

Ostapenko's awesome summer

French Open champion, 20, confident ahead of U.S. Open

BY ANDREW COHEN
Special to amNewYork

This summer has been life-changing for Jelena Ostapenko, who spent last Wednesday evening as a sponsored guest on the rooftop of the HGU New York Hotel in midtown.

It's just one of many new doors to open for Ostapenko, who is better known as "Alona" in her native Latvia. In June, she became the first unseeded woman to win the French Open since 1933 with her defeat of second-seeded Simona Halep in the final.

"My life changed a little bit," Ostapenko told amNewYork. "I'm getting more attention from everyone. It's a little bit tougher

because it's more pressure."

After winning at Roland Garros and reaching the quarterfinals at Wimbledon, the 20-year-old Ostapenko will head into the U.S. Open, which begins Monday, as the 12th-seeded women's singles player. This year's tournament at Flushing Meadows will not include the sport's biggest star, as Serena Williams is expecting the birth of her first child later this year.

Williams' absence will perhaps set the stage for a young emerging talent like Ostapenko to headline the next generation of women's tennis. Ostapenko and 23-year-old Garbiñe Muguruza are the only ac-

tive players under age 25 to have won a women's singles Grand Slam.

"I have my confidence because I know I played very well at the French," Ostapenko said. "I just have to focus on my game and take it one match at a time."

Ostapenko will match up Tuesday against world No. 61 Lara Arruabarrena in the first round. She hopes to replicate her style of play in Paris for the year's final major in Queens.

"I was playing very aggressive but also very consistent," Ostapenko said. "Some matches I was down, but I was fighting until the last point. I think if I put it all together, I can do really well [at the U.S. Open]."



Jelena Ostapenko is one of just two active women younger than 25 to have won a Grand Slam.

GETTY IMAGES / MICHAEL STEELE

2 men with best chance to win in Qns.

Men's tennis continues to be dominated by a small group of elite players as the U.S. Open returns to Flushing Meadows this week.

Since 2010, five players have captured 30 of the last 31 majors. Each in the group, comprising Novak Djokovic, Rafael Nadal, Roger Federer, Stan Wawrinka and Andy Murray, has won at least three in that time.

Judging by past results, one of these men will claim another Grand Slam on Sept. 10. However, the majority of the quintet won't be on the court the next two weeks. Djokovic, Wawrinka and Murray are dealing with various injuries and will forgo the Open.

With that in mind, here's a look at the remaining pair of elite players who will be in action as they enter the final major of the year.



GETTY IMAGES / MINAS PANAGIOTAKIS

Rafael Nadal returned recently to the world's top ranking.

Rafael Nadal

The top seed recently took back the No. 1 spot in the ATP rankings for the first time in three years. After years of relative struggles due to injuries, the 31-year-old Spaniard revived his career with his 10th championship at the French Open in June, extending his record-high total in Paris. The two-time U.S. Open winner might be capable of turning back the clock to 2013, the last time he won it all in Queens.

Roger Federer

Like Nadal, many presumed the legend from Switzerland's best days were behind him when the year began. Titles at the Australian Open and Wimbledon, which increased his record Grand Slam tally to 19, proved otherwise. Although a consecutive five-time winner at Flushing Meadows, the 36-year-old hasn't won the U.S. Open since 2008. But after winning it all in London last month, don't count him out. (SCOTT FONTANA)

Top 4 women all are age 25 or younger

Jelena Ostapenko is one of several elite women age 25 or younger who could leave Queens next month as a first-time U.S. Open champion. Here's a look at the top four players in the WTA rankings entering the year's final major.

Karolina Pliskova

The 25-year-old ascended to the top ranking last month. Although she has yet to capture a major, she was a semifinalist at the French Open and a quarterfinalist at the Australian Open earlier this year. The 2016 runner-up at Flushing Meadows took Angelique Kerber to a third set before falling, 6-3, 4-6, 6-4.

Simona Halep

A two-time finalist at Roland Garros, the 25-year-old has hovered near the top for several years but has yet to achieve the No. 1 ranking or win a Grand Slam. She came close in June, falling short to Ostapenko in



GETTY IMAGES / ROB CARR

Garbiñe Muguruza won at Wimbledon last month.

the final in Paris. Halep reached the semifinals in New York two years ago, bowing to eventual champion Flavia Pennetta.

Garbiñe Muguruza

Of the top four, only the 23-year-old Muguruza is a major winner — and she's pulled off the feat twice. She won the French last year, and is coming off a Wimbledon crown last month when she topped Venus Williams at All England. However, she has yet to advance past Round

2 on Flushing's hard court.

Elina Svitolina

Although the 22-year-old has reached the quarterfinals at a Grand Slam just twice — both in France — her trajectory has trended upward in 2017. She has matched or surpassed her previous best finishes at the year's first three majors, and last year was a quarterfinalist at the Rio Olympics. Svitolina reached the third round in each of the last two U.S. Open tournaments. (SCOTT FONTANA)