



HOW WILL THE
TOP U.S. PROS
FARE THIS YEAR AT
THEIR HOME SLAM



BY VAN SIAS



There's no place like New York.
Commotion.

"You have to be very cognizant of weeding out distractions," says two-time Grand Slam titlist Justin Gimelstob. "You have to find some peace and a routine that works for you in managing the stimulus that comes from playing a tournament in New York."

Pressure.

"I always looked forward to the U.S. Open, but it was always a tournament where I felt the most pressure," says former WTA Top 10 doubles star-turned-Tennis Channel commentator Katrina Adams. "I always fared well in the doubles but not so much in the singles just

because I wanted it so badly."

Bright Lights.

"New York is New York!" exclaims coach Nick Bollettieri. "It's where all the big deals are done, the sponsors are there. You can take all the Grand Slams – there's nothing like New York City. That's where the action is."

In terms of attendance, the U.S. Open is the biggest annual sporting event across the globe. Many players – American players in particular – say it's one of the most, if not the most, important tournaments of the year. How will Team USA fare this year? Bollettieri, Adams and Gimelstob break it down.

>>



F

FAVORITE

SERENA WILLIAMS

U.S. OPEN RECORD: 52-8
BEST RESULT: CHAMPION (1999, 2002, 2008)

THE STORY: A controversial line call, her own emotions and a more-than-game Kim Clijsters derailed the defending champion in her quest to add a fourth U.S. Open crown to her list of Slam conquests. There are no signs of lingering injuries from earlier in the year (shortly after she won her fifth Australian Open title, an Open-era record), as she still managed to make a deep run in the draw at the French Open and win her fourth Wimbledon. She is hotter than ever and a favorite to win the summer Slam.

"She's a champion and she plays her best tennis where it matters most, like under the bright lights of the U.S. Open," says Gimelstob. She thrives on that energy."

"Injuries and lack of consistency on the women's side make it difficult to predict the Grand Slam outcome."

Injuries and lack of consistency on the women's side make it difficult to predict the Grand Slam outcome, says Adams. "The U.S. Open this year is definitely going to be a different animal if we have all the players healthy with the return of [Justine] Henin and Clijsters, and if Sharapova can get back on track, and if Safina gets healthy," notes Adams. But if she had to place a bet on who will be the last woman standing, Adams doubles down on Serena.

"Serena is Serena! You have to say that she's the favorite going in; she's number 1. It's a place where she's played well."

Matt Dunn



CONTENDER

THE STORY: A winner in 2003 and a runner-up in '06, it's evident that A-Rod knows what it takes to succeed at the final Major of the year. His play on the hard courts at the beginning of 2010 was impressive, with a win at Brisbane in Australia, a quarterfinal appearance at the

"As long as Andy can stay healthy, I definitely think he has a shot."

Australian Open, runner-up finishes in San Jose and Indian Wells, and another title at the ATP Tour 1000 stop in Miami. However, that early-season momentum was halted on the clay and grass with a particular low point coming at Wimbledon, where he lost in five sets to Yen-hsu Lu in the fourth round. Andy Roddick has won 19 titles on hard courts in his career, but a second U.S. Open title has eluded him. Will he get the job done this year?

Gimbelstob says Roddick is a huge factor at the U.S. Open. "He's accrued the most points on the hard courts this year, which just shows you how great he's playing."

Andy's game is peaking again, agrees Adams, noting that she hasn't seen Roddick play this well in nearly five years.

"As long as Andy can stay healthy, I definitely think he has a shot because he has the confidence, he has won it before, he believes he can win it again and I think he's taken all the necessary measures to ensure that it happens."

A continued commitment to fitness should help the American withstand the summer heat for the two-week tournament, says Bollettieri. Credit coach Larry Stefanki for Roddick's condition, as well as his willingness to embrace variety when his cannonball serve and blazing forehand aren't effective.

"Larry Stefanki's a great coach," says Bollettieri. "[Roddick's] happy with his home life. He would love, I would say, to win this U.S. Open. It would be like having a baby for him!"

