



REUTERS

Martina's namesake seeks Wimbledon success

By Gideon Long

WIMBLEDON, England, July 1 (Reuters) - As Martina Navratilova steps on to Centre Court on Saturday for her 12th single's final, a namesake almost a quarter-century her junior will also be bidding for Wimbledon glory.

Martina Hingis, named by her Czech-born mother after the nine times Wimbledon champion, will be looking for a win over Amelie Castera of France to take her to the girls' final on Sunday.

Not that the Swiss girl is new to finals.

At 13 she already has two French Open junior titles under her belt and on Friday she clinched her semifinal place with a 6-4 6-3 win over 12-year-old Russian Anna Kurnikova. The two are among the brightest of a cluster of young hopefuls waiting to hit the professional circuit.

"I didn't play so well against Kurnikova," the quietly spoken eighth seed said after the game. "I was a bit nervous. I'm not used to playing against girls younger than me."

In both her finals in Paris she beat girls five years her senior.

Speaking through an interpreter, she said it would be different when she reached the magic age of 14 and became eligible to challenge the established names of women's tennis. "Then I'll have nothing to lose," she said.

Hingis, ranked eighth in the juniors and 396th in the seniors, is due to make that transition in October when she plays in Zurich, not far from her home town of Truebbach.

Unlike Kurnakova, she has resisted the temptation to move to the United States and devote her life entirely to tennis.

"Why should I go?" she asks. "I don't see any need to go when I'm happy at home."

And she shrugs off comparisons with Jennifer Capriati who burst onto the circuit in 1989 as a 13-year-old and enjoyed a few years at the top before crashing out of the game last year.

The American is now on a drug rehabilitation programme and memories of her historic Wimbledon seniors debut in 1990 as the youngest competitor ever to play here are fast fading.

All girls are different, they develop in different ways and they have different family backgrounds, Hingis said.

"I don't know Jennifer personally but I don't think there are many similarities between her upbringing and mine."

Hingis's mother, a full-time tennis coach, appears anxious to protect her only child from the game's pressures, accompanying her to interviews and insisting she concentrates on her homework as well as her tennis.

A self-confessed sports fanatic, Hingis also finds time for horse-riding three times a week and a weekly swim along with a little Alpine skiing in the winter.

While she admits she still has much to learn about the game, particularly on grass, she has already developed at least one trait of a true tennis professional.

In the final game of Friday's match she earned herself an umpire's warning when she slammed her racket down on the grass after a mis-hit shot.

"It wasn't that bad," she says with a smile. "Everybody gets a little angry sometimes."

If she can keep her temper in check this weekend, there may be more than one Martina celebrating Wimbledon success this year.

