

Gluten-free dinners, tourist traps and mocktails: Where the US Open tennis stars hang off-duty





Rafael Nadal and Cori "Coco" Gauff play badminton during the 2019 Palace Invitational at the Lotte New York Palace Hotel in New York City. Many of the US Open players frequent establishments, like the Lotte, in the Midtown Manhattan neighborhood. Jamie McCarthy/Getty Images for Lotte New York Palace



Ericka N. Goodman-Hughey

Aug 29, 2019



The empire city. The city of dreams. The Big Apple. And depending on who's on the court at Arthur Ashe for the evening matches, it's the city that never sleeps. The top tennis players in the world have descended upon USTA Billie Jean King National Tennis Center in Flushing Meadows for the US Open.

New York City hopes to serve them well -- serve them their lattes, tacos and mocktails well, that is.

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From tourist traps to celebrity haunts, your favorite players, such as Venus and Serena Williams, Naomi Osaka, Maria Sharapova and Novak Djokovic, know how to have a good time. Here's where they hang when they are off the courts.

Player: [Novak Djokovic](#)

Location: Scarpetta at The James Hotel Nomad

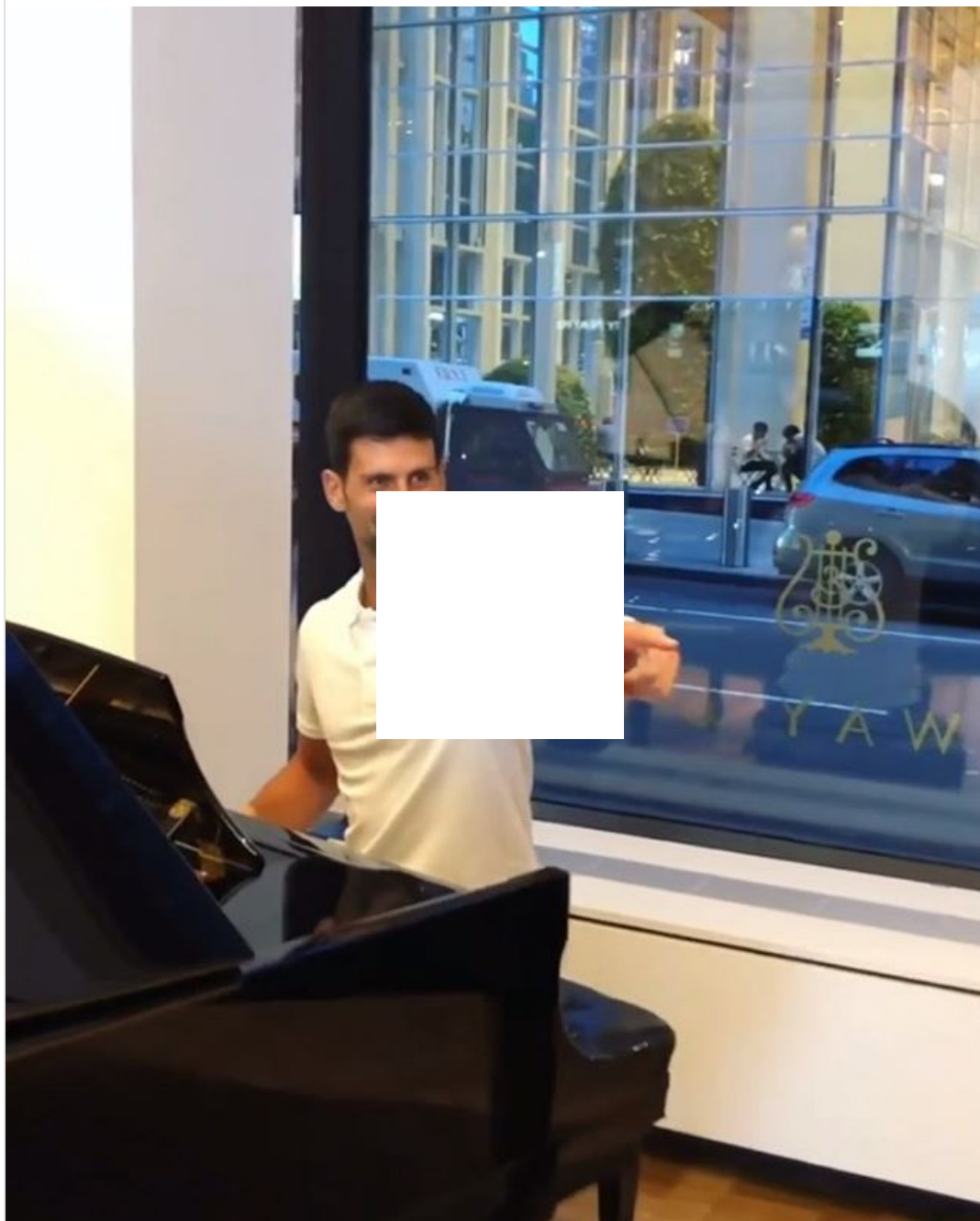


Serbia's Novak Djokovic is a man of many talents. He's the No. 1 men's seed at the Open, "plays" the piano (see below) and is disciplined when it comes to his diet. According to [The New York Post](#), Djokovic was spotted at Italian eatery Scarpetta ahead of the tournament dining on vegan, gluten-free and dairy-free fare. Djokovic beat [Juan Ignacio Londero](#) (6-4, 7-6 (3), 6-1) in Round 2 on Wednesday.



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New York, New York

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Thank you professor @lolaastanova 😊🎹🎹
#repost @lolaastanova ... and this is just after one 🎹 lesson! 😊
Honestly, I don't think this song ever sounded more appropriate! @djokernole ☐☐
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#wearethechampions #usopen #piano #queen

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Player: [Serena Williams](#)

Location: La Esquina (Soho)

After attending Nike's "Queen of the Court" event last Tuesday, which gathered several top professional female players so they could hit balls with young players, Serena popped into downtown hotspot La Esquina. The Mexican restaurant is just as well known for its tacos as it is for its A-list patrons such as George Clooney and Julia Roberts.

According to [Entertainment Tonight](#), the 23-time Grand Slam champ met up with her friend, model [Gigi Hadid](#) (who was accompanied by "Bachelorette" alum Tyler Cameron), at the eatery. Serena defeated fellow American [Catty McNally](#) in three sets (5-7, 6-3, 6-1) in Round 2 on Wednesday.