ANDY RODDICK

U.S. OPEN RECORD: 35-9

BEST RESULT: CHAMPION (2003)



SAM QUERREY

U.S. OPEN RECORD: 6-4
BEST RESULT: FOURTH ROUND (2008)

THE STORY: Sam Querrey had one of the best 2009 summer hard-court seasons a player — male or female — has experienced in years, which resulted in him being the U.S. Open Olympus Series winner on the strength of making the finals in Indianapolis, taking the title in Los Angeles and a runner-up appearance in New Haven. However, the stretch turned into the summer of discontent for Querrey, who fell in the third round at Flushing Meadows. He's coming off of the best

"To succeed at the Open, he must enter the tournament well-rested."

grass-court stretch of his career, where his powerful game served him well. It's the same on hard courts, a surface he embraced as a child in California. To succeed at the Open, he must enter the tournament well-rested.

"I think he learned a lot from last year," says Gimelstob. "This year, I think he'll learn to manage his schedule a little bit better and be more fresh for the U.S. Open."

"Sam Querrey had an unbelievable summer last year, then he got hurt," says Adams. "He needs to manage his expectations and time on the court and really be able to have what's necessary to play seven matches at the U.S. Open."



Leslie Billman



THE STORY: The two-time U.S. Open champ has had a resurgence this year, advancing to the quarterfinals or better in every tournament in which she competed except the French. Venus' consistency on hard courts and clay was rewarded with a return to the No. 2 ranking in May. She was

"She has weapons and the ability to put pressure on her opponents that a lot of woman cannot."

close to meeting her sister in the finals of the Australian Open but faltered two points away from the semifinals before losing to Li Na. She then won the Dubai Tennis Championships and finished runner-up at the WTA Premier Mandatory Event in Miami, both on hard courts. A solid start to the season, including a solid run at Wimbledon, should bode well for Williams during the summer hard-court season, culminating with the Open.

Venus' revival shocked many people in the game, including Adams. "No one saw Venus getting back in the Top 10 a few years ago. No one saw Venus getting back in the Top 5 a year ago," says Adams, also noting her rise to the near pinnacle in spring.

"It's a good surface for her, she's won it before," says Gimelstob. "She has weapons and the ability to put pressure on her opponents that a lot of woman cannot."

Reflecting on the state of the game, Bollettieri says health plays a key role in determining how far a favorite such as Venus will advance.

"When it gets down to the women, it all depends whether Venus and Serena are healthy," says Bollettieri. "If they are, they can beat anybody."

VENUS WILLIAMS

U.S. OPEN RECORD: 54-9
BEST RESULT: CHAMPION (2000, 2001)



Leslie Bliman



D <<<
DANGEROUS

JOHN ISNER

U.S. OPEN RECORD: 5-3
BEST RESULT: FOURTH ROUND (2009)

THE STORY: The 2009 ATP Tour's Most Improved Player keeps getting better. The year started by winning his first career title on the hard courts in Auckland and finishing as the runner-up indoors in Memphis to Querrey. In addition to those

"He has one of the biggest serves and forehands on the circuit."

impressive results, Isner was runner-up to Querrey at the Serbia Open on clay, validating further growth in his game. Then came the unthinkable: A titanic effort in the first round at Wimbledon, where he broke the record for the longest match in history. He has one of the biggest serves and forehands on the circuit, tools that helped him pull off a huge upset at last year's U.S. Open when he eliminated Roddick in the

third round. Is Isner ready for his Major breakthrough?

"He got to the round of 16 at the Australian Open this year, so maybe that is a consistent number for him," Adams says. "It's just getting over that hurdle of beating that Top 8 guy, which he can do as he has wins over Top 8 guys."

Bollettieri has high praise for both Isner and Querrey. "I'm very impressed with Sam Querrey and John Isner. I think both those boys have really come into their own," he says. "They're big, they're strong, they have huge serves. They move extremely well. They have the serve weapon and the forehand weapon, and are very good from the backhand side, and they volley well.

They can do some big damage at the U.S. Open."



