

2004 champ Kuznetsova out of US Open, citing pandemic

WTA players adjust to new normal in return to action in US

LEXINGTON, Kentucky, Aug. 11, (AP) — Marie Bouzkova expected some adjustment to her first tennis tournament in nearly six months.

First was the matter of shedding rust from the layoff caused by the coronavirus shutdown. The Czech Republic player also had to get her mind around the inaugural Top Seed Open and a significantly subdued competitive atmosphere without spectators and a sprinkling of officials around center court.

"The beginning felt like practice because my coach was clapping at some point," said Bouzkova, who quickly adapted to upset No. 3 seed Johanna Konta, 6-4, 6-4 on Monday. "But that quiet was a little bit weird."



Bouzkova

Say hello to the new normal players will see for the foreseeable future because of the pandemic.

This week's event is the WTA Tour's first competition in the US since March. Added to the schedule in late July, the world's top players such as Serena and Venus Williams, Victoria Azarenka and Sloane Stephens aim to hone their hardcourt skills for the US Open later this month.

Practicing social distancing to prevent the spread of COVID-19 is important, and easily practiced at Top Seed. Players were at opposite ends of the court, of course, and the benches were spaced six feet away on either side of the umpire's chair. Masks were prevalent as well.

"The only time that we're not wearing a mask is obviously on the court," Bouzkova said, adding that players are in a similar bubble at their hotel. "When you're here walking inside, you're wearing the mask the whole time."

Konta donned a black mask during one nervous moment in which she required medical attention for an elevated heart rate. The British player acknowledged previous episodes but said they eventually subside before she resumes play.

"I'm not worried at all," Konta said.

Players praised conditions at the Top Seed Tennis Club outside Lexington, where seating resembled more of country club than a tennis stadium. Cushioned lounge chairs lined center court, though few were occupied with competition just starting.

A smattering of claps replaced the usual loud applause on points, though players' grunts on returns seemed more amplified. In a way, that seemed to be the perfect place to regain competitive focus after time away.

"Obviously, we've played a lot of matches with a lot of people watching, big stadiums," Konta said. "But we've also played a lot of matches with nobody watching, whether it's late-night matches or just the region we're in."

"It still felt like a match should, but it also felt like I haven't played a WTA event in six months. It's kind of finding your feet again and finding that space and being able to compete well."

Meanwhile, Svetlana Kuznetsova, the 2004 US Open champion, added her name to the growing group of players withdrawing from the Grand Slam tournament because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Kuznetsova wrote Monday on Instagram that she was pulling out of the US Open and the tournament preceding it at the same site in New York.

The Western & Southern Open starts Aug. 22; the US Open starts Aug. 31.

Also withdrawing from the US Open on Monday were No. 31 Barbora Strýcová of the Czech Republic, a Wimbledon semifinalist in 2019, and No. 108 Wang Xiyu of China.

Kuznetsova wrote: "I feel very sad, because I have been (waiting) for these tournaments so much, but the pandemic changes all plans."

The 35-year-old Russian, who also won the 2009 French Open, has been ranked as high as No. 2 in singles. She is currently No.

TENNIS

32, which would have put her in line to be seeded at Flushing Meadows.

Three of the top seven women in the rankings, including No. 1 Ash Barty, have pulled out of the US Open, as have the defending men's champion, Rafael Nadal, and others such as Stan Wawrinka and Nick Kyrgios.

Also:

PRAGUE: Former Wimbledon finalist **Eugenie Bouchard** won the first and only completed main draw match at the Prague Open on a rainy Monday.

The second European tournament in the WTA's restart amid the pandemic is following the same rules as the Palermo Open last week: No fans and media, players have to handle their own towels and are not allowed to shake hands. The players are isolated on one floor of a Prague hotel that was completely booked by tournament organizers. Bouchard eased past eighth-seeded **Veronika Kudermetova** 6-0, 6-3 for her first win on clay since 2018 and her second victory in two matches against the Russian.

Bouchard, ranked 330th, was given a wild-card entry. The Canadian missed all of February with a wrist injury before the tour was halted in March. She's a former world No. 5 and the 2014 Wimbledon runner-up.

"I'm proud of myself the way I stayed focused," Bouchard said. "My rhythm was off on my serve in the first set, so I need to look at that. I'm happy I could find a solution."

An all-Czech first-round match between **Kristyna Pliskova** and **Linda Fruhvirtova** had to be suspended twice due to thunderstorms with Pliskova leading 3-2.



In this Aug. 18, 2019 file photo, Svetlana Kuznetsova, of Russia, returns to Madison Keys, of the United States, in the women's final match during the Western & Southern Open tennis tournament in Mason, Ohio. (AP)

Royal Montreal Golf Club to host '24 Presidents Cup

MONTREAL, Aug. 11, (AP) — Royal Montreal Golf Club, the oldest golf club in North America, will host the 2024 Presidents Cup.

The club was founded in 1873 and held the Presidents Cup in 2007. The US won that edition in which Canada's Mike Weir beat

Tiger Woods in a Sunday singles match.

GOLF

Royal Montreal will become the second international venue to host

Kuwait to host GCC Winter Games 'HQ'

KUWAIT CITY, Aug. 11, (KUNA) — GCC Winter Games Organising Committee members have backed Kuwait to host the body's headquarters, according to Kuwait's representative.

During a remotely-held meeting, they also extended, for a second term of four years, the presidency of Kuwaiti Fuhaid Al-Ajmi, who also heads the Kuwait Winter Sports Club.

Committee members saw the need to improve winter sports in the region and place an emphasis on encouraging the creation of women's teams.

