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Williams Edges Kirilenko In Tough Three-Setter To Reach Quarterfinals

Meanwhile, qualifier Marina Erakovic upset defending champion and No. 1 seed Victoria Azarenka.

STANFORD, Calif. (www.BankOfTheWestClassic.com) – Two days after cruising to a dominating victory in her opening-round match, Serena Williams showed to everyone on Thursday afternoon at the 2011 Bank of the West Classic that she was also capable of grinding out a close contest.

Taking the next step in her comeback, Williams outlasted Maria Kirilenko 6-2, 3-6, 6-2 in the second round to set up a highly-anticipated quarterfinal matchup against second-seeded Maria Sharapova on Friday at 7 p.m.

Playing in only her third tournament since last year's Wimbledon, Williams improved to 5-0 in her career against Kirilenko although Thursday's victory did not come easily.

After losing the first game of the first set, Williams ripped off five straight games and never looked back en route to a 6-2 victory. But after a 1-1 tie in the second frame, Kirilenko quickly grabbed a 4-1 advantage and held both of her next two serve opportunities to even the match. Trailing 1-0 in the third set, Williams surged ahead by winning four consecutive games to take a 4-1 lead and close out the match with back-to-back games.

The two seeded players in action on Thursday both suffered losses, including defending champion and No. 1 seed Victoria Azarenka, who was upset 4-6, 7-5, 6-2 by qualifier Marina Erakovic. Needing to win three matches just to reach the main draw, Erakovic appeared to be the more comfortable player on Thursday, rallying from a first-set deficit to pull out the win. Taking the court for the first time following a bye, Azarenka dropped only one set combined last year en route to claiming the tournament crown.

Thursday's other upset took place in the evening session, with Sabine Lisicki besting Samantha Stosur 6-3, 7-5. Defeating Stosur for the first time in five attempts, Lisicki pounded home 13 aces and turned a 5-4 second-set deficit into a 7-5 victory.

Meanwhile, Ayumi Morita quietly continued her run to the quarterfinals with a 4-6, 7-5, 6-1 victory over qualifier Urszula Radwanska. Building off the momentum generated by Tuesday's upset of Ana Ivanovic, Morita advanced to Friday's quarterfinals and earned a spot opposite Marion Bartoli.

Highlighting doubles play was a 6-3, 6-1 victory from the second-seeded duo of Azarenka and Kirilenko.

Friday's afternoon session features three singles quarterfinal matches beginning at 12 p.m. The night session is, of course, headlined by Sharapova against Williams. In eight career meetings, Williams owns a 6-2 record.



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