

Internazionali BNL d'Italia

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Novak Djokovic

Press Conference

N. DJOKOVIC/D. Koepfer

6-3, 4-6, 6-3

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. 11th semifinal. I'd like to talk to you about the second set where you slammed your racquet. Your emotions seeming to get the better of you again today. Have you spoken with a psychologist or a member of your team about how you can control that, or is that just part of what you have to let out to get the win in the end?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Well, let me tell you that it's not the first nor the last racquet that I'll break in my career. I have done it before. I'll probably do it again.

I don't want to do it, but when it comes, it happens. That's how I, I guess, release sometimes my anger. And it's definitely not the best message out there, especially for the young tennis players looking at me. I don't encourage that, definitely.

But, look, we're all people. We all do our best. There were times and periods when I don't do that, and there are sometimes periods when I do. It's unpredictable really in life what can happen.

I am working on my mental and emotional health as much as I'm working on my physical health. It's always been part of my, I guess, training and recovery, as well, developing strong character and understanding myself on different levels, the holistic approach to life.

Well, that's just me, and of course I'm not perfect. I'm doing my best.

Q. You were playing in your 14th consecutive Rome quarterfinal today. You have now won the last seven of those. What do you believe it is about this event that has made you so consistent since your debut?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: I feel very welcomed here by people. You don't see people in the stands, but the people who



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are part of the organization, from transportation people, volunteers, grounds people, everyone is very kind to me. I happen to speak Italian, so obviously that brings me closer to them.

I feel that probably next to Serbia and maybe China, this is the place where I get the most support and where I get to feel the best, really.

The results that I have had in the last 11, 12 years are proving that I'm feeling great. So I am very grateful to all the people that make me feel good, and of course that reflects positively on my game.

Q. I wonder if you could give some thoughts on your next opponent, Casper Ruud, who is actually doing quite well this season and is particularly good on clay. You guys haven't played before, but have you done some scouting? Have you given some thought to what you might be facing tomorrow?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: I did watch a little bit of his match today before I got on the court. It's going to be our first meeting.

As you said, you know, he's a clay court specialist. Obviously he's very good on different surfaces, but clay is where he feels most comfortable and where he had his best results.

He's relatively young, as well. He's making his way up the ranking scale. It's really impressive to see him in semis, but at the same time, it's kind of expected, knowing how well he can play on this surface.

He had a tough match today, well fought. Hopefully we can have a good match. I'm going to have to do my video analysis and homework with my coach, with my team, and get ready for that one.

Q. A question about the race for the most Grand Slam titles. With Rafa back now, he obviously has a great chance to match Roger's 20th in Paris. Wondering what you think the significance of that would be in the way people have always compared him to Roger and you, as well.

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Well, of course in our sport, winning



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most Grand Slams and being No. 1 for as long as possible are two biggest goals, I would say, professional goals. I think Roger and Rafa would agree with that.

You know, we all have our own journeys and our own trajectories and careers that are very unique and very specific, but at the same time, we have this era that we have been playing in together that brings us together.

I think this is definitely one of the best eras of tennis, and I'm grateful to be part of such era with these two guys. They are incredible champions on and off the court.

We have some young guys and we have a new Grand Slam winner in Dominic Thiem, which was kind of expected in a way, knowing his qualities and seeing him reach three finals before and now winning. It's great for tennis, as well, to see new faces, but I think it's also quite important for tennis fans and sports fans to keep on seeing, I think, three of us trying to reach these heights, you know, trying to fight for Grand Slam titles.

Any time we get to play against each other between three of us is always a blockbuster match regardless of the court or surface or location.

Yeah, let's see. I mean, obviously Roger is injured and he's not going to play this year. We hope that we are going to have Roland Garros and the whole season end as best as possible without any interruption for the tennis players. It's very important obviously for our sport to keep going.

Roland Garros is the last slam, the last opportunity of this season. So we all know who the main favorite is there. Obviously it's Nadal and everything that he has achieved there, losing maybe couple matches in his entire career on that court, which is probably the most impressive record that anybody has on any court. So, yeah, of course you would put him right there in front as a favorite to win it.

You know, Dominic Thiem has been playing a couple of finals there last couple of years, so he's definitely right up there. I like my chances if I prepare myself well. You know, I won that tournament before, played finals before, had always good results in Roland Garros.

Obviously it's going to be strange without crowd. We have been hearing that they have been allowing crowd and then reducing that, so we don't know how that's going to look like.

Look, you know, clay court is the most demanding physically and I think even mentally surface on the tour, and you've got to be really ready for best-of-five for a stretch of two weeks. So let's see. You know, I obviously,

as you see in my answer, I'm trying to focus only on that tournament and not thinking about the far future, because we don't really know what it brings.

You know, Roger is going to come back. Regardless of his age, he's always favorite. You know, if he's feeling good physically, he's always up there. You know, he keeps on proving to everybody wrong that he can make it, that he has been reaching finals of slams in last couple of years.

Let's see. You know, the race is of course there, and hopefully Rafa and I can stay healthy and with Roger back it's going to be great for our sport.

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