

Internazionali BNL d'Italia

Tuesday, 11 May 2021

Roma, Italia

Novak Djokovic

Press Conference

N. DJOKOVIC/T. Fritz

6-3, 7-6

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. What are your takeaways from the match today?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Well, it was a very strange match with strange conditions. Obviously playing under the rain non-stop for almost two full sets, it is challenging for both me and him.

I thought that I had an advantage there because the conditions were slower which allows me to return his serves, because he's got really big serves. So I kind of kept the match under my control for most part of the two sets, then served for the match. Very sloppy service game. He played well, made a great passing shot to come back.

I was stressed out in the end obviously, but I think it was the right call to stop the match.

When I came back, I thought we were quite even actually till the last point. I'm glad that I managed to finish off this match in straight sets. I know I can play better, and I'm going to work tomorrow trying to make sure I do that in two days.

Q. Given that the French Open is being played just seven months after last year's, do you find playing on clay is more taxing for you physically or mentally? Is it difficult to come back so soon after last year's Roland Garros?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Well, we all know the clay is a slower surface in the sport. As much it requires more physical energy from a player, but also I think mental and emotional energy as well. I think you have to train on clay more than any other surface really to get yourself comfortable playing on it.

It is also a very demanding surface in terms of tactics, in terms of just constructing the point. Sometimes it's just



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really cat-and-mouse type of play where you have to fight for a better position on the court, sometimes use the shots that you would not normally use on other surface, like this looping forehand or backhand, trying to get back in play, build your position. I mean, it is the surface that probably requires from a player to defend better than on any other surface.

But, look, I haven't played a lot at all, so I don't feel physically exhausted or worn out. I don't think that's going to be a case for me coming to Paris. I'm excited to come to Paris. That's obviously the biggest goal of my clay court season. I'm hopefully going to get more matches here in Rome, then some more in Belgrade, then get in the top shape for Roland Garros.

Q. Another surface-related question. You're one of that rare group of players with a career Grand Slam. You've managed to figure out ways to be successful on all kinds of surfaces. Some players have more trouble with that. They might be very good on one, not have the same success on one or two others. For you, what was the hardest part of expanding your repertoire to be able to win everywhere? What do you think maybe came easily for you in that process?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Well, I think what came easily in that process for me was to motivate myself. I had plenty of motivation trying to win Roland Garros, kind of reach that milestone of winning all four slams. I came up short two, three times, losing in finals, in some long, big, tough matches against Nadal particularly, and against Wawrinka in 2015 I think.

I think I played three finals of Roland Garros in a row. I lost '14 to Nadal, '15 to Wawrinka, in '16 I beat Andy. When I won in '16, I held all four slams, I had many finals in a row. I had definitely the best 15 months of my career. Those were so to say the pinnacle moments in my career in terms of results, in how I felt on the court, how well I played.

But little did I know after that I just struggled a little bit with motivation, to be honest. I thought I would never find myself in that kind of state, but I was. I learned something new obviously. That took a lot out of me. I think I was very devoted and very intense with my desire to win a slam on clay. Growing up on clay, obviously I never felt uncomfortable playing on clay. Statistically looking, clay is

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not my most successful surface comparing to hard court or grass for that matter in terms of Grand Slams.

I think it was a bit mental, bit of luck I think as well. It was probably more mental than physical at that stage, coming up short for four or five years, being in finals, semifinals. Just needing that extra step to clinch the title gave me every single season more drive and I think more hunger to get to where I wanted to be and hold that Roland Garros title.

At the same time when I finally reached it, I felt a huge joy, content and relief, but at the same time also exhaustion. It took really a lot out of me. I kind of for a year and a half had to recover in terms of emotions. I had an elbow issue and everything. I felt basically in 2018 that I got back on track.

But, yeah, I think tennis for that reason is a very unique sport because you constantly have to be flexible to adapt and to adjust to new conditions and new surfaces, indoor, outdoor, wind, no wind, playing during the day or under the lights. It's so diverse that if you want to be a contender for the top spot in rankings, you have to be able to play equally well on all surfaces under all conditions and be consistent with your results, otherwise it's not going to work. The level of tennis, quality of tennis is really high these days.

Q. When you have a rain suspension like that, you get an idea it's going to be a little bit, how do you spend the time? Are you going over every detail of the match with your team? Taking out the Uno cards? How do you spend that?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: We played social game, it wasn't Uno, it's Parcheesi. That's what they call it in Spanish. I don't know what it's called in English. We do play that daily now. We try to, so to say, kill some time with that.

In these kind of circumstances, you really don't know when you're going to go back on the court. Every half an hour it's a checkpoint and they will let you know whether the match is postponed or they're going to call it or they're just going to call it a night, then you have to go to hotel.

Also with eating, whether you rest or you get some sleep or not. You really have to feel yourself and know what's best for you. Sometimes if you fall asleep, wake up, maybe it takes time to get those engines moving.

But I was awake. I was listening to some music, talked to my coach about his observation of my game, what needs to be done better. But we also had some fun. I spoke to my kids. There's always something to do. I was definitely

not bored.

Q. Interesting to hear you lose motivation after being at the top. Can you understand how Dominic Thiem felt after he won the US Open, his lack of motivation at the beginning of this year?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: I don't know what exactly is the case of Dominic, why he felt that way. But I can relate. I mean, I understand. Obviously these kind of circumstances that we are living right now in the world are different from back five years when I was experiencing that period or maybe the crisis of motivation a bit.

For me it was a completely different situation in terms of achieving everything, but then realizing that all that I have achieved professionally doesn't necessarily guarantee me to have the time that I want with the close ones, the time for myself for some other things that I would like to enjoy in life. I had to really sacrifice everything to get to that point, and I did.

Then after that, as any other human being, I felt a need to devote myself to certain other things, to family and some other projects, other things, maybe cool off the steam a little bit. When you are on a roll and constantly playing on the road more or less every week, if you're winning a lot, that obviously gives you the confidence and you feel like you're flying mentally, you're pumped, but at the same time when everything ends and you reach that goal, you just feel like deflated balloon in a way. You just feel like you have to recharge.

You have to reset very quickly, which happens all the time in tennis schedule, you have to go for a tournament in a week or two time, that wasn't enough. For me it wasn't enough. That's why it took a bit more time. I was just finding that balance between the court and private life. After a while I found it.

It's all a journey. It's all a process of realizing what is best for you.

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