



BOB FALCETTI/Tribune photo

Martina Navratilova, left, congratulates Chris Evert after Evert won the two-of-three tiebreaker exhibition.

Evert rekindles rivalry in win over Navratilova

Two old foes play again today in the Legends event.

By H.A. BRANHAM
Tribune Staff Writer

WESLEY CHAPEL — It was just like old times. Chris Evert and Martina Navratilova together again, trading shots, turning heads.

Prior to Saturday's mini match at Saddlebrook Resort, Evert hadn't given Navratilova this much trouble in years.

No way was Evert supposed to win, yet she did, taking two of three tiebreakers, 7-3, 6-7, 7-6, to highlight the opening day of the Virginia Slims Legends.

The exhibition format originally was to be only one tiebreaker. But, "that would've only been about eight minutes of tennis, so this was better," Evert said after she and her old rival played 30 minutes on a sun-baked clay court.

The conditions and surface seemed to

favor Evert and her back-court style, just as they did during her professional career. Her ground strokes, now bolstered by a wide-body, graphite racket, put Navratilova on the defensive from the outset.

The first tiebreaker was a two-fisted throwback to the 1970s when Evert dominated the rivalry that ended in 1988, with Navratilova holding a 43-37 edge.

Evert, with husband Andy Mill and 3-year-old son Alex watching, played like anything but a 40-year-old wife and mother of two.

Her parents, Jimmy and Colette, also were on hand — and beaming afterward.

"Yes, I was surprised at how she did," Jimmy Evert said. "It was exciting."

Navratilova, meanwhile, admitted to the unthinkable, considering the non-importance of the afternoon: nerves.

"I haven't been playing singles much, and I haven't been playing on clay, so

See EVERT, Page 14

Evert, Martina renew rivalry

■ From Page 1

being nervous didn't help," Navratilova said.

"I've been hitting on hard courts in Aspen, and for awhile I just wasn't hitting the ball hard enough to get it over the net."

Of course, that changed. Navratilova started accompanying chip with charge, and the inevitable volleying onslaught began. Again, a reminder of the past. Even the best Evert shots were sometimes easy pickings for Navratilova at net.

It could have ended in consecutive tiebreakers, but Navratilova extended things by winning the second breaker with a high, reaching forehand volley.

Evert then shot to a 6-1 lead in the third, only to have Navratilova run through five points. One of the five came via an ace; the other four were from Evert errors, including a ghastly forehand service return.

"I thought I gagged a couple of shots there," Evert said.

And so it reached 6-6 in the third — match point for both (no two-points-ahead rule here) — with Navratilova serving.

Fittingly, one of the day's best rallies developed. It peaked with Navratilova approaching, punching a fine forehand volley that looked like a winner.

But suddenly, Evert was 20 again. A running forehand cross-court passed her old foe decisively.

"I got better as I went along," said Evert, who was beaten easily by Navratilova in a February exhibition, a loss that served as a wake-up call, sending Evert to the practice court in preparation for the first-year/six-city Legends tour.

Apparently, it has paid off. Evert also won both her doubles matches Saturday playing with "Team Evert" teammates Hana Mandlikova and Olga Morozova.

Navratilova, meanwhile, went 0-for-3. She also lost two doubles sets with teammates Francoise Durr and Evonne Goolagong.

Expect more surprising stuff today, Evert said, when Navratilova and she duel again.

"Other things might go [talent-wise] a little bit, but the hands, I think are still there," she said.

"The [one-set] format [for singles and doubles] is good," Navratilova added. "We didn't want people to go away saying we played too long. We didn't embarrass ourselves."

14-Sports

Navratilova, Graf a Wimbledon pair

By H.A. BRANHAM
Tribune Staff Writer

WESLEY CHAPEL — The announcement, fittingly, came in back-handed fashion. It was Chris Evert who leaked word Saturday that Martina Navratilova will play doubles this year at Wimbledon with Steffi Graf.

TENNIS At a news conference preceding the Virginia Slims Legends event at Saddlebrook Resort, Navratilova said she would play Wimbledon. But she wouldn't name her partner.

"I know [who] but I don't want to talk about it," Navratilova said.

Enter Evert, in another interview session. Commenting on Navratilova's retirement from singles but continued doubles play, she said "Martina told me she's playing doubles with Steffi."

Informed of Navratilova's desire to keep the plans quiet, Chris rolled her eyes, and said, "Well, I always was a big mouth."

Elsewhere

■ At Amelia Island, top-seeded Conchita Martinez and No. 2 Gabriela Sabatini posted straight-set victories and will meet for the Bausch & Lomb championship.

AT A GLANCE

■ **What:** Virginia Slims Legends.

■ **Where:** Saddlebrook Resort, Wesley Chapel.

■ **When:** Today, 1 p.m.

■ **What:** Consolation match — Evonne Goolagong-Virginia Wade vs. Hana Mandlikova-Rosie Casals; Semifinals — Chris Evert-Olga Morozova vs. Tracy Austin-Betty Stove; Martina Navratilova-Francoise Durr vs. Billie Jean King-Wendy Turnbull; Singles — Evert vs. Navratilova, followed by doubles final.

■ **Tickets:** Sold out.

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