite ready. You're not ready for that fight to be over, it just was an amazing moment, too

surreal. So I'd like to think that equal prize money would be a legacy for me when I'm all done and retired, that hopefully will be something that's on my resume to say, "Hey, Venus did something for the sport and something for women besides what I might do for myself by winning championships."

Giving back was something that our parents always told us to do. I recall when we were younger, our dad would actually have us teach other kids. So we were only eight years old, but he always said, "You have to give back, you have to give back." So we would go out and teach kids who didn't know how to play tennis. And today, there's an important program with the WTA, the UNESCO program for gender equality for women that got started. I was at the ESPY's one year, which is the best award show ever because you care. When you see these people in these moments of extreme triumph or extreme disaster, you just relate to it because it really does mirror life.

So there were these women in Afghanistan playing sports, but they had to play behind these big concrete walls. They just, as women, they couldn't play because of the things that were going against them because of culture. So when I saw that and they got this award and they were still trying, there's not a dry eye in the house. So I was like, "We have to do something." So UNESCO agreed to come on board with the WTA and we've been making programs for gender equality around the world. It's just a start, but I think it's something that will be very important and for us women tennis players to continue to be role models and to continue to give back.

Recently, I wrote a book, it's called *Come to Win*. We have some contributors here today, very pleased. The book is about sports mirroring life and how it gives back, how sports gives so much to your life and all these philosophies that I believed in. I saw that people were very successful also, believed in the same things. And I found it very encouraging, too, as the book was being written and we were doing interviews, all these things that people would say, it's like they were saying it just for me. I needed it. So I'd take little notes out of-- Donnie Deutsch said this. If you lose, the only tragedy is that you didn't learn from the failure. Or different things like that that I'd actually-- because I write notes sometimes, especially when I want to get really focused before the match. I write what I want to accomplish and I bring it out on the court with me.

And I don't even always look at the notes. Most of the time I don't, but just to know that they're there and I wrote them down, it makes a difference for me. I heard Arthur Ashe used to do that also. So Dr. Q, a neurosurgeon is here today. And Susan Slusser and Leland Melvin and Debra Lee. And I'd like to give a big thanks to Dawn Davis, a publisher who really understood my vision for this, and Carlos Fleming, who really made it work and was the catalyst. And this book is very important to me because I feel like it's something that will be around for ten years. You just take it off your shelf when you need that extra motivation and that extra guidance that says it's fine. It's fine if you don't make it the first time. And it's something that I'm very proud of and I hope will be part of my legacy when it's all said and done and I'm done with tennis.

I'd like to thank you guys for listening to me today. And I guess we have some questions. (Applause)

MR. BJERGA: We do, and keep them all coming, just pass them up towards here because we have a good amount of time to ask some questions. And thank you so much for making yourself available to answer them. Our first question is dealing with what you have seen over the course of your career. How has the development of tennis players changed since you were beginning in the early 1990s? Is it as possible for an elite player to come from the public courts of Los Angeles as you did?

MS. WILLIAMS: Absolutely, it's definitely possible for someone to come from public courts. Most of the players who are in the top right now are from eastern Europe and we know that eastern Europe has come a long way the last ten years, but it wasn't a real place of prosperity when you think about Russian or the Ukraine or all these different places, and these players are on top. If anything, I think there's a lot of young people who are hungry in these areas, as opposed to take children who might have it a little easier. So I think it's really the place where our champions should come from.

MR. BJERGA: You talked a bit about Wimbledon. Why did it take Wimbledon so long to award equal prize money to men and women, and how did you get Tony Blair on your side?

MS. WILLIAMS: I pulled Tony aside and I said, "Now, listen." I don't know how. I think he just likes a cause that makes sense. Why did it take so long? I think in the beginning, I think they genuinely did not think that women deserved equal prize money. And then at a point where I think that it did seem like the right thing to do, it was just hard to admit that maybe they weren't right. And that's not easy, and I'm really proud and really happy that they were able to make that change.

MR. BJERGA: Now, you are playing tonight with the Washington Kastles in a match against Martina Hingis, the rematch. Of course, you've played her several times. How do you prepare for a championship match with your sister, Serena, and how would that compare to preparation for a match against a Martina Hingis? Are there any differences?

MS. WILLIAMS: Yes, I prepare for the match in very similar ways. But, depending on the player, at times I'll practice different things, depending on their strength or weakness. So I'll practice according to that a little bit so that way when I get in the match, I can kind of execute those plays and put them in an uncomfortable position. But, of course, practicing for Serena, I have the most respect for her on tour and I think she has the most respect for me. So I think a lot of times getting past how much you respect someone on court is also important, too.

