

## Top two Belgians pass on Fed Cup

By Charles Bricker  
Staff Writer  
Posted March 23 2005

*Copyright © 2005, South Florida Sun-Sentinel*

KEY BISCAYNE -- If ticket sales for the April 23-24 Fed Cup match between the United States and Belgium at the Delray Beach Tennis Center don't take a major plunge, beginning today, it will be a miracle.

Not only is three-time Grand Slam winner Justine Henin-Hardenne not playing for Belgium, neither is the country's No. 1 player, Kim Clijsters, who just won Indian Wells on Sunday.

That will leave the following four Belgian players to go up against Americans Lindsay Davenport and Serena Williams: Kirsten Flipkens, ranked No. 169, No. 177 Els Callens, No. 364 Leslie Butkiewicz and No. 384 Eveline Vanhyfte.

Callens, 34, is by far the most experienced of the Belgian players, but she has won only one match this year, in a qualifying tournament.

Flipkens, 19, was a top junior, but she hasn't been in a regular WTA event in 2005. Butkiewicz is 22 and 0-3 for the year, and Vanhyfte is 21 with a 3-3 record.

"I have to be very careful about how much I play," Henin-Hardenne said Tuesday, explaining her decision not to play Fed Cup. After a year of fighting off illness and injury, she's back on court for the first time since the U.S. Open, and she's taking things slowly.

"I'm feeling much better," she said. But she added that "I don't know what my level is right now. I have to be patient. But I was No. 1 for almost a year, and I have the experience."

Asked what would satisfy her at this tournament, she gave nearly the same reply she gave before the 2004 Olympic Games. "I'm coming here to play my first match, to enjoy my tennis and fight. Whether I win or lose, it doesn't matter right now." Henin-Hardenne won the gold medal at the Athens Olympics.

As a seeded player, she draws a bye in the first round and plays the winner of Samantha Stosur vs. Abigail Spears in the second round. She hasn't previously played either. If she makes the third round, she'll probably encounter No. 9 seed Vera Zvonareva, over whom she holds a 3-0 lifetime edge.

When the U.S. drew Belgium in the Fed Cup first round, it had the makings of a blockbuster matchup with four the best players on court. That has now been defused, and the USTA is going to have to sell what appears to be a very one-sided competition. The Delray Beach center was to be configured for about 6,000 attendance.