

Power performance gets served up by tennis greats

Julia Beffon

TOP-class tennis returned to the Ellis Park indoor arena in Johannesburg yesterday as Serena and Venus Williams put on a display of power and skill not seen here for decades.

Serena won the exhibition match 6-3 6-4 but it barely mattered to the capacity 4 500 crowd who had come to see the two most dominant players in the women's game since the turn of the century. The sisters were in South Africa on a two-day visit to support the Breaking the Mould initiative.

On Saturday they held a development clinic in Soweto, then they were guests of honour at a gala banquet at which R100 000 was raised for wheelchair tennis. Yesterday's exhibition was followed by Venus attending the SA Sports awards in Sandton.

At each function they won over

South Africans with their graciousness and generosity of spirit. Not only are they role models for youngsters, but their wit and intelligence put them in rare company among sports stars.

But at yesterday's match, the sisters were back in their most natural element: on a tennis court, giving the ball an unfriendly whack. Venus, wearing a red-and-white dress of her own design, showed few signs of Sjogren's syndrome (which affects her immune system) – that has hampered her career since she was diagnosed with it last year, as she kept pace with her sister during the first set until she had her service broken in the sixth game.

The Williams's affection for each other was evident early in the second set when Serena slipped and fell on the baseline. Venus, running in for a simple shot, was so distracted by concern for her sister's welfare that she netted



TOTAL FOCUS: Venus Williams in action during the Breaking the Mould exhibition match against her sister Serena at Ellis Park Indoor Stadium in Johannesburg yesterday.

PHOTO: GALLO IMAGES

the shot.

Before the Williams sisters took the court, Kgothatso Matjane, the women's world No 10, and Evans

Maripa, the men's No 31, put on an exhibition of wheelchair tennis that had the gathering crowd oohing and aahing at their skill.