MR. BJERGA: This questioner asks, I'm the father of a teenage daughter who's a very talented athlete. What advice would you have on how best to help her achieve her goals in sports without burning out and handling the pressures that go with sports?

MS. WILLIAMS: I think my parents were really good about that. We'd practice a lot, and it takes a lot of practice and a lot of repetition to get it right because it's got to be muscle memory. When you go out there, you can't think about what you need to do, it has to come naturally. You don't even think, it just happens and you just correct mistakes if you make some. So it does take a lot of time. But we'd be at the park and we'd get to go play tetherball for ten minutes, and then we'd come back out on the court. Or we'd get to go swimming in the summer and do different things to make sure that we still were kids, even though we were training for something big.

And always be positive. Tell them the successes but also be willing to be constructive criticism. Tell them, "Okay, this didn't go right, but you did this really well," so it's important to do both and keep her encouraged.

MR. BJERGA: This questioner asks how many of the men's professional players can you beat? (Laughter)

MS. WILLIAMS: Oh, my gosh. I have played mixed doubles before and I've beaten some teams with a man on it. But whether or not I would like to play against a man, I don't know that that will ever happen. So sorry, I can't answer that question any better than that.

MR. BJERGA: This actually leads into a couple of questions about Billie Jean King, who you and your sister have spoken of. There are two questions. One is could you discuss the impact she had on your lives and why Billie Jean King seems to hold a special place in both of your hearts? And the second question is who would win between you and Billie Jean King? I'm assuming that means her in her prime. She's probably lost a step by now.

MS. WILLIAMS: Let me hold onto those, I'll forget the questions. I first met Billie Jean King as a kid. I was probably about eight years old and it was in World Team Tennis, like tonight. We do clinics in World Team Tennis and autograph signings for the kids after and I was actually at a World Team Tennis clinic. And she was pitching balls. And I remember just thinking how impressive I was. I was thinking I wanted to hit my best balls so she could see how good I could play. And I remember having the time of my life. So as I give clinics today at World Team Tennis, I always remember that. Like these kids, hopefully they're having that same experience I had.

And I just remember still how exciting that was. So, of course, that was my first encounter with her. What was the second part of the question? Why do I respect her so much? I've played also under her in Fed Cup, which is team competition. And I learned a lot from her. She has an enthusiasm for life and for tennis that I haven't seen anyone else have. And I love tennis, but she *loves* tennis. And she's always saying-- like you'd be in the middle of a court, or she'll be on a court with another player. You can hear her, "I love this game." Just randomly. And she always says champions adjust, champions adjust. And she has all these different saying. Life is hard, but accept that. And different

things that just make so much sense that I've carried with me. Plus, she helped me with my backhand volley, so that was huge.

And who would win? I mean, how can I vote against myself, I don't know if it's fair because I've never said someone else would beat me. But it'd be a close match. It'd be a tossup with both of us in our prime.

MR. BJERGA: You mentioned your book, that I think just came out in the last week or so. We have a couple of advance copies around here at the Press Club so we want to be prepared. One thing you discuss is, or the people that speak in your book discuss, is the difference between what you learn from a team sport as opposed to an individual sport. Several interviewees contend that team sports are more important to building success in business. Your background is from an individual sport. There is doubles, but it's predominantly an individual game. Having developed that as your sport, what lessons may you have missed out on and what have you gained?

MS. WILLIAMS: Yes, I think team sports are so much different. You have to learn how to accept-- you have to learn how to win together and how to work together and to trust the person to do their job and not to interfere with that by getting in their way. And at the same time, you have to learn how to lose together, and then how to work together as a team to win and to be confident in each other.

So there's a huge difference. I think doubles is very similar to that because you have to trust your partner and you have to be positive with them and every time they miss, you have to say, "Great play." That's between every point, Serena and I, we clap hands, every point. And there'll be times where, like, say, "Oh gosh, I'm glad that ball didn't come to me because I sure was going to miss. I'm glad she missed instead of me." So there are times where you have to just hold the team up and wait for that other person to get their confidence back.

What did I miss out on team sports? Gosh, probably all the things that I said before, of really learning to trust the next person and work as a team. You do get that to a degree in doubles. But at the same time, there is so much independence in the singles, there's only you. There's no one coming in, you have to do it or you don't. So there is that independence that you do build in that.

MR. BJERGA: You're clearly an advocate of sports as a builder of character and values. Are sports the only way to get that sort of team training? Music training means ensemble work. Kids in drama programs learn to play roles, literally, by playing roles. Is there a qualitative difference?

