



Pratt slams heat rule as opponent wilts

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Fitness freak Nicole Pratt slammed tennis's "10-minute heat rule" as a farce after moving into the second round of the US Open when her Japanese opponent Akiko Morigami retired mid-match amid dramatic scenes.

Pratt's match was locked at one set apiece when a tearful Morigami was forced to quit after suffering severe cramps to her legs and hands.

In a sad sight that did little to promote the image of the game, the 25-year-old stubbornly attempted to play on for more than a quarter of an hour before finally surrendering and mouthing the words "I can't play" to the chair umpire.

There had been a strong case for the chair umpire, Tamara Vrhovec of Croatia, or another tournament official for that matter, to tell Morigami that indeed she shouldn't be allowed to play any longer.

After taking a medical timeout for treatment while trailing 2-0 in the second set, Morigami called for the trainer again after falling behind 3-0.

By the time it was 5-0 to Pratt, Morigami was crying, struggling to breath and declining to drink - which was worsening her cramps - as the trainer urged her to stop for fear that continuing may endanger her heart.

Astonishingly, though, the Japanese player limped back on court but could barely walk or serve as she dropped her serve to love and promptly sought the 10-minute break permitted under the WTA's rules before the deciding set.

She had won the draining first set that lasted almost an hour and a half 7-0 in a tiebreak.

It was muggy and hot and both players were bothered, with Pratt furious with herself for showing the compassion to hit the ball straight back to her ailing rival.

The Queenslander branded the rule "absolutely ridiculous".

"That's why we train the way we do. To have a 10-minute break after the second set so someone can regroup, freshen up, I'm dead against that rule," Pratt said.

"Tennis is about being professional and being able to play three straight sets."

Pratt first sensed Morigami was in trouble early in the second set.

"All of a sudden, out of the blue, I could see, physically, she was struggling," she said.

"It's a really difficult situation. Towards the end there, I felt she should have stopped. I mean, if you are not going to run to a ball, you should stop.

"So I had mixed feelings. Obviously, I wanted to win the match but, in keeping with the professionalism of tennis, I don't think that (Morigami playing on) is the right thing to do out on the court."

When Morigami finally agreed to quit her distress became so great she began to hyperventilate and needed a wheelchair to take her from the court and an intravenous drip.

"This is the first time I've seen this in many, many years," long-time commentator Fred Stolle said on Channel Nine.

It was the second time in three weeks Morigami had to retire mid-match, having also quit in the second set against compatriot Ai Sugiyama in San Diego, and the world No.47 said she would have tests on Wednesday to try to determine the problem.

Pratt will play Laura Granville in the second round after the American eliminated Italy's 22nd seed Silvia Farina Elia 6-2 6-1.

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