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La Esquina

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City that never sleeps.

...

□ @typhilly.

...

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Player: [Simona Halep](#)

Location: Midtown East



"Concrete jungle where dreams are made of ... These streets will make you feel brand new, big lights will inspire you. Let's hear it for New York." We're assuming you heard Jay-Z and Alicia Keys' 2009 duet, "[Empire State of Mind](#)," in your head when you saw this image of Halep. The 2019 Wimbledon women's singles champion meets American [Taylor Townsend](#) in Round 2 on Thursday. In this photo, Halep is standing at the corner of 49th Street and Madison Avenue, close to where many of the athletes dwell during the tournament.



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♥ New York ♥

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**Player:** [Naomi Osaka](#)**Location:** St. Patrick's Cathedral

Dedicated in 1879, St. Patrick's Cathedral is the Mother Church of the Archdiocese of New York and the seat of the archbishop. Located on Fifth Avenue, across from Rockefeller Center, the sanctuary is the largest Gothic Catholic cathedral in the United States. It welcomes more than 5 million visitors per year. Count 2018 US Open champ Osaka among the tourists who have visited the famed sanctuary. She meets Poland's [Magda Linette](#) in Round 2 on Thursday after defeating Russian [Anna Blinkova](#) in Round 1.



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Players: [Albert Ramos-Vinolas](#), [Feliciano Lopez](#), [Roberto Bautista Agut](#) and [Elina Svitolina](#)

Location: The Knickerbocker Hotel's St. Cloud Rooftop Bar

At the bar overlooking Times Square, the international tennis stars peered down onto the busy metropolis' streets while sipping mocktails ahead their 2018 matches. Ukrainian player Svitolina beat Venus Williams (6-4, 6-4) in a second-round match on Wednesday.



 **theknicknyc**
St Cloud NYC

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Cheers to the fantastic performances of tennis stars [@robertobautistaagut](#), [@elisvitolina](#), [@felilopezoficial](#), and [@albertramosvinolas](#) during the [@USOpen](#). It has been an honor hosting them, and we look forward to their next return! Join us to score your own winning vantage point with a stay high above it all. [#KnickOfTime](#)

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Players: [Nicole Gibbs](#), [Sorana Cirstea](#), [Heather Watson](#), [Danielle Collins](#), [Jordan Thompson](#) and [Milos Raonic](#)



Location: Citi Field



When you're not on the court, why not walk the less than half-mile from Billie Jean King Tennis Center to Citi Field? And don't forget to tell Mr. Met hello for us while you're there. Halep knocked Gibbs out in Round 1 of the Open.





