

Serena Williams withdraws to rest toe before U.S. Open

By AJ Mazzolini

THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

MASON, Ohio — Serena Williams returned to tennis with a blaze this summer after a long injury layoff, but she might have pushed herself too hard on her recently healed foot.

Williams withdrew from the Western & Southern Open yesterday because of a toe injury. The former No. 1 player in the world was riding a 12-match winning streak and was due to

face 10th-ranked Samantha Stosur in the second round, a rematch of the Rogers Cup final that Williams won Sunday.

The withdrawal is precautionary, she said, and should not affect her playing in the U.S. Open, which begins Aug. 29 in New York.

"It's not as bad as it was before," Williams said of the injury, which she suffered in July 2010 after stepping on glass in a

See **SERENA** Page C5

SERENA

FROM PAGE C1

restaurant in Germany. "It's just more of an aggravation."

The cuts required two surgeries and put her tennis career on hiatus for nearly a year. She returned to the court in June.

Williams played into the fourth round at Wimbledon before winning back-to-back WTA tournaments. The string of wins shot her up the world rankings from 175th to 31st, making her the highest-ranked American.

After so much time off, Williams pointed to all the play in such a short time as the reason for the pain in her foot.

"I've played a lot of matches, more than I have in a long time," said Williams, who turns 30 in September. "And with training as well, it got a little aggravated, so instead of making it worse, I've decided it would be for my best health not to go."

With Williams' match canceled, Vera Zvonareva and Ekaterina Makarova moved to the center court, where Zvonareva won in straight sets.

"It's unfortunate for the tournament because Serena is a great champion and we always want to see her play ... but that happens and it's understandable," said Zvonareva, the No. 2 player in the world rankings.

Francesca Schiavone commended Williams for her play this summer. The strain of the U.S. Open tune-up season can be tough on anybody, she said, and worse for those with recent injuries.

"I think she played very hard this last two weeks," said Schiavone, who beat Maria Kirilenko yesterday to



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With the U.S. Open coming up, Serena Williams chose to rest her injured toe.

advance.

With a chance to rest before the U.S. Open, Williams likes her odds of winning a 14th Grand Slam event even more.

"If anything, (the withdrawal) will make them even better," Williams said. "I'll have more opportunity to rest up, give a 200 percent of healthy me, which would be a very dangerous thing."

Top women's player falls

American Christina McHale, 19, knocked off WTA No. 1 Caroline Wozniacki 6-4, 7-5. The match was Wozniacki's first after a first-round bye. Wozniacki's exit was her second disappointing showing in consecutive weeks. She lost to Roberta Vinci in the opening round of the Rogers Cup last week.

In the men's bracket, top-ranked Novak Djokovic beat Ryan Harrison 6-2, 6-3. No. 2 Rafael Nadal beat French qualifier Julien Benneteau 6-4, 7-5 while playing with two fingers on his right hand bandaged to protect burned fingertips.

The left-handed Nadal said was burned when he touched a hot plate at a local restaurant.

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