

Mubadala Citi DC Open

Saturday, August 5, 2023

Washington D.C.

Maria Sakkari

Press Conference



M. SAKKARI/J. Pegula

6-3, 4-6, 6-2

THE MODERATOR: Maria, congratulations. You're through to the final. How are you feeling?

MARIA SAKKARI: Feeling good. I mean, it was a very, very difficult match, obviously, as expected. I don't think that we had easy matches with each other. So I'm just very happy, you know, just to be in the final.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. Can you take us through a little bit of what the internal monologue was like out there in this sort of three different stages of the match? There was the beginning where you played spectacularly well and got out to a huge lead; the middle where that lead went away and got pushed to a third set; and then the way you sort of reset yourself and were able to pull away for the victory.

MARIA SAKKARI: So what I told myself was that it happens almost every week that someone's leading a set and a break and then the opponent comes back. So I was, like, You're not the first, you're not the last that is losing this set after being a break up.

So I was, like, Just don't freak out. Just try and play every point from now on without thinking what happened. Just keep being aggressive, because that's what really worked on the first-and-a-half set. Of course I saw the finish line when it was 4-1. I'm not gonna lie.

So it wasn't easy, but then, you know, I saw it as a challenge just to overcome myself, as I said on the court, after losing that second set just to be able and come back on that third set.

Q. Obviously we don't know who you're going to play, but Coco Gauff is up now. If she were to win, you have played her a few times, several times in the past. How have you seen her progress and improve over the

years? What do you think, for you, would be the key playing, if you do play her, for the title tomorrow?

MARIA SAKKARI: I think she's been playing very good tennis this week. Obviously she's super young, but at the same time, she, you know, she has been on the tour for years. So she's not a new player to us. She has been there.

She played the finals last year. You know, she's an amazing player. It's going to be very tough.

I believe I have a winning record against her, but at the same time, it's going to be different tomorrow because, you know, she's going to be motivated to win the title. I'm going to be motivated to win the title. She's playing at home.

I watched a little bit now that I was doing treatment. She's good. She's solid. She's serving well. It's going to be very tough, as it was today.

Q. Speaking of that winning record against her, do you use that in your own mind just as something to give you confidence going into the match, or do you try and set it aside before the final?

MARIA SAKKARI: I do try to set it aside, because every match is different. You know, there might be players that you like to play more, but at the same time, you're going to lose to them at some point.

Coco is improving all the time, so, as I said, it's not going to be easy. I mean, no matches are easy nowadays (smiling). You know, it's can be very, very tough, because as I said, she's playing very good.

Q. How are you finding the conditions this week? A lot of players are mentioning really heavy balls, a bit slower points. Wondering if you're enjoying that or how you're enjoying things?

MARIA SAKKARI: I mean, the balls haven't been the best that we have played in the season, because they just get very, very big. But at the same time, it's something that I



cannot control coming into a tournament.

You know, these are the balls we have, so we cannot, you know, do anything about it. It's humid, so that's why they get a lot bigger than different ones.

But, yeah, conditions are tough, especially today, they were not easy. It was pretty hot out there.

Q. First final since Guadalajara at the end of last year. You have come up short just a few times in the previous semifinal rounds. Was that something that was on your mind when you lost that second-set lead being up 4-1?

MARIA SAKKARI: It wasn't really on my mind, because I really tried to block that semifinal thing that has been going on and on for so long and in every different platform. I just don't really care anymore (smiling).

They have made YouTube videos of my losing semifinals. I'm, like, Whatever. People are just so dumb (smiling).

You know, I'm telling you, I think if you were to ask a lot of players on the tour if they would take my semifinal record, they would say yes, because I'm not losing first round. I'm losing in semifinal. So at the same time, it's nothing bad about it.

But obviously I had it in my mind that I want to overcome that for this year, and, you know, it's something that I'm happy about that it happened this week. But I'm not done yet. That's how I feel.

Q. Do you feel like now that you have, I guess, gotten over that semifinal hump that it would give you more confidence to get another WTA title tomorrow?

MARIA SAKKARI: Yeah, well, I played four finals last year, so I don't know why everyone is, like, so, you know, crazy about me losing in the semifinals. I think that I have been doing pretty well. I have been top 10 for two years, but I guess that everyone has something to say.

So at the same time, you know, it is what it is. I don't really care about it anymore. I just want to win the title. Yeah, that's for sure.

Q. You mentioned yesterday taking advantage of the extra practice time you had in early July after the early Wimbledon loss. I'm wondering where you see maybe reaping the benefits here? It's three matches in two days, but where maybe that extra practice time, down time has put you in that position to make a run here?

MARIA SAKKARI: Well, I'll be deadly honest with you: I didn't expect my tennis to be that good this week. I was playing really good back home, but I didn't expect to make the final here.

Actually, I had a feeling that this tournament is going to be good for me, but at the same time I was, like, Okay, let's see how it goes.

But, yeah, it's paying off. Like, I'm playing good tennis again. I'm aggressive. That's something that I lost a little bit this year.

You know, I'm approaching the net a lot more than in the beginning of the year. My serve has been good. Not the best but good these three matches.

I'm just, you know, super excited. I'm going to enjoy myself tomorrow, as well.

Q. I'm just wondering why you felt like your tennis wasn't going to be good this week.

MARIA SAKKARI: Why?

Q. Yeah.

MARIA SAKKARI: Because when you lose two first rounds, Grand Slams, then it's...

Q. Carryover?

MARIA SAKKARI: It gets into your head a little bit. You don't have that match preparation that you wish to have. It's a confidence thing.

But, you know, I had to build that up and I just feel good with my tennis again.

Q. You mentioned the conditions out there today. It was pretty hot and pretty humid. What, for you, is the worst part of playing in weather like that?

MARIA SAKKARI: I would say that the balls get big. That's the only thing. I have said it a billion times that I like the heat.

Of course afterwards you don't feel great, like, you feel pretty tired, but I just feel like everything is a lot easier for me when it's hot.

When it's cold, I just don't like it on my body (smiling).

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