

FOND FAREWELL

Unless she unretires—again—the 2012 U.S. Open will be the final tournament played by Kim Clijsters. Over the years Flushing Meadow has served as the backdrop for some of her most memorable achievements. Here's a by-the-numbers look at Clijsters, 29, at the Open.



37-5

Record in her eight appearances.

\$5,408,867

Total Open winnings.

0

Unseeded women's champs before Clijsters won in 2009.

36

Years since a mother (Margaret Smith Court) had won the Open when Clijsters did so in 2009, 18 months after giving birth to daughter Jada.

TENNIS

THE CASE FOR ... Clay Courts at The U.S. Open

BY ANDREW LAWRENCE

The most formidable opponent at the U.S. Open is not Novak Djokovic or Roger Federer or Serena Williams. It's the rain.

Rain puts the *flush* in Flushing Meadow, having caused the tournament to spill into a third week in each of the last four years. In no year was the draw more weather-beaten than in 2011: Rain washed out nearly two full days. Drainage problems rendered Louis Armstrong Stadium unplayable. Go-with-the-flow players such as Andy Murray and Rafael Nadal considered going on strike.

Unfortunately, that idea was just as far-fetched as suggestions to cover the Open's main venue, Arthur Ashe Stadium. The ground beneath it is likely too soft to bear the additional weight of a roof. But here's a notion that can actually work: Change the playing surface to clay. As safe when it's drizzling as it is when it's dry, clay is the most practical surface for the only Grand Slam event that takes place during the middle of the North Atlantic hurricane season.

Clay at the Open is not a new idea. For three seasons, from 1975 to '77, the tournament was played on clay. A switch back would help solve two problems: one with the Open, one with U.S. tennis. USTA player development chief Patrick McEnroe believes that clay-based instruction is key to America's keeping pace in a game that has quickly retreated from the net to the baseline. McEnroe is so convinced of clay's track record for

creating patient, well-rounded players that the USTA deputized José Higuera—a renowned clay-court guru from Spain—to oversee player development. Top players such as Nadal, Federer and Djokovic all took their first steps in the game on clay.

As Australia is furiously building more clay courts in hopes of finding the next Nadal, the USTA could spur a similar movement by resurfacing the courts in Queens. The nine tournaments in the summer U.S. Open Series would have to fall in line—who would play a hard-court

A SWITCH WOULD SOLVE PROBLEMS WITH THE OPEN AND U.S. TENNIS.

event to prepare for a major on clay?

In 2009, the All England Club spent nearly \$100 million to put a roof over Centre Court. For that amount of cash the USTA could convert the courts at the Billie Jean King National Tennis Center to clay and still have plenty of money left over to build better public facilities around the country.

It's a bold idea, sure, but the Open has thrived on reforms such as tiebreakers, equal prize money and night matches. Even Wimbledon—which has in recent years switched to grass that plays more slowly and to larger tennis balls—isn't afraid to think outside its perfect white lines. The U.S. Open should, too, and give clay one more shot. □

