

## **Cummings and Goings**

*US Open, Brian Earley, Roger Federer and Vote*

September 30, 2018

The 2018 US Open is now history and the women have a new champion, Naomi Osaka, who became the first Japanese player to win a Grand Slam championship. Her impressive play made you wonder where she has been all this time. For most of the Open I was traveling, but I did see some of her play and what impressed me most was how few free points she gave her opponents. It's hard to beat someone who doesn't make errors and keeps the ball in play as well as she did. And she didn't baby her shots in the process. Then there was her remarkable composure which was somewhat broken and dampened by tears at the awards ceremony by the raucous booing of the New York crowd, no thanks to Serena Williams. Serena did redeem herself somewhat by beseeching the crowd to stop the booing and to give Naomi her due. My thinking is there was a little guilt connected to it.

The Open Women's final was marred by Serena's behavior and it all started when she took exception to a code violation warning issued by chair umpire Carlos Ramos for coaching. I have repeatedly written about the New York Times great coverage of the Open and this year was no exception. Writer David Waldstein gave as good a rundown as you could ask for of the events that happened in that match. But I have to take him to task for a sentence he wrote leading up to all that went on in the second set. In it, he refers to Ramos as the "notoriously" strict chair umpire. To me, that puts a slant on the narrative that could easily bias what comes after, setting up Ramos as the fall guy. Then it goes on to say that by calling a code violation for coaching, he had "interjected" himself into the match. Interjected? What he did was his job, plain and simple. It was what he was there for and certainly not an interjection. He saw obvious coaching and he called it. Was the call correct? Serena's coach, Patrick Mouratoglou, admitted to it. Serena was more than a little surprised after the match to learn he had done so and I would have loved to have been a little bird listening in later when she talked to Mouratoglou about it - and I'm sure she did.

Code violations carry with them progressive penalties. The first one is a warning, the second a point and the third a game. So Serena got a warning for the infraction which did not impact the game score whatsoever. If she had let it go at that point, that would have been the end of it. She and Ramos did have a

conversation about the matter at the next changeover, but it was described as a civil one. Then, in the second set, with Serena leading 3-1, she got broken and, in anger and frustration, smashed her racket onto the court, turning it into a useless, twisted mass. It was a clear code violation, her second, and Ramos issued a point penalty.

After the changeover, with Osaka serving at 2-3, Serena walked to the deuce court to receive serve, apparently under the mistaken notion that Ramos had rescinded the warning given earlier for coaching and that she had received a warning for the racket abuse. No such thing had happened. She blew up and the crowd loved it. She argued again that she did not get coaching and therefore the racket abuse penalty was the first code violation and would only be a warning. No such luck despite Serena's protestations. Osaka held serve and then proceeded to break William's serve again.

At the changeover with Osaka leading 4-3, William's continued her rant against Ramos and got personal, calling him a liar. When she took it too far by calling him a thief, Ramos gave her another code violation for verbal abuse of an official. Roy Van Brunt, who I bounced this column off of for any comments he might have, said you could see the frustration in Carlos's face when he had to do so. His efforts to calm Serena had failed and he had no other recourse. Since it was a third code violation, the penalty was loss of a game. When Williams realized what had happened, she called for the referee. Long-time US Open referee, Brian Earley came out accompanied by Donna Kelso, the Grand Slam supervisor. After hearing Serena out, they upheld the chair's decision. Maintaining her composure while all this was going on could not have been easy, but Naomi held it as well as her serve at 5-4 to claim a well-deserved championship.

In her appeal to the referee and GS supervisor, Serena said she was she was being discriminated against because she was a women and that men do and say things a lot worse and nothing happens. She felt she was being treated unfairly. The NYT looked into this a few days later to see if it could detect a double standard. Looking at Grand Slam's fines data for the 20 year period ending in 2018, it found that men were fined 1,517 times compared to 535 fines for women. True, the men play 3 out of 5 while the women play only 2 out of 3, but an appreciable gap still exists when an adjustment is made for this. Looking at the detail involved in Serena's case, men were fined for racket abuse 646 times and women 99; verbal

abuse 62 men to 16 women and coaching 87 men to 152 women. There's a give and take here, but men still get it socked to them pretty good.

Where does all this leave Serena? First, let's remember that she was seeded #17 going into the tournament and getting to the finals was quite an achievement. Who knows what would have happened if she had put that first code violation behind her as her old partner, Martina Navratilova, said she should have, and focused on the match. Since her blowup at the 2009 Open in her match against Kim Clijsters (against a baseline umpire who called a foot fault on her) Serena became a role model for women to follow - especially the younger players. Naomi Osaka was one of them. Serena's conduct was exemplary. You had to admire for it. Here's hoping she will get back on that horse and ride it high and mightily for the rest of her career.

And what about Carlos Ramos, how did he come out of all of this? Well, I'm happy to say, he was back at work the following Friday with a plum assignment chairing matches in the Davis Cup semifinals between the United States and Croatia. What does he have to say about the whole affair? Nothing. His lips are sealed by tour policy and, by now, everyone knows he respects the rules - including policy.

### Brian Earley

After an illustrious 39 years as a US Open official, the last 26 of which he has been its referee, Brian Earley, as planned, will turn over the reins to Mark Darby, this year's Deputy Referee. I join Roy in thanking him for a job well done year in and year out. When asked about his service, Brian said he took pride in his efforts to see that female officials received the same consideration as men in assignment selection, witness the fact that female umpires were selected to chair 4 out of the 5 main draw matches in this year's Open. He set a nice tone not only for officials, but for players as well. Brian intends to back off, but not out, of officiating. Then there is Woodie Walker who was recognized for her 50th anniversary as an Open official. I had the good fortune to work with both when I was an Open official and will personally attest to the fact that any recognition received is well deserved.

### Roger Federer

Roger Federer was seemingly sailing along in his 3rd round match despite the heat and humidity, but it apparently took the wind out of his sails and John

Millman from Australia prevailed. I can tell you from my own personal experience as a player that getting hit by the heat can be a brutal experience. It can crumble you. I've seen many good players go down from it including Billy Jean King at the US Open when she had to retire. I was a back court official on that match and remember gasping for breath a few times myself when I got into an airless pocket along the back screen. No fun, McGee.

But don't feel too sorry for Roger. True, his 24 year contract with Nike is over, but in its place is a purported 10 year contract with Uniqlo, a Japanese clothing manufacturer, for \$300,000,000! That's a lot of zeros, the largest I know of for a sponsorship, and it's reported that it will be in effect whether he plays or not. There's no argument that Roger has touch.

### Vote

For anyone who thinks their vote doesn't count, consider what happened in the Democratic primary election for Baltimore County executive. Out of 87,222 hand-counted votes, the winner beat out his closest opponent by 17 votes! That's less than a whisker. You owe it to our great country to do so. Make sure you pay up.

By: Jim Cummings

*Jim Cummings Bio:*

*Born in Marinette, WI*

*Longtime friend of the Cook family*

*Played varsity tennis for UW-Madison in the 50s*

*Officiated at over 25 US Opens as a chair and line umpire*

*Served on USTA's Rules Committee when Jack Stahr and Nick Powel were Chairs*

*Retired senior player and Referee*

*Editor of the "Friend At Court" for many years thru 2016. [Link to 2016 Friend At Court.](#)*

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