»»» **D**
DANGEROUS

MARDY FISH

U.S. OPEN RECORD: 9-9

BEST RESULT: : QUARTERFINALS (2008)

THE STORY: With two of his three career singles titles coming on hard courts and making the finals at ATP 1000 stops in Indian Wells and Cincinnati, it's clear that Fish has the game to succeed on concrete. He's shown a commitment to fit-

"With Mardy, it's hard to say, but you can't discount him. He's very competitive."

ness this year, but injuries have slowed his progress. He has, however, recorded wins over Andy Murray this year on his way to the fourth round at Indian Wells and the finals at the AEGON Championships on grass.

The components of Fish's game, Bollettieri and Gimelstob comment, could allow for success in New York.

"He's got a big serve, he can volley extremely well, he's got a super backhand and an improved forehand," says Bollettieri. "With Mardy, it's hard to say, but you can't discount him. He's very competitive."

"I love Mardy's game," says Gimelstob. "For him, it's about staying healthy. He's really committed himself to the game and is in the best shape of his life. He's dangerous."



E
ERRATIC

ROBBY GINEPRI

U.S. OPEN RECORD: 14-9
BEST RESULT: SEMIFINALS (2005)

THE STORY: Robby Ginepri has proven that he's a threat on grass—winning his first career title in Newport in 2003—and clay, where he's been the last U.S. man standing at the French Open in 2008 and 2010. However, it's the hard courts where he's had the most success,

"He has an excellent return of serve, one of the best backhands in the world."

winning the tournament in Indianapolis in 2005 and again in 2009. But the former U.S. Open semifinalist has had more than his fair share of injury-related issues, which have halted his momentum in the past.

"Coming back from a neck injury in the early part of the spring and building confidence at the French will definitely [help] his momentum going into the U.S. Open, where he loves playing on the hard courts," says Adams. "Robby looks strong, as quick as ever and is hitting a much heavier ball than in recent years."

Gimelstob adds, "He has an excellent return of serve, one of the best backhands in the world, and he is very strong and physically fit, which you need to be due to the physical demands of five-set Grand Slam tennis."



Getty Images



MELANIE OUDIN

U.S. OPEN RECORD: 4-2

BEST RESULT: QUARTERFINALS (2009)

THE STORY: America's new tennis sweetheart captivated a legion of fans cheering on her run to the quarterfinals last year. While there hasn't been a momentous occasion like that in 2010 for the young Georgian, there have been

"Everybody's got their eyes on the little girl from Georgia who did so well last year."

some highlights: Oudin reached her first career semi-final in a WTA Tour event at the Open GDF Suez in Paris, which was played on an indoor hard court. You could probably refer to Oudin as "Ms. America" as she's led the U.S. squad to the finals of the Fed Cup team event for the second year in a row. Will she handle the increased expectations going into the home Slam this summer?

"Everybody's got their eyes on the little girl from Georgia who did so well last year," Bollettieri says. "There's a lot of pressure on her now."

An example of that could be seen at this year's Wimbledon, where she failed to defend the points from her fourth-round finish a year ago.

"It's different your sophomore year where everyone kind of gets used to your game," Adams says. "She'll have the pressure of feeling she has to duplicate what she did last year, so I will be excited to see how she can handle it."

Gimelstob thinks Oudin is well-equipped and primed for the tournament.

"I really believe in her. She's got an excellent forehand and has great belief in herself," he says. "What she's accomplished is impressive at this early age."



ERRATIC

JAMES BLAKE

U.S. OPEN RECORD: 20-9

BEST RESULT: QUARTERFINALS (2005, 2006)

THE STORY: Though injury marred the first half of the season for the veteran American, nothing gets the Yonkers, New York-born, Connecticut-raised player's game going like the U.S. Open. His personal cheer-

"On any given day, James has the ability to beat anybody."

ing section, the J-Block, will fire him up along with several thousand additional Americans. But will his game hold up for a deep

run, particularly if his ranking isn't high enough to avoid meeting a top seed early? A first-round loss at Wimbledon had the former Top-4-ranked player talking of retirement. Gimelstob is ambivalent.

"Hopefully with James having had a little bit of bad luck early in the year, he'll be fresh for the later half with the U.S. Open Series and the U.S. Open," says Gimelstob.

"James becomes electrified at the U.S. Open. It's his hometown, it's his home court," stresses Adams, who adds, "On any given day, James has the ability to beat anybody."