

[http://www.espn.co.uk/tennis/story/\\_/id/21103442/serena-williams-absence-opens-new-wave-women-tennis-wta-finals-singapore](http://www.espn.co.uk/tennis/story/_/id/21103442/serena-williams-absence-opens-new-wave-women-tennis-wta-finals-singapore)

## Serena's absence ushers in different kind of open era at WTA Finals

Simona Halep arrives at the official draw ceremony and gala ahead of the WTA Finals in Singapore this week, where she will be looking to consolidate her hard-earned place as world No. 1.



Clive Brunskill/Getty Images for WTA

22 Oct, 2017

- **Ros Satar**

KALLANG, Singapore -- As the top eight WTA players of 2017 gather for the season finale in Singapore, it is the most famous female tennis player of all -- [Serena Williams](#) -- who has been central to all their aspirations.

In a year that has seen Serena win the Australian Open -- it would emerge later that she did so while pregnant -- then vacate the scene to have her first child, the top spot has been occupied by five different women, and the race is still very much on to win the coveted year-end No. 1 title.

Seven of the eight women here could yet be that person, and there has not only been an emergence of younger talent but a resurgence for some veterans, too. [Venus Williams](#) has been one of the feel-good stories of the year to many fans, but for the elder sister it has been very much business as usual. She made Slam finals in Australia and Wimbledon, and is one of the

seven in contention for year-end No. 1, although the American played down its importance when asked if regaining that title was on her mind. "Not really, no," she said. "We'll see what happens."

## WTA Race To Singapore Standings

	POINTS
1. Simona Halep (Rou)	5675
2. Garbine Muguruza (Esp)	5635
3. Karolina Pliskova (Cze)	5105
4. Elina Svitolina (Ukr)	5000
5. Venus Williams (USA)	4642
6. Caroline Wozniacki (Den)	4640
7. Jelena Ostapenko (Lat)	4510
8. Caroline Garcia (Fra)	3795

Red Group: [Halep](#), [Svitolina](#), [Wozniacki](#), [Garcia](#)

White Group: [Muguruza](#), [Pliskova](#), [Williams](#), [Ostapenko](#)

In truth, it may come down to a straight battle between current No. 1 [Simona Halep](#) and reigning Wimbledon champion [Garbine Muguruza](#), who are separated by just 40 points in the yearly standings. Both players walked into their pre-tournament press conferences with confidence, knowing they are the ones to beat in their respective round-robin groups when play begins on Sunday.

Muguruza said: "It's way different than before [Serena's absence]. I feel like every week, depends who is playing well, can be in the top. It gives us a lot of options and variety. It's just more, like, dramatic for the fans and for us, too, to see that every week everything can change." For Halep, though, there was a sense that not only was the world No. 1 place a long time coming, but that it could be a real turning point in her career.

It was an agonising summer of flirtation with top spot for the Romanian. First she was denied in a dramatic French Open final, losing to [Jelena Ostapenko](#) having been a set and 3-0 up. Then grasscourt opportunities at Eastbourne and Wimbledon fell short as well, and defeat to Muguruza in the final of the Cincinnati Masters left her an agonizing five points short of then No. 1 [Karolina Pliskova](#).

So it was not until earlier this month, with victory over Ostapenko in the semifinals of the China Open, that Halep finally ascended to top spot. "The dream came true," she said in Singapore. "It is just the best feeling that I ever had in my tennis career so far. It's nice. I cannot describe in words what I feel, but it's a good feeling. I'm happy when I'm going to the courts now."

It is perhaps reflective of the season that the US Open saw four American women in the semifinals, but only one -- Venus -- in Singapore. [Sloane Stephens](#) was the shock winner in Flushing Meadow in early September, but finished only 13th in the Race to Singapore standings. Halep continued: "I said at the beginning of the year when I heard that Serena was pregnant that now every tournament is open, and we saw that we had [three] different Grand Slam champions and many No. 1s in the world. No-one is going to dominate how Serena did, for sure."