



**AT HER
MOUNTAIN HOME
IN ASPEN
TENNIS ICON
MARTINA
NAVRATILOVA**



TELLS HOW SHE HAS BOUNCED BACK FROM BREAST CANCER

When Martina was diagnosed in February, she showed the same spirit that helped make her nine-times Wimbledon champ, choosing to be treated in Paris so she could still play in the French Open. Now, she's been given the all-clear





Martina, 53, wants to stress the importance of regular mammograms. Being an athlete makes her message even stronger, she points out: "Here I was, as healthy as you could be, and I could still get it"



Martina Navratilova is explaining the intricacies of the joinery involved in an exquisitely crafted side table at her mountain retreat in Aspen, Colorado. The nine-times Wimbledon singles champion made the piece herself.

Never one to stay still, Martina, who turns 54 this month, took up woodwork after her first retirement from professional tennis in 1994 and found she had a natural aptitude. Says the legendary left-hander: "I wanted to create something; to do something new with my hands after I quit tennis."

What immediately impresses about her, though, is how radiant she looks. She jokes that people seem surprised to see her looking so well. "I don't know if it's because I look better than a year ago, or I just look better than they thought I would."

It's not surprising that it's here in Aspen, at her spacious chalet-style home with panoramic mountain views, that nature-lover Martina feels most comfortable. It was also while on her own here in February that she first learned she had breast cancer in a phone call from her gynaecologist and close friend, Mindy Nagle.

She has spoken candidly about her devastation on hearing the news, and a sense of disbelief that it could happen to her – an athlete in

"mint condition". "It just goes to show that cancer can affect anybody, at any time," she has said.

She had no inkling when she went for a routine mammogram on 10 January – her first in four years – that there was anything wrong. She was subsequently diagnosed with the most common type of non-invasive breast cancer: *ductal carcinoma in situ*, or DCIS. In her case, the news was encouraging because the cancer had not spread.

She underwent a successful lumpectomy on 15 March, followed by an intensive six-week course of radiation treatment at the Curie Institute in Paris. She chose the famed hospital not only due to its reputation as one of the best, but also because the location allowed her to fulfil her commitments at the French Open.

Martina's fighting spirit had enabled her to pull herself together after the diagnosis. "I had about five minutes of self-pity and then I went grocery shopping, where I bought all the organic vegetables and fruit I could find," she smiles.

As one of the world's greatest players, with 18 Grand Slam singles titles and a record 31 Grand Slam women's doubles titles to her name, Martina has always pushed herself hard. Born in what was then Communist Czechoslovakia, she defected to the United States in

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1975, at the age of 18, and won her first Wimbledon title three years later. A trailblazer both on and off the court, she famously came out publicly about being gay shortly after being granted American citizenship in 1981. Comments her friend and fellow tennis icon Billie Jean King: "She's a woman of action. The way she played was that way and that's how she lives her life."

Three days before undergoing surgery, Martina won a Hit for Haiti fundraising tournament in Palm Springs. Less than two weeks after her operation, she took part in a triathlon in Hawaii and then played an exhibition match in Minnesota. During radiation treatment, she competed in the French Open Legends doubles tournament with Jana Novotna – and won.

Fiercely protective of her private life, Martina insists her only reason for ultimately going public about her illness was to alert other women to the importance of regular breast screening. "Another year and I could have been in big trouble," she admits.

There have been a lot of upheavals in Martina's life over the past couple of years. She lost her beloved mother Jana to emphysema two years ago, and, more recently, she settled out of court with former partner Toni Layton, who filed a lawsuit when their seven-year relationship ended.

During Martina's 2008 *I'm A Celebrity...* stint she was said to be dating ex-Miss Universe Julie Lemigova, but she says she's still searching for the perfect partner. In the meantime, she's enjoying the solace and solitude of the mountains, hiking and cycling in preparation for her next big challenge, climbing Mount Kilimanjaro for the Laureus Sport for Good Foundation in December. "Aspen was the best place I could have been when I found out I was ill and the place to go to recover, rejuvenate and recharge. The mountains are where I feel at home," she explains.

Now, having been given the all-clear, Martina tells how her life has changed forever.