MS. WILLIAMS: I think there is a difference. I've never done drama, I don't think I can act very well. But I think that sports is the ultimate way to really build confidence. Obviously, doing other things where you do have to set goals and learn how to succeed. There are different ways. I'm not saying it's the only way, but I personally think it's the best way.

MR. BJERGA: One of the people you spoke to was Magic Johnson. And Magic Johnson talks about how being a teenager in Lansing, Michigan, he would take his first job cleaning an office building and sit in the CEO's chair and fantasize not about being an NBA champion, but about being a CEO. Did you ever have that fantasy? Is it something you fantasize about and execute now?

MS. WILLIAMS: Absolutely. I love Magic's story, also, especially from the athlete's perspective of people taking you seriously even though you're an athlete. And we don't always have the best reputation as far as having a lot of smarts. But, it was very encouraging to read his story. What was the rest of the last part? Do I have those visions? Yes, because I like to tell people what to do. So you here, you here, I'll sit in that chair. But more than anything, I'm obsessive. I think any athlete is obsessive and compulsive. You have to be to do it over and over again and get it right. I do need something to obsess over once this is said and done. And I do love organization and I do love business and I do love the arts. So I'll find a way to combine those, and I'm trying to find a way already.

MR. BJERGA: Roger Staubach, the NFL quarterback for the Cowboys back in the '70s talked about how when he was starting his business, you could never tell when you were walking in whether you're looking at prospective client or somebody who wanted your autograph. Is that an experience that you have had? And as your business has built, has the frequency of that happening lessened?

MS. WILLIAMS: I've been pretty fortunate that most people do want to have their space designed by V Starr Interiors, or different design projects for fashions that I've done. So, fortunately, but it does happen. Sometimes, people don't always take you seriously. I realize you don't start at the top of anything. You start where you start at and you work your way up and the battle is the fun part. Having those challenges and overcoming them, that's the fun part. And I've done that in tennis, I started at the bottom, my way to the top and I look forward to continuing to battle to the top outside the court.

MR. BJERGA: Starting a business is one thing. One area where a lot of athletes have had well publicized struggles with this, basic financial literacy, being able to manage the money that they've received. What is your take on the need for financial literacy in this and what are some of the biggest pitfalls you see athletes go through as they're dealing with these windfalls of money that they may or may not be prepared to deal with?

MS. WILLIAMS: Yeah, the athlete mentality. What can I say to that? I've never wanted to be a statistic, in any statistic that was a bad one. Good ones are great. But I'm not sure why a lot of athletes think that way. I don't have the answer to that. But, I've never wanted to be that way. And I think it's important to read your own bank statements, to know what's coming in, to go over it once a month and to be realistic about what's coming in and what's going on. And that's not always easy. A lot of times, you have a lot of people that you're taking care of and you have to be realistic with them about their expectations, too. So it's not always easy-- sometimes you focus so much on the sport

that you don't think about the reality outside of it until it's too late. So I think training or intervention training or from the very beginning is very important.

MR. BJERGA: Following that, a couple of people asked questions about specific athletes, clearly in an attempt to get you in trouble. What advice, speaking of financial literacy and lots and lots of zeros, what advice would you have for LeBron James as to where he should land as a free agent?

MS. WILLIAMS: I'm from Florida, so Miami is most certainly the best place. I actually have a slideshow prepared in case you guys want to watch on why. I'm sure he'll make the right decision. Best of luck to him.

MR. BJERGA: Those big pictures of Chris Bosh and Dee Wade with that little spot in the middle, maybe, there. What advice would you give Tiger Woods to get back on track? (Laughter)

MS. WILLIAMS: I guess if I'm going to answer the question, I would just say life happens and I think as a country and as a world, we're way too judgmental, especially on the same things that we might be doing also. So, I think it's just important-- (Applause) Yeah. We need to stop judging the next person, focus on our own life. He's a champion, he plays so well. It's just crazy. He's already won so many, he knows how to do it. I'm sure he'll be playing very well in no time. He's already playing well in the rest of America.

MR. BJERGA: Several questions dealing with health. The first question, why can't athletes do more to challenge American adults and teenagers to live healthier lives? Shouldn't athletes be leading the crusade against obesity and bad eating habits?