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Citi Field

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Let's go Mets 🕒🕒 #TeamNB

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Player: Maria Sharapova

Location: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum



The 2006 US Open winner -- who lost to Serena Williams 6-1, 6-1 in Round 1 -- sure doesn't give fine art the cold shoulder. The Frank Lloyd Wright-designed Guggenheim museum, which overlooks Central Park, houses a world-class collection of art.



mariasharapova
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum

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Sneaked out to catch Giacometti's glory at [@guggenheim](#) before he departs in a couple weeks. What I really wanted to do was walk around the city in my new Cortez. 📷

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Player: Venus Williams

Location: Central Park and The Smith (Midtown)

Venus Williams has been to the US Open quarters or further 12 times. New York has become sort of a second home for her. Every August she is spotted walking her dog near Central Park between matches. Williams, who has seven Grand Slam titles under her belt, has also been seen at popular brunch spot The Smith during her Open breaks. She departed the Open after a Round 2 loss to Svitolina.



venuswilliams
Central Park in NYC

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Why are American women more successful in tennis than U.S. men?



Serena Williams reflects on her second US Open finals loss in a row, describing it as her "worst" match of the tournament. (1:19)



Peter Bodo
ESPN.com Staff Writer

Sep 10, 2019



NEW YORK -- The spotlight on American women at the US Open this year was relentless, shifting from 15-year-old sensation [Coco Gauff](#) to 37-year-old [Serena Williams](#) to iconoclastic stylist [Taylor Townsend](#), pausing now and then to give us a glimpse of a [Madison Keys](#), [Sofia Kenin](#) or [Caty McNally](#).



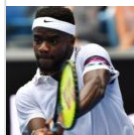
Lurking in the background, out of the light: an embattled generation of American men.



As fans cry for the next great American male champion, the current veterans -- including [John Isner](#), [Sam Querrey](#) and [Steve Johnson](#) -- are still oppressed by the Big Three. Meanwhile, a cohort of talented youngsters are doggedly trying to move up from the Top 50 into the spotlight. But the slogging has been slow.



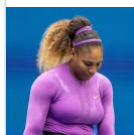
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The U.S. had four women in the US Open fourth round, led by finalist Williams. Three women from the U.S. were ranked in the top 10 (Williams, Keys, [Sloane Stephens](#)) during the Open, another was in the top 20 (Kenin), three more ranked No. 36 or better -- a grand total of 13 in the top 100 -- and, of course, Gauff. Other talented players wait in the wings.

The men?

Not a single American man survived the third round. They have nine in the top 100, but none ranks higher than No. 20 Isner, the only one in the top 25. Three 21-year-olds ([Reilly Opelka](#), [Taylor Fritz](#) and [Frances Tiafoe](#)) are in the top 50, led by No. 30 Fritz. But there's no male franchise player like Williams, or a surefire future one like Gauff and not a single active singles Grand Slam champion (the women have three).



There are powerful reasons for the disparity, and most of them have little to do with the quality of the heavily-funded USTA training programs, which allocate resources equally to the men's and women's programs.



Patrick Mouratoglou, Williams' coach and operator of the eponymous academy where Gauff and men's star [Stefanos Tsitsipas](#) have trained, told ESPN.com: "I can't comment on what the USTA is doing, but something more general applies. When you have a star in any sport in any country, the kids want to be like him or her. And the U.S. doesn't have a male tennis star who can compare with Serena and [Venus Williams](#)."



[Timea Babos](#), one of the top two-way players (singles and doubles) in the WTA, knows the value of having a domestic role model, as she didn't have one growing up in Hungary.

"It's important to have these great idols," she said in an interview. "We never had such players like the Williams sisters. I looked up to (Russia's) [Elena Dementieva](#), but that as personal. Having someone from your country at the top creates a lot more interest."

Coco Gauff is just one of many talented young American women's tennis players coming onto the scene.
Robert Deutsch-USA TODAY Sports

Call it the "Williams Effect." It is powerful, difficult to quantify and unique. It has drawn in volumes of gifted players, particularly people of color, and in a manner and for reasons that reach far simply for having two great champions as high-profile role models. Colette Lewis, the doyen of junior tennis and author of a blog and the [@zootennis](#) Twitter feed, told ESPN.com:

"You can't forget the impact of Richard [Williams, the father of the sisters]. A lot of African-American men looked at Richard as their role model, instead of their kids just looking up to Venus or Serena. Richard was basically saying, 'You don't have to come from a lot of knowledge of this, you can do it on your own. It inspired a lot of parents (including the Gauffs).'"



