

# Justine salutes Israeli

## Obziler shows some Zip in 2nd-round loss to No. 1

By **WAYNE COFFEY**  
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A 31-YEAR-OLD VETERAN of the Israeli Army took Center Court at the U.S. Open yesterday, a Flushing Meadows rookie unlike any other. She wore an outfit that was the color of a school bus, whacked slices and forehands under azure skies and spent two hours and 14 minutes drinking in an opportunity she never would have had were it not for Billie Jean King, and her own steadfastness.

When it was all done at Arthur Ashe Stadium, Tzipora (Zippy) Obziler left to a rousing ovation, thrilled that she had unretired and had given herself a chance, though she was not thrilled with the result.

"She stole the show, even though she didn't win," said Darryl Cummings, Obziler's coach, and the tennis coach at Old Dominion University, after his pupil lost to the No. 1 player in the world and defending champion, Justine Henin-Hardenne, 6-2, 5-7, 6-2, in a second-round match.

"To play this kind of match, to know so

many people are behind me, it fills my heart."

In the ensuing match at Ashe, Andre Agassi moved into the third round with a 7-5, 2-6, 6-2, 1-0 (retired) victory over 20-year-old Florian Mayer, a Wimbledon quarterfinalist from Germany who was done in by a pulled thigh muscle. Mayer engaged in spirited baseline bashing with Agassi, and said, "If I had no injury, I think I had good chances to beat him today."

Zippy Obziler has tried to qualify for the U.S. Open five times, never breaking through into the main draw until last week. She lives in a suburb of Tel Aviv, and is the polar opposite of the teeming tide of teenagers who dominate her sport, kids who go off to some Florida academy or other, in pursuit of wealth and stardom.

Her father, Ephraim, is a salesman. Her mother, Yanka, manages a jewelry store. She is the only tennis player in the family, and made an impression on Henin-Hardenne.

"She had the right to beat me today," said Henin-Hardenne, who is returning from her two-month absence with a blood virus, and has looked vulnerable here after winning the gold medal in Athens. "I had to work very hard on every point."

Obziler played her first tour event in 1993, before getting a letter from Cummings. She went to Old Dominion, where she was the NCAA runner-up to Jill Craybas in 1995, and won the national clay-court championship the same year.

Obziler went on the tour, traveled the world, but had uneven results, hurt her shoulder and decided to quit in December, 2000, her rank at 149. She coached and played Fed Cup for Israel, and when she had a match point against Lindsay Davenport and played a tough match against Monica Seles in the summer of 2002, Billie Jean King, U.S. Fed Cup captain, urged her to give the tour another try.

"I got a brave decision to come back," she said.

She showed plenty of bravery against Henin-Hardenne, too, breaking her in the second set for 5-5 when the champion was serving for the match. Obziler held for 6-5, then took it to a third set when Henin-Hardenne missed a forehand. After going down a break in the final set, Obziler had three break points in an 18-point Game 4, but finally succumbed with a long backhand, which Henin-Hardenne followed with a gorgeous forehand crosscourt winner.

Henin-Hardenne won 10 of the last 11 points, won going away, but the ending took nothing from the experience for Zippy Obziler, who was flying back to Israel last night, loving being a pro tennis player again. "I go with my heart. I always follow my heart," she said.



HOWARD SIMMONS DAILY NEWS

Tzipora Obziler makes happy return but falls to Justine Henin-Hardenne.

## Nadal revs for Roddick

Shirt off, hat backwards, Rafael Nadal of Spain came off a practice court yesterday, his sights set squarely on the defending champion of the U.S. Open.

"I think it will be very nice," Nadal said of his Arthur Ashe Stadium debut tonight against No. 2 Andy Roddick. "I hope I play my best. I hope he doesn't play his best."

Nadal, 18, is one of the rising stars on the tour, a top-10 player waiting to happen. Nadal's greatest asset of all is that he has a "winning mentality," said countryman Carlos Moya, who is from the same area of Spain (Mallorca) as Nadal and has known him since he was a little boy.

"He's a very good fighter," Moya said of the 6-foot, 165-pound lefthander with a potent forehand and dazzling court coverage. "He's not going to be an easy opponent."

Nadal, ranked No. 49, won his first pro title in a clay-court tournament in Poland earlier this month, and comes in with a 26-12 record for the year after his five-set victory over Switzerland's Ivo Neuberger in the first round. He knows he's up against the best server on the planet — a guy who cranked a 152 mph shot in his first-round victory — but said he's eager to test himself in his first match against Roddick.

Awe should not be a problem. Earlier this year, Nadal beat Roger Federer at the Nasdaq 100 in Miami, one of only six losses the world No. 1 has had this year.

"I've heard a lot about him," Federer said. "I think this is not a surprise for everybody."

Said Roddick: "He gets amped up. He likes playing the big matches. I'm just going to have to try to enforce my game upon him." — Coffey

### TODAY'S FEATURED MATCHES

#### DAY SESSION (11 A.M.)

#### ARTHUR ASHE STADIUM

No. 31 **Maria Vento-Kabchi** (VEN) vs. No. 2 **Amelie Mauresmo** (FRA)

**Hicham Arazi** (MAR) vs.

No. 4 **Lleyton Hewitt** (AUS)

No. 8 **Jennifer Capriati** (USA) vs.

**Vera Douchevina** (RUS)

#### NIGHT SESSION (7 P.M.)

#### ASHE STADIUM

No. 30 **Tatiana Golovin** (FRA) vs.

No. 3 **Serena Williams** (USA)

**Rafael Nadal** (ESP) vs.

No. 2 **Andy Roddick** (USA)

#### ARMSTRONG STADIUM

**Tommy Haas** (GER) vs. No. 12

**Sebastian Grosjean** (FRA)

No. 15 **Patty Schnyder** (SUI) vs.

**Daniela Hantuchova** (SVK)

No. 16 **Francesca Schiavone**

(ITA) vs. **Angela Haynes** (USA)

No. 8 **David Nalbandian** (ARG) vs.

**Mikhail Youzhny** (RUS)

#### GRANDSTAND

No. 7 **Juan Carlos Ferraro** (ESP)

vs. **Stefan Koubek** (AUT)

No. 28 **Joachim Johansson** (SWE)

vs. **Jan-Michael Gambill** (USA)

No. 6 **Elena Dementieva** (RUS) vs.

**Nathalie Dechy** (FRN)

**COMPLETE RESULTS, P. 136**