

Western & Southern Open

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Cincinnati, Ohio, USA

Novak Djokovic

Press Conference



N. DJOKOVIC/C. Alcaraz

5-7, 7-6, 7-6

THE MODERATOR: Novak, incredible atmosphere out there. Has it sunk in yet what you guys have done on court for four hours?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Thank you, but not yet. I don't know. It's crazy match that we've been through today. Roller coaster of a match, to be honest. I don't think I've played too many matches like this in my life.

Maybe I can compare it to Nadal finals in Australian Open 2012 that went the distance. Obviously three sets today, but almost four hours.

Some phases of the match went the way of one player, some the other player. We went kind of toe to toe. I started off better, but then just struggled a lot physically on the court. He was a set and a break.

Yeah, when he played a poor game to give me the break, I was quite solid that game. I thought, Okay, maybe I have a chance. Then I fought and believed that I can make it. It was really anybody's game.

I thought the third set I had many chances, maybe even for double break. The match point at 5-3 was unbelievable (smiling). It was kind of a showcase of what this whole match was about, that match point saved from him.

Yeah, just one of the most exciting and toughest mentally, emotionally, physically matches that I've ever had in my career.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. His emotional and mental strength, has that surprised you in your last two battles with him?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: It doesn't surprise me any more. It was surprising me maybe, I don't know, end of last year or beginning of this year, what he was doing, the way he won big matches, big tournaments. So impressive.

I mean, coming out in important moments, going for it, brave. You just have to put your hats down to a guy like that, that plays so maturely, handles the pressure so well for a 20-year-old. We cannot forget how young he is. That's something that is so impressive about him.

Yeah, I mean, each point... The feeling that I have on the court reminds me a little bit when I was facing Nadal when we were at our prime of our careers. Each point is a hustle. Each point is a battle. You feel like you're not going to get maybe in total five free points in the entire match. You've got to basically earn every single point, every single shot, regardless of the conditions. Obviously if you play on slower conditions, slower courts, even more so.

Here, the ball bounces quite high and pretty quick. But nevertheless, we both found a way to play a four-hour match for three sets. It doesn't surprise me, to be honest. I do wish sometimes I can play maybe in some moments slightly more aggressive. Maybe I should have.

But one thing is to analyze the game after the match, maybe think about things you could have done better. The other one is really being there on the court and experiencing what you're experiencing, and trying to tactically play the correct point, especially against him, knowing that he's going to run down every single shot.

I mean, that match point saved from him, I run him around two, three different corners, from deep backhand corner. I played I think a solid forehand dropshot. He was there in no time and made a passing shot in the corner. He's just amazing.

Amazing to be able to experience that with him on the court. All of the matches we played against each other went the distance. First match in Madrid last year, 7-6 in the third. 7-6 in the third today. Both Grand Slam matches, four five-setters. It just keeps getting better for the fans. For us, I don't know if we are enjoying it so much.

It's definitely a challenge that we both need to embrace and accept because that's what's required from both of us

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Q. Everywhere you went this week, there was a large group of fans. Can you describe your experience this week in Cincinnati?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Amazing. As I said on the court, fans the entire week, for all the players, I mean, I can speak on my behalf, were super kind, nice, supportive. They welcomed me with their open arms. The first practice session I had... Full stadium. It was amazing.

Couple years not being in USA, obviously I didn't know the way I'm going to be accepted by the fans or welcomed. It was a perfect week in every sense. I just have obviously big, big thanks to say and to give to all of them.

Q. Do you feel like you played good serves today?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Well, so-and-so, to be honest. I wasn't serving as well as I was serving the entire week. But again, I played in completely different conditions. I played four night matches. Then I played today in the middle of the day with strong sun and reflection of the sun.

It was so hot on the court, at times it was unbearable honestly. It's so difficult in those moments to really execute the shots in a way that you have been or you are intending to because you feel so slow and so heavy on your legs.

I wasn't maybe having the best day serving-wise. That made my life difficult because I had to go into the rallies basically.

I mixed it up. Sometimes I played a second serve coming to the net when he was returning back of the court. But then he started stepping in, putting more pressure on me. Then I played really bad service game on 5-4 when I was serving for the match. Match point, really slowest second serve I've ever had in my life (smiling).

I was tight, no doubt about it. When you're facing one of the best players in the world, one of the biggest tournaments in the world, of course you can't always feel completely free in your mind to do whatever you want to do, right? I mean, you're going to experience those kind of moments where you're going to drop with the concentration, yeah, energy, whatever it is. You just have to try to work your way out from that situation.

When I lost service game, he broke back 5-All, again 15-40, again another two advantages. Mentally this affects you big-time. But I'm very proud of how, after not using all these match points on 5-4, 5-3, all these break points on 5-All, I'm very pleased with the way I served out the next

game to get into the tiebreak. Played a really, really solid tiebreak.

Yeah, just overall an incredible match with some really highs and really lows.

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