

Western & Southern Open

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Cincinnati, Ohio, USA

Naomi Osaka

Press Conference



N. OSAKA/C. Gauff

4-6, 6-3, 6-4

THE MODERATOR: Well done today. A great match. Just talk us through the match and what made the difference in the end for you, and also how it felt to be playing back in front of fans again.

NAOMI OSAKA: Yeah, I mean, I feel like whenever I play her, it's definitely always very tough. I feel like we are really lucky to have played in front of a crowd today and for there to be so many people, and for them to be so engaged and energetic was definitely really exciting.

I don't know. I felt like today the match was very serve-reliant, so I'm very happy that my first serve didn't let me down.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. Just talking through today's match, obviously you started incredibly well and put a lot of pressure on her early in the match. It seemed like she was able to claw things back. How did you see the shifts of momentum in that match? At what point did you feel like you were able to kind of settle in and play your game the way you wanted to play it?

NAOMI OSAKA: Yeah, I felt like for me the first set was a bit of like an experiment, like I was trying to see what was going on. I still feel like I haven't played that many matches, so my turnaround isn't that quick.

I would have been really happy if I was able to, I guess, turn things around in the first set, but I'm glad that I was able to do it in the second set. But I felt like I was more just examining her and trying to stay calm. I felt like the last time I played her in Australia I was definitely not calm at all. Just trying to keep a level head and figure out like what I could do better during the match.

Q. What does a match like that and the performance, being able to turn it around, what does that do for you with respect to your confidence as you kind of get

ready for, you know, your next few events?

NAOMI OSAKA: I mean, it means a lot to me, this win especially. I think coming off of Tokyo, coming here and playing her as my first opponent, you know, she's not really my favorite player to play. Like mentally I think it's the most straining to play against her.

Just to be able to, I guess, keep a level head and even win is, for me, definitely, I think I can congratulate myself.

Q. I'm trying to follow up with something you said in your on-court interview. Are you talking about a change in perspective you have gained over the course of this year as it relates to wins and losses and maybe other things as well? Can you expand on that and how your mindset you think has evolved over the course of this year and what you have learned.

NAOMI OSAKA: Yeah. Honestly I was thinking about this since the last time I sat here. I was wondering why was I so affected, I guess, like what made me not want to do media in the first place.

Then I was thinking, I'm wondering if I was scared because, like, sometimes I would see headlines of like players losing and then the headline the next day would be like a collapse or they're not that great anymore.

So then I was thinking me waking up every day, for me, I should feel like I'm winning. You know, like the choice to go out there and play, to go see fans that people come out and watch me play, that itself is an accomplishment. And I'm not sure when along the way I started desensitizing that. Like it started not being like an accomplishment for me. So I felt like I was very ungrateful on that fact.

And then, I don't know. Like I think definitely this whole COVID thing was really stressful with the bubbles and not seeing people, not having, like, interactions. I guess seeing the state of the world, like how everything is in Haiti, how everything is in Afghanistan right now, is definitely really crazy, and for me to just be hitting a tennis ball in the United States right now and have people come and watch me play is, I don't know, like I would want to be myself in

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this situation rather than anyone else in the world.

Q. I just wondered, sort of watching your last few matches against Coco, it feels like a nice rivalry is building, albeit a friendly one, I'm sure. I wonder if that's how you feel? Do you feel as a player that a rivalry is building with Coco? And what you make of her as a person off the court and also her game on the court.

NAOMI OSAKA: No, well, I think as a person she's really amazing. She's super lovely. Actually, when I took time off from the French and Wimbledon, she sent me really nice messages. I was very appreciative of that.

So like I know that she's an amazing person, and I feel like everyone can kind of sense that, as well. That's why she's able to draw big crowds. That's why there is little kids cheering her on.

For me, as her opponent, playing her, I really love that atmosphere to just see so many people like being engaged in the match is really nice.

For me, I'm excited when I hear that it's a rivalry. Like I think rivalries build the sport, like Federer/Nadal definitely did amazing things for tennis, so, yeah, it would be amazing to have something like that on the woman's side.

THE MODERATOR: Questions in Japanese.

(Naomi's answers to questions in Japanese.)

NAOMI OSAKA: Yeah, I feel like this match I changed my return position quite a lot, and mainly I wanted to be very close in, but she had a really good second serve, so I felt like I had to keep switching around. So that's what that was.

Yeah. I feel like for me I just, depending on who I play, but definitely I would love to be closer in.

Okay. I'm going to assume what I heard. Yeah, it's definitely been a while since I played a tough opponent like three-set match. For me, I feel like -- is that what you asked? I'm going to answer it both ways. Definitely really tough, but I feel really good right now.

My next opponent, I don't really know her that well, but I'm going to watch a lot of videos. I'm sure Wim is going to update me really well. Yeah, just super excited to play another match.

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