Third-seeded **Elise Mertens** game against **Jasmine Paolini** didn't start.

Fourth-seeded **Dayana Yastremska** withdrew from the tournament at the last minute due to tooth pain.

No. 2-ranked **Simona Halep** heads the field.

Preparation is a regimented endeavor. Practice periods are measured on a clock on the field, whistles signal the time to hustle from one drill to another. And uncertainty is a formidable opponent to the process.

Virginia coach Bronco Mendenhall said it adds an "emotional drain" to the rigor of weight lifting and fitness, film study and psychological preparedness.

"With so many variances on the outside of start, stop schedule, new schedule, continued start, stop, there's an existing emotional drain and distraction that is very difficult in terms of managing the external environment that does spill over," Mendenhall said Monday on a Zoom call with reporters.

FOOTBALL

Virginia, like many schools with recently revised schedules, has just started practice. But Syracuse coach Dino Babers has a different take, saying team workouts seem to provide relief.

"The effort, based off all the stuff that's gone on, I almost feel like it's been a release that they can actually lose themselves and do something that they really enjoy with a bunch of guys that are all COVID-free and running around and having fun," Babers said on Zoom.

West Virginia coach Neal Brown agrees.

"You see guys, their demeanors have changed," he said. "They have something to look forward to. Our guys have new energy when they're out there. They're able to get off their phones. They're able to get away from all the uncertainty and they're really going to do what they love to do. So



Minnesota Lynx forward Napheesa Collier (left), drives around New York Liberty guard Jocelyn Willoughby during the first half of a WNBA basketball game on Aug. 5 in Bradenton, Florida. (AP)

Stewart rallies Storm past Sky for 5th straight victory

Thomas, Sun hand Dream's fifth straight loss



Connecticut Sun's Brionna Jones (left), reaches back to tie up a rebound with Chicago Sky's Cheyenne Parker during the second half of a WNBA basketball game on Aug. 8, in Bradenton, Florida. (AP)

BRADENTON, Florida, Aug. 11, (AP) — Breanna Stewart had 25 points and a season-high seven assists, and the Seattle Storm won their fifth straight game with an 89-71 victory over the Chicago Sky on Monday night.

Stewart had 10 points and five assists in the first quarter as Seattle built a 15-point lead after scoring 33 points. Seattle led 46-28 at halftime by holding the Sky to 10 second-quarter points.

Sami Whitcomb added 17 points for Seattle (7-1). Ezi Magbegor scored 13, Alysha Clark had 12 and Jewell Loyd 10. The Storm had 25 assists on 36 field goals and shot 51% from the field.

BASKETBALL

College football coaches face tough adversary: 'uncertainty'

NEW YORK, Aug. 11, (AP) — College football coaches are facing the daunting challenge of getting their players to maintain the required focus to prepare for season-openers when the prevailing question swirling around the sport is when, or if, the season will even be played because of the worldwide coronavirus pandemic.

Preparation is a regimented endeavor. Practice periods are measured on a clock on the field, whistles signal the time to hustle from one drill to another. And uncertainty is a formidable opponent to the process.

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"With so many variances on the outside of start, stop schedule, new schedule, continued start, stop, there's an existing emotional drain and distraction that is very difficult in terms of managing the external environment that does spill over," Mendenhall said Monday on a Zoom call with reporters.

that's been a positive experience and I hope it continues."

The Mountaineers, Brown said, have no current COVID-19 infections.

Army coach Jeff Monken prefers his team focus on when, not if, games are played.

The Black Knights' biggest challenge might be finding opponents. Their only confirmed home game is Nov. 7 against Air Force. The other five scheduled visitors have canceled.

Whatever their take on the situation, coaches at the top levels of college football are facing the distraction challenges. Louisville coach Scott Satterfield refers to it as "the elephant in the room."

The issue was highlighted Saturday when the Mid-American Conference became the first Football Bowl Subdivision league to cancel its fall season. Monday night saw the Mountain West Conference also cancel its fall sports.

Connecticut and Old Dominion have also canceled, bringing to 14 the number of schools at the top level to forgo the fall, along with numerous conferences one step down in the Football Championship Subdivision.

Allie Quigley led Chicago (5-3) with 13 points. Cheyenne Parker added 12 points and Courtney Vandersloot had nine assists. Sue Bird missed her fifth game of the season for Seattle, which has only lost to reigning league champion Washington on July 30.

Sun 93, Dream 82

Alyssa Thomas scored 21 points, Jasmine Thomas had 15 points and seven assists and the Connecticut Sun beat the Atlanta Dream 93-82. Jasmine Thomas and Alyssa Thomas combined to score 26 points in the first half as Connecticut built a 56-46 lead. The Sun put it away in the third quarter by holding the Dream to 15 points.

The Dream lost guard Chennedy Carter in the first quarter with an ankle injury. Atlanta's shining rookie was averaging 19.4 points per game, but was scoreless in three minutes before getting hurt. DeWanna Bonner scored 12 points for Connecticut (2-6), and grabbed nine rebounds to move into 20th on the WNBA career list.

Shekina Stricklen scored 18 points — all on 3-pointers in the first half — for Atlanta (2-6), which has lost five straight. Stricklen scored 12 of Atlanta's first 14 points by making all four of her 3-point attempts in the first quarter. Courtney Williams added 12 points against her former team.



In this Jan. 7, 2019 file photo, Alabama's Najee Harris reaches for the end zone during the first half of the NCAA college football playoff championship game against Clemson in Santa Clara, California. (AP)