

Internazionali BNL d'Italia

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Novak Djokovic

Press Conference



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THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. We haven't seen you since obviously your US Open ended. If you could talk us through what your process has been for processing, how that tournament ended, what it's been like sort of having to accept that very sudden end to your tournament and trying to learn from it or move on from it or what you have been doing in the last week or so since everything ended.

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Well, of course it was a shock to finish the US Open in the way it was finished for me. First time in my career that something like this happens.

Of course, you know, it could have happened earlier in my career, you know, could have happened to many players, you know, that the ball hit the line umpire. It was just unfortunate that I did hit a line umpire in a very awkward place.

Look, there was a lot of speculations and discussions whether it was deserved or not. I accepted it and moved on. I checked with Laura after the match. She said that she was fine. No big injuries. I felt really sorry to cause the shock and drama to her, because, you know, she didn't deserve that in any way. She obviously is volunteering, as well, and doing her work. She loves tennis, and she's been there, as I understood, for quite a few years.

It's unfortunate, you know, for both of us to kind of experience that, but at the same time, you know, we probably had to experience something like that, you know, life, just the range of things to happen in that way, which was very awkward and disappointing for me, as I said, to finish off the US Open that way, because I felt very good about myself, my game. I won the Western & Southern Open. Played on the same courts of the US Open and came into the fourth round feeling really good, hitting the ball really nicely and confident, ready in every aspect.

But, yeah, I mean, it was totally unexpected and very unintended, as well, of course to hit her. But as I said, when you hit the ball like that, as I hit it, you know, you have a chance to hit somebody that is on the court. The rules are clear when it comes to that.

So I accepted it, and I had to move on. That's what I did. Of course I did not forget about it. I don't think I will ever forget about it, because it's one of these things that stays in your memory for the rest of your life.

But I don't think I will have any major issues coming back to the tour and being able to perform well and hit the tennis ball, of course during the point (smiling).

Of course I have my first chance here in Rome. It's great that I think I have a tournament like week or ten days right after that happened, because I feel like the earlier I get back in a competition mode, the faster I'll overcome that memory and kind of reprogram it.

So, yeah, I'm hoping for the best. And I spent some time with my family. I looked at my shoulder, as well, that I kind of hurt a little bit when I fell down in that last game with Carreno Busta. It's okay for now. So I'm going to be playing Rome and hopefully getting far here.

Q. You're going to spend 286 weeks as the World No. 1. You're equating Pete Sampras, passing him this month. Wondering what does it feel for you? 286, it's not too bad.

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Well, Pete was my childhood idol growing up, so of course surpassing his records is very special to me. I always looked up to him, and I wished to be mentally strong and resilient as he is, especially in the big tournaments, in the big moments. You know, he's one of the mentally most composed and toughest players ever to hold a racquet.

Him being a No. 1 in the world for so many weeks, you know, proves how tough he was. This is one of my two, I would say, biggest professional goals, you know, is to reach the record of, surpass Roger's record for longest No. 1 and win as many slams as possible. I have been saying that before, so I'm working towards that.

I'm at a good place right now, in a good position. Hopefully I can stay healthy and continue to play well.

Q. Normally there are several weeks playing on clay. This year for most players, certainly those who have been at the US Open, have a maximum of two weeks to



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prepare for it. How much of an effect do you think this is going to have on what happens at Roland Garros?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Well, it is unusual, you know, to be in these kind of circumstances, but at the same time, we are -- I am, and I know most of the players are thankful that we have a chance and opportunity to play and compete and be on the tour.

As many tournaments organized on the tour as possible I think the better it is for all of us. It's more opportunity to play. Of course, you know, you do have a choice as well if you want to play or not in certain tournaments, but, you know, the big ones, all the top players of course try to be there and try to be part of them.

As you said, you know, for the guys who are playing US Open, it's very close, very tight, so that's why I think also Zverev and Thiem have pulled out from Rome, because it's just very close after an exhausting month of tennis in States on a different surface, come back and play within two days on different surface, different continent. It's very challenging.

I have experienced that couple times in my career where I played finals of the US Open and then I had to go to indoor clay Davis Cups in my country, and I played I think couple times in similar circumstances, so I know how demanding it is in every sense.

Yeah, let's see how it turns out. You know, Rafa obviously decided to stay on clay and practice. I mean, surely that gives him more advantage, but even if he didn't practice for that long on clay, he would still be the number one favorite in Roland Garros or any other clay tournament because he's Rafa, you know. And playing on clay, you know, he's the ultimate challenge.

But for most of the other guys, of course, it's going to be adjustment challenge, you know, how quickly can we adapt, how quickly can we adjust to this new surface.

Let's see. You know, I did have, you know, four or five days of training, coming here, couple more days of training before my first match. I think it is sufficient. But let's see on the court.

Q. Did you watch any of the US Open after you left? Wondered if you empathized with the extreme tightness and nerves that both players talked about during the men's final.

