

# Internazionali BNL d'Italia

Sunday, 20 September 2020

Roma, Italia

## Novak Djokovic

Press Conference



INTERNAZIONALI  
BNL D'ITALIA

BNP PARIBAS

N. DJOKOVIC/C. Ruud

7-5, 6-3

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

**Q. Still curious to know more about how you feel about Casper Ruud, now that you've faced him, what you think he has to offer on clay? What do you think are the things he did well today?**

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: I have never faced him on the tour before, and I didn't train with him so much. So I had to rely on the video analysis, I guess, and just watching his matches and talking with my coach and understanding what is the right tactics.

But having said that, it still takes time to really get used to his pace of the ball, his positioning. Today was probably the windiest conditions that we had this week, and so definitely it was challenging for both of us to really find the good timing, for me especially in the first set. I was serving well, but he was a better player from back of the court until those set points that he had on 5-4.

You know, I played a couple of really good points, managed to break his serve. Then whenever I needed to get myself out of trouble, I had first serve and aced him quite a few times. So I'm very pleased with that part of my game.

But I think Casper is really good player, someone that is very dedicated to his work on the court, off the court, as well. Nice guy. Trains at Nadal Academy. He has that pattern of play on clay with a lot of spin.

You know, it's no accident he's in semifinals here in Rome. I'm sure we will see more of him in the big tournaments, especially on this surface. I mean, he's got the game. He's physically fit. He just knows how to play on clay.

**Q. Obviously you have one more tough match to go, and you have had the lead in this category before, but what would it mean, considering when you returned from tennis you had 34 Masters titles, to win a 36th**

**and take the outright lead in that the category again?**

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Well, I mean, these are the biggest tournaments we have on our ATP Tour. Grand Slams are obviously Grand Slams, but they are part of our season but not part of the ATP Tour.

So obviously the 1000 Masters events are as important as it gets on the tour. These are the events where I want to perform my best other than Grand Slams and the World Tour Finals.

It's great that we get to play the tournament at all. I mean, considering the conditions in Italy and worldwide, it's good that we get a chance and even in front of the crowd today.

Of course finals at such a big event means a lot even after 15 years being on the tour. I still am as motivated to get my hands on the trophy. I mean, this is what I work for as much as anybody else, really, on the tour.

Of course as the time passes by, the tougher it gets. You know, obviously I'm not super fresh and young as I maybe was five, ten years ago, but I still feel physically really good.

And I love playing in Rome. I always want to do well here. I feel great support and great energy from the crowd.

Of course, you know, with Nadal in the finals and without Nadal in the finals makes a big difference. Nevertheless, I will not underestimate anybody that steps on the court against me tomorrow.

Diego played the match of his life. I watched it last night. He was so impressive. And that proves that, you know, anything is possible, even Nadal who is probably the toughest challenge in our sport, playing Nadal on clay. But he managed to win in straight sets, so that proves his quality.

Let's see. Hopefully I can get another big trophy.

**Q. I was wondering what part of Casper Ruud's game made you feel most uncomfortable today?**

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: His forehand is his weapon. You know, he uses the forehand very well. He can hit it through



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the court. He can also spin it.

He's also moving really well. I mean, he just, as I said before, he understands the tactics and the game that clay requires. This surface is the slowest surface with the highest bounce that we have in our sport, and it requires certain adjustments in the game.

You just can't play on clay the way you play on hard courts or, say, grass for that matter, or indoors, outdoors, whatever. It's a very particular surface.

So you can see that Casper's specialty is clay. You know, he just knows how to move, how to put himself in a position to attack with the forehand.

I think, you know, I was maybe forcing a little bit too much to go to his forehand side and he was dictating the play, basically, in the first set from that corner. I was making some unforced errors, but he was the one that most of the rallies he was in control. So, you know, he did pleasantly surprise me with the forehand and the way he moves.

**Q. In terms of the obscenity warning, I didn't hear exactly what was said. Was that warranted? If so, are there any regrets? It seemed like there were a lot of large proportion of kids out there today. Only a thousand people, but there was a lot of kids.**

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: You didn't understand what I said when I got the warning (smiling)?

Yeah, I deserved the warning. Let's keep it that way. I didn't say nice things in my language.

Yeah, I had a couple of disputes with the chair umpire with those calls. As I understood, I was three out of three right, but doesn't matter. You know, everybody makes mistakes. It's fine.

It was a kind of the heat of the battle, obviously. There is a lot of intensity on the court. A lot of pressure for him, for both players. It's kind of whatever happens, happens.

Yeah, it was nice to play in front of the crowd. There was a lot of children, which I love seeing kids. You know, I hope everyone is playing tennis.

Traditionally, this tournament brings a lot of young people and a lot of children, which is very nice to see. Actually, out of restricted 1,000 limited number of people that could access the court today, you had half maybe or maybe one-quarter young people and children, which is fantastic to see.

**Q. I wanted to ask about the crowd again, just how different it feels having the crowd. Also what your thoughts are on having the crowd be I think five times at 5,000 is the plan for French Open and what your comfort level with that is, given that they still have a lot of cases.**

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: I wasn't expecting the crowd here at all. Yesterday they told us, Well, you're going to have the crowd.

That was really nice news and surprise for me personally, I think for all the players. Because, you know, a big part of us being professional tennis players is crowd, you know, playing in front of them, feeding off that energy, just enjoying that complete experience of being professional player and playing on the biggest stadiums in our sport.

It is very unusual and hopefully only temporary playing in front of the empty stadium, such a big stadium. It feels wrong (smiling). But it is what it is, and I guess we all have to accept it and understand that this will all pass.

French Open, you know, I was very glad to hear that there is going to be a crowd, as well. I understood that the first decision was to have 11,500 and down to 5,000 and only to one court.

Yeah, I mean, it's tough. You know, I just hope that we are going to be able to finish the season with all the tournaments we have in the calendar. I heard that Moscow is going to get canceled. London, as well, is under question mark with everything that is going on in Great Britain.

It's out of control of everyone, I mean, involved in tennis and sports. It's just you have to follow what government is requiring you to do. We're just hoping we can play. You know, even if it's in front of empty stadium, okay, we'll take that.

**Q. I would like to know what are your thoughts about knowing that you won't be facing Rafael Nadal at finals, but also, I wanted to know how do you think about this match of Diego last night and what are your thoughts about that?**

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Well, I answered that a couple questions ago. I watched the match last night, and Diego played match of his life, as he said. I mean, he deserved to win. He was playing fantastic.

He's also probably feeling the most comfortable, talking about Diego, on clay. But he would probably have more chance to beat Nadal in night conditions, as it was last

night, and maybe the ball doesn't bounce as high. You know, that's I guess something that was more suitable to him, and he just went for it.

He absolutely took the victory. I mean, he earned it. So big, huge credit to Diego, because winning against Nadal on clay in any conditions is probably an ultimate challenge in our sport. So it's amazing achievement for Diego.

Look, of course it makes a difference playing or not playing Nadal in the finals. Most of the finals that I reached in the big events on clay I played against Rafa (smiling). So it's going to be strange not facing him, but at the same time, I mean, Diego and Denis have deservedly reached semifinals.

So let's see who I get to face. But whoever I get to face, I'll try to do my best and win the trophy.

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