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Day In The Life ↓

VICTORIA AZARENKA



## Full Court Press

Phoenix resident [Victoria Azarenka](#) is rising fast on the world's tennis rankings and living life to the fullest along the way.

BY ROB SIDENBERG

PHOTOS COURTESY TROY BORRUSO AND RON C. ANGLE

**S**un setting in Rome. A young, vibrant nineteen-year-old tosses her shopping bags on the bed, getting ready for dinner and a night on the town. With the looks of a cover model and personality of a bubbly debutante, it seems like Victoria Azarenka is living some sort of dream life. It's a lifestyle she has earned. The young athlete is in the middle of an international grind, refining her killer groundstrokes and training for the upcoming Italian Open (Internazionali d'Italia).

Born in Belarus, Victoria now calls Phoenix home.

Azarenka is currently ranked number eight in the Women's Tennis Association, having rocketed into the top 10 in the last year. Recently, she beat Serena Williams in Miami to take the third title of her budding career. Victoria's victory was especially sweet since she'd had to forfeit her previous match against Williams. They had met in the fourth round in

Australia and Azarenka had taken the first set before falling ill during the second. But don't expect this young star to start talking trash. She's far too controlled for that. No gloating, just humbled by the experience and ready for the next.

"Serena is a great champion, she's a great person and it was just an honor to play against her in a final. To beat her... was amazing. It gives me a lot of confidence, but I still have to work and work even harder than I did before," Victoria recently told *POST* from Italy via Skype.

She had just played indoors at the WTA Tour Porsche Tennis Grand Prix in Stuttgart, Germany, and Victoria was getting ready to play outdoors in Italy. While the sun might be nice to bask in during a vacation, it can prove to be an obstacle while playing tournament tennis.

"It's a very big difference. The training isn't much different, it's just the conditions are quite different. It's windy, sunny; it

can be tough.”

So what would be the ideal tennis weather?

“My ideal weather would be like 23 Celsius (about 73 Fahrenheit), cloudy and no wind. That would be the perfect tennis day,” she explained.

Not the best for getting a tan, but probably prime for focused, world-class tennis.

Focused and disciplined is Victoria’s modus operandi. She enjoys the spoils of her labor, with shopping and photo shoots mixed in with her practice, traveling and competing, but staying on top of her game is her main concern. Having been playing since the age of seven, Victoria knew when she turned 10 that she wanted to make a life out of the sport.

“When I started, I was just playing for fun. It was just fun to hit the ball. By about 10, I knew I wanted to be a professional tennis player. But, I never knew it would be like this.”

For a young phenom, there is often an aggressively active parent or coach pushing from the start. But Victoria was a self-starter.

“No one was ever pushing me. I was just spending seven hours at the courts myself. My mom was the one to buy me my first racket,” Victoria told *POST*.

Having earned her success through willpower and steadfast determination, Victoria doesn’t really let the fame and distractions get in the way of her pursuit of tennis excellence.

“Being recognized in the airport is cool and all, but I don’t really look at it like that. I’m just really focused on the next event. Everything is very nice, but I just have to keep going the same way for me to stay at this level.”

So, amid all of the fanfare and attention it’s tough to keep the blinders on. Which is another impressive trait of Victoria, how she maintains her drive and focus when there is so much going on peripherally.

“My coach tells me all the time, ‘You have good results, you have a lot of attention, so you just have to keep working hard.’”

You can’t tell a story about the world’s eighth ranked player and not mention her work ethic. Not surprisingly, it is off the charts and also where she garners pure joy; from the constant training, which sometimes consumes an entire day. A daily goal of hers is to wear out her coaches. We’ll let her give you an example of a typical day. “For Miami, we would start about 9 a.m. and work until noon. Then in the afternoon it would go from about 3 until about 7-thirty, and we’d combine the workout to include tennis and general fitness. It’s a hard, full day of training, but that’s what I love and I keep going. They have to push me sometimes when I’m really dead, but I really want to do well and I really want to work hard because I know without hard work, there is nothing to achieve.”

Yes, she does have a prodigious work ethic, but Victoria knows how to have fun, too.

“Once the work is done, I have my free time. I go to restaurants, I go shopping, I go out with my friends. Whenever I have time I like to have fun, it’s not all about tennis life. When I have longer down-time, I go to the club, go to the movies, just regular stuff,” Victoria said.

Phoenix, and specifically Paradise Valley and Scottsdale, is a place she truly loves to live, and finds it to be the perfect respite from the hustle and bustle of life on the tour.

“It’s so relaxing there,” Victoria told *POST*. “The weather is always great, the people are so nice. I always rest there and I have a lot of fun too.”



As for local hotspots, you’ll find Victoria at Sushi Roku in the W Hotel and City Hall Steakhouse. She’s a world class athlete, but she’s only human, and like a lot of us, she’s a sucker for nachos. With cheese.

Victoria also is a fan of hockey, her second favorite sport, and goes to several Coyotes games each year.

Not surprisingly, her goals and desire for success off the court are right in her crosshairs, too, and is taking college work for international communications and finance and economics.

The ultra-busy 19-year-old keeps it all in check by remembering where she came from. Back in February, Victoria went back to Belarus, her native country, and hopes to go again after playing in an upcoming tournament in Madrid. She’s a major star back home and she’s rapidly becoming a big one in her adopted hometown of Phoenix, too. 