



FOCUS: Serena Williams beat older sister Venus 6-3 6-4, in an exhibition match, part of the women's empowerment initiative, Breaking the Mould, at the Ellis Park Indoor Arena, in Johannesburg. The event was sold out
Picture: ALON SKUY

Serena puts big sista in her place at the Park

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 from women players in South Africa 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 women's empowerment 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 about R100 000

was raised for wheelchair tennis, then yesterday's exhibition was followed by Venus attending the SA Sports awards in Sandton.

At each function they won over South Africans with graciousness and generosity of spirit. Not only are they role models for a generation of youngsters, but their wit and intelligence puts them in rare company among sports stars.

But on the tennis court, the sisters gave the ball an unfriendly whack. It might not have been the quality Serena displayed on the way to seven titles this year — including Wimbledon, the US Open, the WTA championships, as well as singles and doubles (with Venus) gold medals at the London Olympics — but the fans were more

than satisfied with the entertainment provided.

Venus, wearing a red-and-white dress of her own design, showed few signs of the debilitating 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 dink, was so distracted by concern for her sister's welfare that she netted the shot. Loud laughter from the other end persuaded her that there was nothing to worry about.

**Intelligence
puts them in
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Serena, in a fairly conservative (for her) red top and white skirt, sent down some almost unreturnable serves, though Venus — with years of experience of playing against the current world No 3 — was able to read the direction of many of her ground strokes. Some of Serena's serves registered more than 185km/h, while Venus's were more in the 165km/h range.

During Saturday's press conference the sisters said their parents would have preferred if they had shared out their trophies a bit more equally (Serena has 15 grand slam titles to Venus's seven).

Before the sisters took to 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 impressed the gathering crowd.