In his autobiography, Richard Williams wrote about the moment the light bulb went on over his head. Channel surfing at home, he happened to catch the presentation ceremony in which then-25-year-old pro Virginia Ruzici received a prize-money check for \$40,000. Stunned by the payoff for a few hours' work, he almost immediately resolved, "I'm going to have two kids and put them in tennis."

That's just one of the ways money has been a critical driver in tennis' ability to recruit the best female athletes. Insurgents in the ATP are busy kicking up a fuss about how little lower-ranked tour-level players compared to their counterparts in more popular sports like basketball or football. For women, though, tennis offers the biggest payout of any pro sport -- by far. Eight of the top earners in women's sports last year, according to Forbes, were tennis players.

Successful Olympic stars and others (such as top 10 earner Danica Patrick) can also capitalize in the marketplace, but as Lewis said: "The Olympic sports and World Cups that everyone watches occur every four years. You can become famous, but then it fades. A tennis player has four chances (the Grand Slam

tournaments) every year to be famous, to make money (including endorsements) and stay in the public eye."

On a more modest scale, the promise of a potential college scholarship is alluring to many parents. It's a fallback in case the child is an excellent player, but not pro material at a young age. That option is open to men, too, but with fewer scholarships available.



According to Kathy Rinaldi, the head of women's tennis for the USTA, "It all starts with a broad base, and it narrows as you go up. The women do mature earlier, so they tend to stay in the game if they experience some success."



There are high hopes for 21-year-old American Taylor Fritz, ranked No. 30 in the world.
David Kirouac/Icon Sportswire



Martin Blackman, general manager of player development for the USTA, told ESPN.com: "It's a value proposition when a parent is choosing a sport for a child. Fully funded Division I colleges have eight full scholarships to offer girls, compared to four-and-a-half for boys (The discrepancy is meant to restore the imbalance created by the abundance of scholarships given to men in sports like football)."

The scholarship pitch brings many gifted female athletes into the USTA fold at an early age, and there's little to lure them away. It's different for young men. Although there is no hard and fast data, tennis ranks somewhere in the bottom half of the 10 most popular sports on most lists. It's no secret the popularity of the game has exploded worldwide, ending the reign of the two longtime superpowers, Australia and the U.S. But it also turns out that many other nations have a built-in advantage in recruiting talent.

"In Europe, tennis is No. 2 after soccer," said Mouratoglou, who currently has no promising players from the U.S. at his academy in France. Mouratoglou believes boys in Europe can grow up wanting to be the next [Gael Monfils](#) or Rafa Nadal. But in the U.S, "You could have another [Roger Federer](#) and probably he still will not be as popular as LeBron James."

Despite the enormous population advantage enjoyed by the U.S., the base of elite athletes is limited. In the halls of American high schools, the heroes are the quarterback and the shooting guard, not the kid ranked No. 3 in some regional, extra-scholastic organization. There's no homecoming celebration for the tennis team.



Rinaldi is sympathetic to the plight of her male counterpart (Kent Kinnear), and suggests the outlook isn't as grim as some claim. "The men have a different pathway, you have to look at that," she told ESPN.com. "Our guys are stepping up." She said she expects "great things" from 21-year-olds Fritz (ranked No. 30), Tiafoe (No. 43) and Opelka (No. 46).

"When you look at how the longevity has increased," Rinaldi added. "You can see that time is on their side."

Blackman is committed to overcoming the obstacles faced by the U.S. men and the perils associated with such attempts. He said, "A lot of the challenges are structural, or could be perceived as external (the popularity of other sports), but we have to tackle them. We have to do it, and we're going to do it without lowering the bar."



To that end, the USTA has launched the "Net Generation" campaign, an initiative to recruit talented athletes and keep them satisfied with the tennis experience. By the start of 2021, Blackman said, the USTA hopes to roll out comprehensive "format reform." That will include a perhaps dramatic shift to team play, because research has shown that young men much prefer it to the sometimes lonely experience of an individual sport.

Blackman insists the benchmarks for success will remain rigorous. Right now, the first target for players in the player development program is a top 20 ranking. The next box to tick is top 10. After that, elite players tend to build their own teams and federation support dwindles.

"Understand, there is a real sense of urgency regarding the men's side," Blackman said. "We have three young guys in the top 50. It's the first time in a long while that we've had that."

That may not be so impressive when compared to the U.S. women, but it's a start.



Gluten-free dinners, tourist traps and mocktails: Where the US Open tennis stars hang off-duty

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