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Yes, I have watched the men's final last night until the end of the fourth set. You know, I want to congratulate both of these guys.

I want to congratulate them, of course, for their achievements. You know, to get to the finals for Sascha for the first time and to play for two-and-a-half sets the way he played was really impressive, and he was very close to win it. Then again, he served for the match in the fifth.

And for Dominic to lose three finals and start the match not on a very high level but then come back and win in such fashion is very inspiring, and it's -- you know, they deserve a lot of credit.

I think in my eyes what I kind of noticed the most is the way they greeted each other after the match. We all know that they are good friends, and you could see how much they wanted to win, of course, finals of slam. They both were fighting for the first Grand Slam title, and both of them were bringing a lot of intensity on the court but never disrespecting each other. In contrary, actually, after the match they hugged and they said nice things about each other. That struck me the most, to be honest, the appreciation, respect, and friendship that they showed. I think it's a great message to all of the tennis players and the sports world in general.

Dominic deserves this title probably more than anybody. He's such a nice guy, and he works extremely hard. He was so close in the last couple of years and finally he has it.

So, you know, it would be interesting to see how his career kind of goes on from here, but it's a huge relief. I remember my first Grand Slam title, you know, obviously getting that first monkey out of your back, in a way, to say it's a huge relief, and after that you start, you know, kind of believing in yourself much more and feeling maybe a bit less pressure and expectations from yourself to win slams.

Both of these guys possess a huge tennis quality on all surfaces to win titles and Grand Slams. We have Roland Garros coming in couple weeks' time, and Dominic is right behind Rafa, I mean, on clay, the favorite to go all the way.

Yeah, will be interesting to see these guys back on tour again.

Q. As you said, what happened to New York could have happened to lots of players, because we see lots of players hit balls like that. How will you stop yourself doing that again?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Well, look, there are things that are just unpredictable, in a way, even for ourselves. You know, of course, as anybody else, I'm working mentally and emotionally as hard as I'm working physically, trying to

be the best version of myself on the court and off the court.

I understand that I have outbursts, and this is kind of the personality and the player that I have always been, you know. Obviously went through ups and downs in my career, managing to control my emotions more or less.

But you're alone out there. It's a lot of intensity and a lot of pressure. You have to deal with all of that. So sometimes the situations like this happen.

I cannot promise or I cannot guarantee that I will never ever do anything similar to that in my life. I don't know. I mean, I definitely am going to try my best that something like that never happens again, obviously.

But anything is possible, really, in life. I'm going to take this in, you know, as profound as possible for me as a big lesson. I have been thinking about it, I have been comprehending, been talking to my team, of course. It's just one of these things that is unfortunate and happens.

You know, you have to move on, and as I said, try to take the most out of it so you can be better in the next day.

Q. I was wondering, you were talking about this incident at the US Open lasting in the memory. If you do surpass the all-time record for Grand Slams and get past the 20 mark, do you think people will remember you as the greatest of all time, or will it have an effect on your legacy, this one moment?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: I don't know, to be honest, how to answer that question (smiling). I leave that to other people and their judgment.

I try to be honest and transparent and respectful, and I try to represent the right values in life and something that I grew up with and was fortunate to be surrounded with some people that really affected me in a very positive way and gave me good foundation for my life and my behavior on and off the court.

Of course, I'm not perfect. I have flaws. Whether that's going to stay is something that people will always remember? I don't know. Time will tell, I guess.

Q. Can you give us how long you allowed the frustration to linger? I read comments from Stepanek and Goran and they said at the moment it was hard for you to take. Curious how you dealt with it.

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Well, of course it was very hard for me to accept that right after it happened. I mean, for a couple of days I was -- I was in shock, and I was shaken by

the whole default thing. As I said, I called Laura right away and just checked on her if she's doing fine.

That was important for me, because I obviously did not want anything worse than what already happened. I didn't want her to get injury or something like that.

She was good, so that gave me a relief. And of course time heals these kind of things. You know, as I said, I will not forget about it. It will always be there. But I will have to accept it, as I have, and move on and embrace it, as well, and welcome it as a great lesson, because I try to have that kind of a mentality where I, as weird as it sounds, but befriend that kind of experience and try to really let it assimilate in my emotions, in my mind, and let it process and let my mind process and my heart what has happened and try to make the most out of it, take the lesson and move on wiser, hopefully, and richer in terms of experience.

But it's going to be there. It's still there, of course. And you guys do a great job of reminding me of it (smiling). But it's okay, you know. It's fine. A lot of people talk about it. I understand.

It's very unusual for me, for anybody in the tennis world, and I understand that that's something that's going to stick with me for many years.

But I'm fine with it, as well. Because in the end of the day, I know that it was unintentional. I mean, of course, I didn't want to hurt her. It can happen. It could have happened maybe even before few times in my career, and I know it could have happened a lot to other players.

So it's not completely out of the blue, so to say. It's unseen situation in tennis. We will probably see it, some of that more in tennis in general in the future, hopefully not so much and hopefully not from my side.

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