FOCUS ON WINNERS: CAROLINE WOZNIACKI

There was a time when the most famous person to come from Denmark was author Hans Christian Anderson. But now it's time his legend made way for a newer, sportier star, whose life so far resembles that of a fairytale: tennis pro Caroline Wozniacki.

Denmark's little princess

Danish tennis player Caroline Wozniacki is no stranger to defeat. At the tender age of seven, her parents and brother refused to play tennis with her because she 'wasn't very good'. Several years later, just eight days after her 15th birthday, Ms Wozniacki made her pro debut at the Sony Ericsson Women's Tennis Association (WTA) Tour at Cincinnati's Western & Southern Financial Group Women's Open, only to lose to Patty Schnyder in the first round. In her second WTA tournament of the year, the Nordea Nordic Light Open, the tennis player was again knocked out in the first round, this time by Martina Suchá.

But it seems that for the ambitious tennis pro, determination, discipline and dedication have finally paid off. At 20 years of age, Ms Wozniacki is ranked world number one in the WTA ranking, the 20th player to achieve this status and the first ever Dane, male or female, to be deemed the world's best tennis player.

Hailing from a sports-minded family, it could be said that Ms Wozniacki was always destined for greater things. Her parents, both Polish immigrants, achieved high levels of sporting prowess, her mother having played on the Polish women's national volleyball team, while her father played professional football in Poland and in Mannheim, Germany. Ms Wozniacki's older brother, Patrik Wozniacki, is a professional footballer for Brønshøj BK in Denmark. So it makes sense that Ms Wozniacki, an ardent Liverpool FC fan, holds football as her true passion.

Tennis, on the other hand, is a game Ms Wozniacki simply wanted to join in with as a child. "I was seven years old and my brother and parents were playing for fun, but I wasn't very good at tennis so no-one wanted to play with me," she says. Undeterred by the lack of encouragement, Ms Wozniacki endeavoured to improve her game. "I took a racquet and some balls and started playing against a wall for three or four hours every day to become a better tennis player. One day my dad said, 'Ok, if you want to play tennis, I can help you out'."

Aiming high

From that point on, Ms Wozniacki set about playing her way to the top, with her father as her coach. At the age of ten she became known in Denmark as the 'Little Princess' for her talent with a racquet. In 2006, she won the junior Wimbledon title and in September 2009 she played in her first Grand Slam final at the US Open but lost to Kim Clijsters. This year, Ms Wozniacki is one of only two players (the other being the formidable Venus Williams) to reach at least the fourth round of every Grand Slam, getting to the last 16 at the Australian Open and Wimbledon, the quarterfinals of the French Open at Roland Garros and the semifinals of the US Open.

Never one to give up on a dream, Ms Wozniacki always knew she would persevere until she made it to the top. In an interview in June 2010, days before her 20th birthday and just four months before being crowned world number one, she said: "I know it's been pretty good and the rankings and the Slam final came quite early, but I won't even begin to be satisfied until I reach world number one ranking or start winning Grand Slam titles. I know I can get there. I've just got to keep on doing what I'm doing. I'm only 19 so it's a fact I'll be better when I'm 20 and better still when I'm 21. My dad always asks me, 'You're world number three, how can you be upset at your age?' He's right, of course, but I have no intention of making this my peak."

World number one

Ms Wozniacki stayed true to her goal and on Monday, 11 October 2010, surpassed former world number one Serena Williams, who had held the ranking since becoming year-end world

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Caroline Wozniacki wearing her adidas/ Stella McCartney designed dress for her appearance at the US Open. The Danish tennis player started 2010 as No.4 in the world and ended the year at the top of the rankings.

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During the doubles competition at the US Open Ms Wozniacki wore the tennis Performance Tank in neon yellow and the tennis Performance Skirt in dark slate, the Visor and the Studio Spring Hoodie in white.

Adidas tennis Performance wear features its Climalite fabric, a combination of cotton on the surface with a polyester or nylon backing to enhance wicking sweat away from the skin.

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number one in November 2009. But who knows; if her parents and brother had been having a kick around on that fateful day when she was seven years old, she could be playing an altogether different ball game. "Denmark has a good women's football team and if I'd started to play football seriously at seven years of age like I did with tennis I reckon I could have ended up playing football for a living," she says. "As it is I love watching men's football."

There's no denying that Ms Wozniacki might have succeeded in any career path she chose. The piano-playing star is also taking singing lessons and not surprisingly is trilingual. And rather than shy away from the pressure of a thousand eyes, she thrives on playing big games. "I first really noticed this in the US Open final last September [2009] against Kim [Clijsters]," she says. "There I was, playing in the biggest game of my life inside the biggest tennis stadium in the world in front of 23,000 fans and I remember midway through the game wondering why I didn't feel at all nervous. On the day Kim was better than me but I learnt a lot that day, and will not be fazed the next time I'm in a Slam final and will try my hardest to take the opportunity."

Fame and fashion

The Danish are deeply proud of their 'little princess', which, as those in the limelight know all too well, can be a double-edged sword. "It means that in Denmark I can't really go anywhere without being photographed," says Ms Wozniacki. "It can be frustrating sometimes because I'd like to throw on a tracksuit but always have to dress up so that people don't comment on why my shoes don't match with my top."

That's not to say Ms Wozniacki isn't interested in fashion. Since June 2009 she has been sponsored by adidas and has worn Stella McCartney sportswear at every match since. Ever the professional, she is quick to endorse the brand and confesses to an interest in 'looking nice' during media interviews. "I'm so lucky I am the face of adidas by Stella McCartney and I have my own special line that no one else is wearing," she said in a recent interview. "I like to dress up and look nice and I think it's nice to have a nice looking dress on. You don't want to think about what you're wearing on court. If you feel comfortable, you just think about your tennis. So I think it's important to feel good."

Of course, Ms Wozniacki's athletic prettiness and natural charm are any sponsor's dream, and the fact that the star remains so level-headed despite all her success can only mean good things for the future. Her mum, Anna Wozniacki, is the first to praise her daughter's grounded outlook, saying: "Of course we're not a regular family, but I think we handle it pretty well. Caroline is completely down to earth and tries to do her best. She is also very friendly and smiles easily, and she's completely herself. She doesn't have a diva attitude."

It just goes to show that a few knockbacks at a young age can plant a seed of determination that will one day create a world-class athlete. She ended 2010 as world number one and is aiming to win the Australian Open, the first Grand Slam tournament of 2011.

Talking of her future prospects, Ms Wozniacki says: "I feel that my life is complete right now, I love being where I am. I worked to become a professional tennis player all my life, and now I feel like that my dream has started to finally come true. I feel like I can beat everybody on a good day. Of course, they can also beat me if they play well. But definitely I believe it's possible, and we'll have to see what the future brings."

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