

THE EXTRA POINT

BY JERRY ROBERTS



155 How to Ruin a Feel-Good Story

The recent women's U.S. Open Tennis championship had some warm and fuzzy story lines. Then things got ugly. I'm Jerry Roberts and let's get busy, today, on The Extra Point.

Hollywood couldn't have scripted this better. Story line one: Serena Williams, almost 37, only a year past giving birth, and needing one major championship victory to tie the UK's Margaret Court for the most ever at 24.

Storyline 2: Williams would play 20 year-old Naomi Osaka, who idolized her while growing up. Osaka had not yet won a major title. Could the kid handle the pressure or would Serena win her 24th major title.

By now you know the story. Williams lost in horrible fashion. Her coach, breaking the rule that coaching may not be provided to a player during a match, sent Williams visual signals. She saw them and so did the umpire, who called her for a violation. She argued that the coach was just giving her a thumbs up. A lame response. It was coaching and she knew it, plus the coach later admitted what he had done. However, Williams didn't seem to realize she had been cited for the violation.

Later, after losing a key point, she smashed her racquet on the court. Another violation, and automatic loss of a point in the current game. Now realizing the umpire had indeed called her on the coaching issue, Serena blew it. She screamed at him, calling him a liar and a thief. He nailed her for verbal abuse, Osaka was awarded a game, and the match was soon over.

Afterward, Williams labeled the umpire sexist, a claim supported by the leaders of the United States Tennis Association and the Women's Tennis Association. They said umpires take a lot more abuse from male players, and thus Williams should not have penalized that last time.

Hey, I agree the no coaching during the match rule is silly. What are coaches for? What if boxers couldn't get coached between rounds? That's a rule that is begging to be changed.

That said, this is on Serena. She and her coach know the rule and broke it. She busted her racquet like a belligerent child. She then chose to call the umpire names. That kind of behavior brings punishment. Here's a point rarely mentioned. This umpire had given her sister Venus trouble, and he has cited major male players for the same violations. He's tough. He's old school. He plays it by the book. She knew that and should have adjusted her strategy accordingly. Baseball plate umpires all call pitches a little differently. You have to adapt your game to those differences. It's the same in all sports. Professionals study officials the same way they do opposing players.

Here's the takeaway. Whether it's sports or business, It doesn't matter how great you are, you are still not bigger than the game itself. Give it everything you have and challenge a ruling if you feel you're right — but do it in the right way. Serena Williams is one of the best players of all time, but her ego — and maybe the fact that she knows her chances to win are running out, got the better of her.

I remember my mom telling me early on that in sports, as well as the rest of life, you compete as hard as you can and you win and lose the same way...with dignity.

That's The Extra Point. Get out there and make something good happen today. For 93.3 and the Ray Gibson Show, I'm Jerry Roberts.

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