

Point to make: Navratilova still going

Approaching 50, knee injury not deterring star

By HOWARD FENDRICH
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Even as she approaches her 50th birthday and recovers from knee surgery, Martina Navratilova plans to play a full schedule of doubles tournaments in 2006, including the Grand Slams, and might take another stab at singles.

"I just feel like I'm not quite done yet," Navratilova said from her home in Sarasota, Fla. "When I feel like I'm done, then I'm done."

"And I don't know when that will happen."

In a sense, she's finally being honest with herself and her fans, after having repeatedly made "This time I really mean it" declarations about when she would hang up her racket. But farewell tour followed farewell tour.

Navratilova originally retired in 1994 with a record 167 singles titles and having spent 331 weeks ranked No. 1.

She returned to the tour as a doubles player in 2000 and eventually couldn't resist dabbling in singles, including a first-round victory at Wimbledon in 2004.

Nowadays, she won't make any predictions about how much longer she'll play or whether she'll again give singles a try



Martina Navratilova of the United States plays a shot in a doubles match against Liezel Huber of South Africa and Lisa McShea of Australia during the Sydney International Tennis tournament in Sydney on Jan. 10, 2005.

against players half her age or younger.

"We'll see how the body's going. ... I might get on the grass again," she said when asked about playing singles. "Right now, that's so far away, I'm not worried about it or thinking about it. If it happens, it happens. If I'm ready, then I'll play. If I'm not, then I won't."

She injured her left knee during an exhibition event in November

and had arthroscopic surgery the next month, forcing her to miss the Australian Open and other events.

Back at practice, Navratilova is aiming to return to the WTA Tour at the Feb. 20-25 hard-court tournament at Dubai, United Arab Emirates, then wants to play the next week at Doha, Qatar.

Her partner at those tournaments will be 29-year-old Liezel

Huber, who teamed with Cara Black to win Wimbledon last year.

After that, who knows? Navratilova said that if things don't work out with Huber, she'll look for another partner, perhaps Martina Hingis.

Hingis, who was named after Navratilova, recently returned from her own three-year retirement, winning the mixed doubles title and reaching the singles quar-

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Martina Navratilova

on continuing to play a full schedule of tennis matches despite knee trouble and nearing her 50th birthday

terfinals at the Australian Open.

"I've been talking to Martina about playing for a couple of years," said Navratilova, whose 58 Grand Slam titles include 18 in singles, 31 in doubles and nine in mixed doubles. "Maybe I can convince her to play some doubles."

She hopes to play doubles at 15 tour events this season and also could enter the mixed doubles at the French Open, Wimbledon and U.S. Open.

But Navratilova will take time off from tennis in April to promote her new book, "Shape Your Self," which she describes as "a health and fitness book (about) getting the inside organized before you can get the outside looking better."

"It's a guide of how to do it with little baby steps instead of a drastic lifestyle change," she said.

So why is she still playing professional tennis? After all, she turns 50 in October.

"Because I still can. A lot of athletes would compete longer if they could still compete at a level that's acceptable, that's exciting, that's competitive with the rest of the field," Navratilova said.

"Most people leave because they just can't do it anymore. I left because I'd had enough. And then I thought, 'Well, maybe I

can play a little again,' and I had so much fun doing it again, I wondered, 'Why did I leave?'"

Besides, clearly, she's still capable of playing doubles at a high level: Navratilova and Anna-Lena Groenfeld reached the semifinals at Wimbledon and the U.S. Open in 2005.

Never one to let others dictate her thoughts or actions, Navratilova left her parents and defected from Czechoslovakia at 18.

For years, she was made to feel like an outsider because of her homosexuality and candidness.

She gets plenty of support from fans of all ages at tournaments around the world, but if anyone did question her motives for continuing to play, why would she let that bother her?

"I surprise myself. What I'm doing is very unusual. I can't believe I'm still doing this. I'm going to start patting my own back a little more, saying, 'You know what? What I'm doing is amazing,'" Navratilova said.

"It's maybe about defying age and showing Father Time, 'Hey, I'm still here.' I've always been the defiant type. That's why I left the country. I couldn't deal with the Communists."

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