

Conchita Martinez

After an 18-year professional career in which she claimed Wimbledon among her 33 singles titles, Conchita Martinez remains intrinsically linked to tennis in other ways. The history-making Spaniard talks to BARRY WOOD.

While her compatriot Arantxa Sanchez Vicario once famously complained that 'grass is for cows', Conchita Martinez proved herself to be far more comfortable on the surface by claiming the Wimbledon title in 1994 with victory over none other than Martina Navratilova. She remains the only Spanish woman to triumph at the All England Club.

She went on to reach the final of the 1998 Australian Open final, losing to Martina Hingis, and at Roland Garros in 2000, when she was defeated by Mary Pierce. She was twice a singles semi-finalist at the US Open and also twice finished as runner-up in the doubles at Roland Garros. She reached world No. 2 in singles and No. 7 in doubles, winning 33 WTA singles and 13 WTA doubles titles.

What made you decide it was time to retire from the tour?

I had a very long career, 18 years on the WTA Tour, and I was struggling with a heel injury (near the Achilles tendon) for the last four years I would say. It was not easy to practise anymore and I had to modify the way of practise etc. It is something that you think about and at the end of 2004 I thought I had enough and was going to retire, but one day in December I started playing again and decided that I would play in 2005.

That year was very positive for me. I won another title in singles (in Pattaya, Thailand) and did quite well, and in doubles too we qualified for the year end championships with Virginia Ruano (only four teams qualified) so I was very happy I played that year and I had no doubt in my mind that I had to stop, so I did and then had surgery.

Any regrets, and is there anything you miss from those days?

I have no regrets. I knew it was time and having played that extra year made it all good. I do not miss anything from those days. I'm very much connected to

tennis so I don't miss that competition life anymore, I go to tournaments on a more relaxed way and it's great. 18 years being active is a long time.

What are your strongest memories of when you were playing?

Well, everything from travelling all the time, living in hotels, having to practise and do everything possible to be at your best all the time. Hotels, new cities, tennis clubs, airplanes, airports. And the greatest feeling of getting the trophy on Sunday, that was a great one. Didn't mind working on Sundays. I love it!

What is it like going out to play a Wimbledon final?

It is the ultimate feeling, so great to step out on the beautiful Centre Court at the All England Club, full of people ready to watch some good tennis. I wasn't too nervous and I was confident that I could do it.

What have you done since retiring, and do you ever pick up a racquet now?

I have been commentating matches for

The 1994 Wimbledon champion was also runner-up at Australian Open 1998 and the French Open in 2000.



TV, I have been coaching some players on and off, and I worked with Tennis Australia coaching in 2010.

I love Australia and the people. It's very pretty. I did some work with Rennae Stubbs when she was still playing doubles. I have been open to coaching and they thought it would be great to have me work for them and help some players.

I was also a tournament Director for the Andalucia Tennis Experience for three years, I worked for the San Diego Tournament in 2009 and 2010, I have a sports consultancy and work with Zonair3d, a Spanish company that is engaged in research and the scientific development of technological applications based on air and its components. They make a portable bubble machine where you can breathe pure air and it's great for recovery, great for athletics.

What do you think about the WTA Tour now?

The Tour now is a little different but it's good, there is a lot of competition but it is hard to follow a player because some of them are not as consistent and they do really well and then some drop off (down) the rankings. So I think people are having a hard time following players. But there are some really good players out there.



Commentating and coaching have kept Martinez busy since her 2006 retirement.

CONCHITA MARTINEZ FAST FACTS

Born: 16 April 1972, Huesca, Spain

Lives: Barcelona, Spain and San Diego, USA

Career titles: 33 singles (including Wimbledon 1994); 13 doubles

Other: A member of the Spanish Fed Cup team from 1988-96, 1998, 2000-04 and Spanish Olympic team 1992, 1996, 2000 and 2004