

# Analysis: If this was it for Williams at Wimbledon, it works

By **HOWARD FENDRICH** | AP



**Serena Williams** source/diggita.it

**WIMBLEDON, England (AP)** — If this turns out to have been the last time the world gets to watch Serena Williams at Wimbledon — and she says she doesn't know, so how could the rest of us? — it would not be how she would want to depart, naturally.

Yet it still would be, in some ways, a suitable farewell.

As competitive as they come, Williams could never be satisfied by leaving with any defeat, let alone a first-round exit in a third-set tiebreaker against someone ranked 115th on Centre Court at the All England Club, where she earned seven of her 23 Grand Slam singles championships.

Which is why when Williams, who turns 41 in August, was asked Tuesday night whether she would be OK with the 7-5, 1-6, 7-6 (10-7) loss to Harmony Tan being her final memory at Wimbledon, this was the immediate response: "Obviously not. You know me. Definitely not."

Quickly, this followed: "But today, I gave all I could do, you know, today. Maybe tomorrow, I could have gave more. Maybe a week ago, I could have gave more. But today, (that) was what I could do."

These circumstances would be far more apt under which to say goodbye — unlike on June 29, 2021, the previous time Williams participated in a singles match at any event. On that day, she left in pain and against her will, forced to stop playing in the first set of her first-round match at Wimbledon after hurting her right leg in a slip on Centre Court.

This time, Williams gave her all for 3 hours, 11 minutes, dealing with rust and fatigue and Tan's

speed-shifting mix of slices, riding all manner of momentum shifts through an entertaining, down-and-up-and-down-again spectacle that enthralled a raucous crowd.

"That was insane and intense," Williams wrote on Instagram afterward. "Not the result I came for, but my goodness I enjoyed that. I hope you did as well. Onward and up."

There were some signature serves, at up to 118 mph. There was some turn-back-the-clock court coverage. There were powerful forehands and swinging volleys and, at one juncture, back-to-back backhand return winners of the sort she'd hit in her prime. There were the excited yells and raised fists after some of her most effective shots. And there were her mother, Oracene Price, and older sister, Venus, up in the guest box, just like old times.

"It definitely makes me want to hit the practice courts because," Williams said, "when you're playing not bad and you're so close ... I feel like that it's actually kind of like, 'OK, Serena, you can do this if you want.'"

Here's how tight it was: Williams twice was two points from victory. She actually collected more total points, 124-119. She determined the outcome of most exchanges, with more than twice as many winners as Tan, 61-29, but also nearly twice as many unforced errors, 54-28.

In her prime, this result would have been disappointing as can be, considering the stage and the opponent. She is not in her prime, of course.

The 24-year-old Tan said afterward she didn't

truly believe she could win until right before what would become the final point. Tan, making her Wimbledon debut and appearing in only her seventh Grand Slam match, grew up watching Williams on TV.

"She's a legend," said Tan, who pulled out of doubles on Wednesday because of an injured thigh. "I was scared when I was on the court — but really happy to be there."

So, it seems, was Williams. The spectators, too. She surprisingly returned to the tour this month at a smaller grass-court tournament, but only for doubles, and only for two matches, for a hint of preparation.

Asked whether she will play again, Williams was noncommittal.

"That's a question I can't answer," she said. "I don't know. ... Who knows? Who knows where I'll pop up?"

Asked specifically about the U.S. Open, which she has won six times and begins on Aug. 29, Williams said: "There's definitely lots of motivation to get better and to play at home."

At her post-match news conference, Williams wore a T-shirt that read "Be the Game Changer."

A reporter wanted to know how Williams thinks that phrase reflects her.

"Don't be afraid to be different. Don't be afraid to stand out. Yeah, I think that's been me. I love changing the game. I think that's something that I never kind of set out to do, and then somehow I did it," she said. "Somehow I'm Serena. That's pretty awesome."



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