MS. WILLIAMS: Exactly. We have so many treats in America. I mean, when I go to Europe, it's not the same. In America, we do have a certain lifestyle of fun food. What other way can I put it? One of the contributors to our book, Bill Clinton, he is also working with childhood obesity. I think it's important to start from the beginning when people are young, to teach them the right eating habits. Otherwise, they just don't know. And then they get so locked up into these habits. Fortunately, I had a healthy lifestyle with sport and with food and eating, so that helped a lot. But it's all about moderation. So very important, I think, very important point.

MR. BJERGA: Ms. Williams, as another tall woman tennis player with feet proportionate to her height, do you also find it a challenge to find good tennis shoes larger than size 10? Thank you.

MS. WILLIAMS: I wear my shoes bigger on the court than in real life. Actually, my clothing line EleVen is named on the size of my foot. I was not being serious earlier. But, I don't know. I'm really fortunate, I wear 11 ½ on the court just for that extra room when you stop and start. So off the court, I wear a smaller. And that's

why I can't have kids. They say that your feet grow when you have kids. So I can't have a kid ruining my wardrobe. So adoption is the option for me. (Laughter)

MR. BJERGA: The French Open dress 2010. Explain.

MS. WILLIAMS: Honestly, it was a vision I had for a design. It was not about anything else. And it just blew up into something so crazy that I almost decided to retire the Illusion, what I call the design, it's all about illusion. And gosh, I almost did, but I won't. Illusion will be coming back, to all the supporters of Illusion. And it was like the dress saw around the world. And I just was thinking, gosh, "This design is so successful, I'll never be able to top this." So the challenge is to make something even cooler. I hope I can.

MR. BJERGA: Earlier today, you mentioned that sports is something that humbles you and you will lose a big one that hurts. What was the loss that hurt you the most?

MS. WILLIAMS: Oh, man, that's a hard one. Which hurt me the most? I mean, obviously this last loss, really irritating. Wimbledon last year, I was numb for a week. It's not easy. But I try to get perspective, I really do. Like okay, I was actually at a book signing yesterday and this woman came over and she gave me a magazine. She said, "I want you to have this." And I read the article, she was from Rwanda and her family was killed and the genocide and then she contracted AIDS. And I was just thinking, "Gosh, there's no need to feel sorry for yourself anymore. You're fine." So it was just an eye opener. So now if it's a tough loss, it's just a tough loss. I'm actually going to keep that magazine with me that she gave me, her story. Because really, it was so moving. So no longer tough losses, that magazine is with me. I'll be reading it after the alleged tough loss and I'll remember her losses were much more. (Applause)

MR. BJERGA: Well, and you mentioned earlier that the funny stories don't come from the really great shots, they come from the mistakes. So is there anything funny about Wimbledon yet?

MS. WILLIAMS: Perspective, perspective. Gosh, no.

MR. BJERGA: We'll be sure to check back with you. You mentioned many times that your parents were your role models. Who else was a role model for you in your early years?

MS. WILLIAMS: Definitely my sisters, all my older sisters. I had three older sisters and Isha here is one of them. We all looked up to each other. Plus, she tricked us a lot, like really. We were younger and she'd say, "I bet you guys can't clean this room in five minutes." "Yes we can, yes we can." Well now I'm hip to that. So even though she was a role model, she got us quite a few times. Our sisters I really looked up to.

And as far as tennis players, I used to serve like Boris Becker. Any of you guys who know tennis, he would rock back and forth like so, and I'd just be rocking in the juniors. I think I rocked like ten times too many. I should have got a time violation, but I looked up to him also.

MR. BJERGA: Part of the motivation, as you've expressed, for you going into business now is you want to be able to be doing something you can transition into when your tennis career is over. Later in your career, how will you transition to business full time? Will you be focusing on tennis until the day you gone, or do you transition gently? Is it possible to be an elite tennis player if you're not completely focused on tennis?

MS. WILLIAMS: Definitely possible to be an elite tennis player without just focusing on tennis. I think if you focus on tennis 24/7 you'll not like it anymore. And like I said earlier, just being a balanced person and knowing who you are off of the court is extremely important also. So I look up to my sister, also, who has about nine degrees. She went to Georgetown and Howard and MBA and lawyer and soon I think she's going to be a cook and she's an amazing cook. So I had a lot of people to look up to, too, growing up. Does that answer the question? I don't remember, sorry.

MR. BJERGA: As your career in professional tennis continues, how many more championships in majors do you think you still have in you?

MS. WILLIAMS: At least 25. Of course, it's all about the majors and as you get more experience, you even want to focus more on the majors. And I guess I know what it takes to win them, so got to go out there and do it, right?

MR. BJERGA: We've had several questions about your workout routine and your diet. If you could give any details about how you stay fit both in exercise and nutritionally?

