

# Sydneysider adds finishing touches to ageless champ

By LIZ HANNAN

TENNIS legend Martina Navratilova will team with Todd Woodbridge for the first time when Wimbledon starts tomorrow, reinforcing the strength of her Australian connection.

Navratilova made history during the week when, at 45, she became the oldest woman to win a singles match on the women's tour, an incredible eight years after she last played a lone hand. And it was a Sydneysider - physical trainer and massage therapist Giselle Tirado - who created the small miracle, after winning a bet with the woman who some consider the greatest female athlete of all time.

"I've got all kinds of Aussie connections going on here," Navratilova told *The Sun-Herald* in an exclusive interview from England yesterday.

"Giselle keeps my body in shape every which way. It's been great for both of us. And Todd and I have hooked up for Wimbledon. I am excited about that. Hopefully, we will do well. I feel ready."

At 28, Tirado - a champion touch footballer who was a fixture in the Australian team throughout the 1990s - had not even been born when Navratilova began her assault on women's tennis, which would yield 18 grand slam singles titles alone, including nine Wimbledon titles. But a strong bond has developed between the pair since Tirado signed on with Navratilova in March, after two years in Arantxa Sanchez-Vicario's camp.

"Two weeks ago, we made a bet that if she won the doubles title in Madrid, she had to do whatever I wanted her to do. Just one thing," Tirado explained.

"When she won, I said the thing I wanted was to see her play singles again."



WINNING TEAM: Navratilova and Tirado. Picture: TOMMY HIBBLEY

Navratilova was sceptical but Tirado convinced her that her body was ready for the assignment if her mind was. Navratilova took the court against a player 20 years her junior, 25-year-old Russian Tatiana Panova, in the first round of the Eastbourne grasscourt tournament - and won.

While she was beaten in the second round, Navratilova was grateful to Tirado for opening a door she thought had been closed, even though she has no plans to play another singles match.

"I think I surprised some people and hopefully inspired a whole bunch of people to get off their bums and do something," she said.

The Czech-born champion paid tribute to Tirado, who was raised in Sydney's east and hopes to return to the city to marry her long-time Australian boyfriend, Nathan Martin.

"She is very positive," Navratilova said. "She knows her stuff, obviously. She is an athlete so she can do all the stuff with me. The great thing is that every workout is different. We never do the same thing twice. She is just a nice person, like most Aussies are."