Martina, it's certainly been an eventful year...

"You could say that! First, I broke my arm in January playing ice hockey. It was the first time I ever broke anything. Then my tooth fell out – the cap fell off as I was flying to Europe with my arm in a cast. It was really comical. Then I get cancer and it was only February, and I'm like, 'Oh my God, maybe I should stay in my house and not do anything. This is not looking so good!' The arm healed up, the tooth is fine and I'm cancer free. But it's been a trying year to say the least."

How are you feeling now?

"Back to normal, almost."

You've said you didn't feel too ill during treatment?

"Not at all. I was tired and a bit depressed, which I didn't know was a side effect. I couldn't find a pair of jeans one morning and I started crying. I thought, 'What the hell is the matter with me?' I did get out of bed, I did play tennis and I was working, but I wasn't myself. I was flat... I just didn't care. It was very strange."

Did you give yourself time to recover?

"The radiation finished on 18 June and then I went straight to Wimbledon. It was the busiest two weeks ever. Everybody wanted to do interviews about this, then I was promoting the Mount Kilimanjaro climb and doing a documentary on Chris Evert and me, and, of course, I was working for Tennis Channel ▶





Martina says her background gave her resilience. She defected from what was then Communist Czechoslovakia at the age of 18 and chose to come out as gay shortly after being granted US citizenship in 1981. So her cancer diagnosis was not about to defeat her. "I had about five minutes of self-pity, then went out and bought all the organic fruit and vegetables I could find," she smiles



'My cancer showed up in a routine mammogram. I didn't have any symptoms'

and playing. So, I did not enjoy Wimbledon because I was doing too much. After that I had the summer off, where I was able to reflect and relax and reset everything."

When you were first diagnosed, you insisted on fulfilling all your commitments. Was that partly out of denial?

"It wasn't denial. When my doctor said 'You're positive', everything stops and you're like, 'Okay, what do I have to cancel?' Because nothing is going to be done until you take care of yourself first. But the way things worked out with the treatment, I was able to do everything I was supposed to be doing."

A lot of people would let the disease consume them, though...

"I'm not like that. I mean, you can only do something about it when you are doing the treatment; to dwell on it is pointless. I've always been a very positive person and that really helped in this instance. Sometimes maybe I'm too positive, to the point of being naïve. I think nothing bad is going to happen but when it does, then I deal with it. I'm very good in a crisis situation."

Why did you decide to keep quiet about your illness at first?

"There was no reason to tell anybody. It wasn't like I was going to be in the closet about it, but I didn't want to go for the sympathy vote. But then the more I found out about how lucky I was that it had been detected early, the more I felt I had an opportunity to speak to women."

"My message was that much stronger because here I was, as healthy as you could be, and I could still get it."

You didn't have any symptoms?

"None. The calcifications were minute – a pinhead – so I wouldn't have felt them either. Even when the doctor did the biopsy, he still thought it was nothing and was very surprised when it turned out to be cancerous."

Was a mastectomy ever an option?

"It was small and the 'right' kind of cluster, which is why they were able to take out the surrounding tissue and I didn't have to lose the breast."

Did the experience represent a mortality check?

"As an athlete you're probably aware of your mortality earlier because your career is over before most people are just getting started. You see the body deteriorate and are more aware of it on a physical level. It was more a matter of taking stock. I think if I only had a year to live, I would go to Kenya on the Masai Mara and watch the animals go by. I'd learn to surf and go heli-skiing. But I have that time. I'm still under the assumption that I have 30 years or more, and I'm very happy with what I'm doing and where I'm going."

Did you look to religion to help you through it?

"I'm spiritual, not religious. It didn't bring me closer to God or further away [laughs]. Well, you do pray; you want to believe that somebody can help you. But my positive attitude has come more from within me, rather than needing to get it elsewhere. I get my spirituality from being really close to the people I love. I also spend as much time outside as I can."

Has the experience given you a deeper appreciation of life?

"Of course. I never took what I have for granted. When I go to the cash machine and get \$500 out, I'm still grateful I can do that. The *I'm a Celebrity...* jungle put that in perspective. When there's nothing to eat, you realise there are