MS. WILLIAMS: Well, my life is one big huge workout. First thing in the morning I train on the court probably about two hours, usually not more than three. And then I go to the gym an equal amount of time. Once I hit the 2 ½ hour mark in the gym, though, I'm just not enjoying it anymore. So probably about five hours. And I spend a lot of time on the table for just-- once you break your body down like that, you've got to resurrect it. So probably hopefully just an hour, sometimes two, a few times a week. At a tournament, probably every day.

And as far as nutrition, my motto is eat to live, don't live to eat. So I follow that, and I have to eat a lot as a player. So like when Wimbledon is over or tournaments like that, I'm taking a break from eating. Like, I'll eat pasta in the morning before a match and you just eat a lot of food. But I definitely concentrate on my carbohydrates and protein for fueling myself. And trying to avoid too many fun-- fried foods and things like that. There is a formula to it all. I could sit here and talk about that for a long time.

MR. BJERGA: What do you do to relax?

MS. WILLIAMS: I love to read. I've recently started swimming, which I actually love. I have a little dog that travels the world with me, he's my little buddy. Hang out with my sisters. It's so much fun, we just laugh all day. And I'm a workaholic, so I'm always doing something and I'm happiest when I'm accomplishing something of some type. So, there are times when I have to make myself sit still.

MR. BJERGA: Do you talk to Serena about your future lives post-tennis? You work as a doubles team on the court, do you do so off the court?

MS. WILLIAMS: Yes, we talk about it. We live together in the same house, so she's threatened me that I can't move out. So I'm stuck. Help. But we do live together and we're like, "We should never leave each other. And even if we have to get married, we'll still live here, okay?" (Laughter) So we do talk about it in fun ways about what we'll do after tennis. She also has different companies that she does also, and so we just enjoy our life outside of the court and make something, make businesses. Make something of ourself off the court also.

MR. BJERGA: And we are, of course, at the National Press Club where Cabinet officials and heads of state speak. So this question, with your competitive nature and drive to succeed, do you ever see yourself going into politics? Could you see Serena going into politics?

MS. WILLIAMS: No, too many skeletons in the closet. I don't have any political aspirations, no. I'd like to definitely help people after tennis, especially teaching young people how to play would be a great experience for me, to get more people into the sport and actually have the time to see people through and teach them and follow them would be one of my goals. So it won't be politics.

MR. BJERGA: We're almost out of time, so just a moment here for some announcements. Before asking the last question, we have a couple of important matters to take care of. First of all, let me remind our members and guests of future speakers. On July 16th, fitness consultant Tony Horton, creator of the P90X home fitness system will address the nation's obesity epidemic and its impact on declining fitness levels among U.S. military recruits. Warning to anyone who wants to come to that; bring your gym shoes and a towel.

The next day, Tony Horton will also be involved at the National Press Club because we'll once again be hosting the National Press Club's 5k Beat the Deadline race that is a benefit for the Eric Friedheim National Journalism Library, its scholarship and professional development funds. To register for the race, go to www.press.org.

Second, this is the moment we all wait for, we'd like to present our guest with the traditional and fabled National Press Club mug. (Applause) If you get Serena to come here, you can toast your coffee mugs together.

Final question, appreciate your having time here today. I understand you just got into Washington this morning and it's going to be a really quick trip. But people are excited to see you tonight at the Washington Kastles match playing Martina Hingis. Of course, you have been playing Martina for years, going back to that fabled first match to other match-ups over the years. Should she be trembling in her shoes tonight?

MS. WILLIAMS: Not a trash talker, tennis is supposed to be a gentlewoman's sport, so I'll keep it that way today. But, she's a competitor. She knows how to play. She's a major champion, so I'm going to expect her to play very well. I hope I can play well for my team. Mark, if I let you down, then please be positive with me. Remember that talk about positivity and all that stuff? So thank you. I think more than anything, it'll be fun for all of us and the fans. I'll be using this mug on court tonight so watch for it.

MR. BJERGA: Thank you, Ms. Williams.

MS. WILLIAMS: Thank you. (Applause)

MR. BJERGA: And thank you to you all for coming today. I would also like to thank the National Press Club staff including its library and broadcast operations center for organizing today's event, which you will be seeing on C-SPAN several times over the next few weeks, we're sure.

For more information about donating to the National Press Club, visit www.press.org/library. For more information about the National Press Club including joining the National Press Club and on how to acquire a copy of today's program, please go to our website at www.press.org. Thank you very much for your time and for coming here to the National Press Club today. This meeting is adjourned. (Sounds gavel.)

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