



Venus Envy: A Sensational Season Inside the Women's Tennis Tour

L. Jon Wertheim

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Venus.

Serena.

Anna.

Martina.

Lindsay.

Like other modern-day heroines -- Madonna, Hillary, Mia -- they need only one name. They are the stars of professional tennis -- the young, brash, and often reckless women who hold court, and serve.

The last several years have seen such a seismic explosion in women's tennis that you might be surprised to learn there's still a men's game. Fans flock to the high-voltage matches, which come packaged with tales of infighting, family squabbles, and, of course, Anna Kournikova's micro-miniskirts. In *Venus Envy*, *Sports Illustrated* investigative reporter and tennis columnist L. Jon Wertheim draws back the curtain on the soap opera that is the women's professional tennis tour, with its primal plotlines driven by ambition, sex, and revenge.

Here are the stories behind the stories: the tragic Garbo-like star who whiles away hours in a midwestern hotel room because she's afraid to go outdoors; the teenager who tries to cope with the pressure of the big time as well as an abusive father; the brilliant number one who plays out her adolescent tantrums on the public stage; the coquette who launched a thousand Web sites; and a little-understood African-American family who proved that they could play by their own rules and still win the game -- not to mention the endorsements.

The biggest story in sports in 2000 was Venus Williams. Forced to the sidelines for the early months by injuries to both her wrists and her psyche, she stormed back to win Wimbledon, the U.S. Open, and two Olympic gold medals. Not since the glory days of Martina Navratilova -- and the historic days of Althea Gibson -- has women's tennis seen such a dominant champion with the rare combination of athleticism, intelligence, and competitive fire. By the time Venus signed the biggest endorsement deal ever for a female athlete, her opponents' sentiments could be described in just two words: *Venus Envy*.

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