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SPECIAL FEATURE

NICK GAS AT THE U.S. OPEN!
Tennis Stars Shine in New York City

Arthur Ashe Kids Day Welcomes 98 Degrees, Jessica Simpson



Tennis fans got to see 98 Degrees perform on centercourt.

For the next two weeks, the National Tennis Center in New York will play host to the finest tennis players in the world as they vie for millions of dollars in prize money at the U.S. Open. But last Saturday, it was the kids that ruled.

Arthur Ashe Kids' Day, founded by and named for the late tennis champion and humanitarian,

brought thousands of kids to Flushing Meadows to take part in a day-long festival of tennis, music, and good times to benefit the National Junior Tennis League. Ashe, the first African-American man to win the U.S. Open, started the NJTL in 1969 to enable kids of all ages and economic backgrounds to participate in tennis.

The day began with tennis drills supervised by up-and-coming American players like Mardy Fish, Philip King and Andy Roddick as well as established stars like Todd Martin and Jim Courier. For the non-tennis-inclined, there were plenty of other activities including face-painting, juggling and people-watching - easy to do when there are about 20,000 people roaming around the grounds.



Then came the main event in the Ashe Stadium Court. For anyone who thought it might be hard to top the headliners who had played at previous Kids' Days - a list that includes Britney Spears, Backstreet Boys and Hanson - the answer came as soon as 98 Degrees took the stage and began to sing "The Hardest Thing" from their 1998 album, "98 Degrees and Rising."



Jennifer Love Hewitt went out to meet the fans.

The electricity continued when special guest Jessica Simpson came out and sang "I Think I'm In Love With You," then paired with Nick Lachey on "Where You Are."

When asked about what Arthur Ashe's legacy meant to her, Simpson said, "I always love the underdog. I love when someone who isn't supposed to win pulls it out. It's kind of like when I started my career, when nobody believed in me but myself and my parents."



Basketball star Grant Hill, recently traded from the Detroit Pistons to the Orlando Magic, told the crowd to "follow Arthur Ashe's example É Fight for the causes you believe in, and let your personal integrity touch everything you do."

Kids got photos taken with tennis star cut-outs.

On the court, Alec Baldwin and Jennifer Love Hewitt took turns playing umpire while players like

Pete Sampras, Martina Hingis and the Jensen Brothers entertained the crowd. And 98 Degrees' Justin Jeffre had the crowd roaring when he participated in a contest in which players try to hit stationary targets on the other side of the net. He didn't hit as many as Andre Agassi - in fact, he barely hit any - but then, Agassi doesn't sing as well as Justin does.

Story and photos by Dave Porter

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