

Top seed plays like one, winning the Girls 16

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A chair umpire, linesmen, ball people and a sizable crowd. Just a few of the unfamiliar distractions for the finalists at the USTA Girls 16 Super National Tennis Championships.

Then again, the way Catherine Newman and Reka Zsilinszka hit a tennis ball, they'd better get used to it.

Newman lived up to her top seed, defeating the third-seeded Zsilinszka 6-2, 7-5 yesterday at the Barnes Tennis Center in Point Loma.

"If I'm on my game and play real well I can compete with anyone," Newman said assuredly. "If someone plays better than me when I'm at my best, then obviously they deserve to win."

That didn't happen this year.

After placing third in last year's 16 Super Nationals, Newman claimed a coveted USTA gold ball and earned a berth in the U.S. Open Junior Championships in New York.

Newman, 16, of Greensboro, N.C., broke Zsilinszka's serve three times in the first set. Zsilinszka, 15, of Fayetteville, N.C., fought off two set points before dropping the set on a double fault.

"I think I was definitely more nervous (than Newman) even though I've been in this situation before," said Zsilinszka, who won the 14 Super Nationals last year. "I mean, it was a pretty big crowd and the ball people – it was kind of intimidating at first. I was framing balls all over the place."

Zsilinszka, a straight-sets winner over Newman in their most recent match, regrouped and built a 4-2 second-set lead with consistent play.

"I was like, 'OK, you have to do something. You just lost (the first set) 6-2,' " Zsilinszka said, laughing. "It wasn't looking too good."

Newman held serve, then battled to break Zsilinszka's serve and tie the second set at 4-4, winning the match's longest rally in the pivotal eighth game.

After Newman held serve easily for a 5-4 second-set lead, Zsilinszka saved two match points on her serve, and drilled clean winners to save three more match points serving at 5-6. Finally, a Zsilinszka forehand sailed long to give a virtually emotionless Newman the match.

"I was excited. I was like, 'I'm gonna come back!' and it didn't work out that way," Zsilinszka said, jokingly choking Newman postmatch.

"I'm just like, 'OK, I won, big relief,' " Newman said, explaining her customary postmatch celebration. "We've played a few times before and we're pretty good friends so it's kind of tough. But it's kind of cool at the same time – an all-North Carolina final all the way in San Diego."

Kirsten Flower (Columbus, Ohio) defeated Kristen McVitty (Woodland Hills) 6-4, 6-7 (7-5), 7-5 in the third/fourth-place singles playoff.

In the doubles final, eighth-seeded Hilary Barte (Newhall) and Denise Dy (San Jose) rallied to upset seventh-seeded Lyndsay Kinstler (Downey) and Sanaz Marand (Katy, Texas) 4-6, 6-3, 6-4.

