

Internazionali BNL d'Italia

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Roma, Italia

Jessica Pegula

Press Conference

J. PEGULA/N. Osaka

7-6, 6-2

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. Can you just talk through the match, first and foremost, about what you think was the key in terms of getting that match.

JESSICA PEGULA: I think I started off a little slow. I was a little annoyed. I didn't make many first serves. Against someone that hits as big as her, I was getting frustrated. I was, like, This isn't going to work if I don't start putting in some serves.

So I definitely started off frustrated but was able to get back into the match. Saved I think maybe a few set points, I don't remember.

Yeah, I knew I was right there. I knew if I could just hang in there and play my service games smart, I could get opportunities on her serve. I did in the tiebreak especially.

So, yeah, I thought I toughed out the first set mentally, and then the second set I started to play better and I think she was starting to show more frustration. I was able to close it out, because I know that she's a strong, powerful player that she could come back at any time.

I was glad that I kind of closed it out there quicker in the second set when I had the chances.

Q. What does it mean for you to get that type of win and on clay, nonetheless, in Rome where things are usually a little bit slower, a little bit trickier? How much satisfaction do you get out of that? How much does it play into kind of your belief on this surface and what you believe your game can do on this surface?

JESSICA PEGULA: Yeah, I mean, I thought I played a couple really good clay court matches here. Madrid, you know, Sabalenka was playing honestly unbelievable. I think she demolished everybody until Barty was able to take that second set off of her. Kudos to her.



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But, you know, I beat a good player, Cirstea in Madrid, I beat Kasatkina the other day. Those two wins I tried to take with me to be positive, and I honestly think I have been feeling more and more comfortable. I thought my movement was really good today.

Yeah, I know I'm not really a clay court player, but, I mean, I did grow up on green clay when I was younger in the States so I'm not too unfamiliar with it.

It's been a while since I really played a lot on clay. I just played the French Open last year, and that was the only clay court tournament. It's kind of taken me longer than I thought to kind of get used to it again, but I'm starting to find my range.

I know she doesn't love clay, so I just tried to be the clay court player out there today, and it worked just good enough (smiling).

Q. I hope you like Rome more than before. What does it mean to beat Osaka? In the tennis world right now, even if the depth of the women's tennis has been growing, still Serena Williams and Osaka are the, let's say, the most famous names in the tennis world. And in America, I guess, too. How important is for you to come out and make headline and say, I have beaten Osaka who has won four slams, and so on?

JESSICA PEGULA: Thank you. I love Rome. It's amazing. Yeah, again, I know it's not her favorite surface. It's probably her least-favorite surface. But it still is a win, and I still want to take confidence away from that knowing that I can play.

Obviously there is clay court tournaments coming up, especially before they take rankings for the Olympics. So I do think it's still an important part of the season.

Yeah, she's obviously been unbeatable kind of on hard court, and I knew I just had chances today to beat her. I just thought I played solid and I played a good match. I was tough mentally. Again, I'm just going to try and take all the confidence I can from this match. Obviously probably my highest-ranked win. Yeah, so I think it's good no matter what, basically.

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Q. Do you think that she will ever be able to become better and better on clay? What are exactly her limits from your point of view? I understand it's not an easy question of an opponent to another player, but I saw many, many years ago Navratilova was not that great on clay at the beginning, and then suddenly she became very, very good. Chris Evert had always been good.

JESSICA PEGULA: Well, I think it's just playing on it a lot more. I think she could be good. She has a good forehand, a good serve. I mean, that's a big part of being good on clay. She's a good athlete. I think it's just finding her comfort level. She probably hasn't played on it that much even the last few years with the pandemic and everything.

I don't think she played the French last year either. It just takes time, and you just have to work on it. Of course I think she can play well. You see Sharapova wasn't a clay court player. She won the French twice. You see Li Na, a Chinese player win the French is crazy to me too.

I think it's kind of what Sabalenka said when she won Madrid is she was afraid of it too, but I think she just accepted it and realized -- she worked on her movement and stuff like that. You can always get better on a surface.

I think she will be fine. She's just got to play on it more, and I'm sure she'll get that confidence at some point.

Q. You mentioned it before, but as much as there is talk about the Tokyo Olympics and will they, won't they, but there is still the race to qualify. You know, a lot of points in the air for the next five weeks. Talk about is that added pressure? Is that motivation? How do you kind of use the Olympic race within the race for the U.S. spot to help you over the next few weeks?

JESSICA PEGULA: Yeah, well, the way I look at it is I probably wouldn't have qualified last year, so if I don't make it this year maybe it wasn't meant to be. At the same time, yeah, I definitely -- I think I use it more as motivation when I'm out there and it's tough. It's, like, Okay, I'm not going to sit here and kind of not throw away the match but get frustrated and let my emotions ruin it when this is a really important part of the season, especially for the Americans who are all so close together with their ranking and they take it after the French.

I really only have -- I don't know if I play anything before the French, but it's really probably going to come down to the French with points.

Yeah, I like to use it as motivation, okay, there are other things to worry about, and just use that to kind of keep myself level-headed and realize there is another opportunity that is the result of my match today or yesterday or whatever.

So I like to use it as motivation. The way I just take the pressure off is I just think I really wasn't supposed to be qualified anyway, so if it doesn't happen, it doesn't happen, but, yeah, I mean, it's definitely there and it's lingering, so...

Q. You're playing Rome, it's another WTA 1000, Madrid, got good results there, do you feel the comfort level you have at the tour's biggest events, the success in the Middle East, as well, that that has really changed anything about how you approach these events?

JESSICA PEGULA: Yeah, I definitely feel way more comfortable. I forget who I was talking to, I think it was Tennis Channel, and I was saying, It's weird, you realize how much more confident you feel and it's not something you feel -- I don't know. You don't know when it happens, but it kind of just gradually happens and all of a sudden the confidence is there where you feel comfortable. Whereas before, not that I felt not confident, but you can feel the difference of your mindset and how you're thinking, how you go about things.

So I think I have adjusted really well, because a lot of these big tournaments I have never played before, and it's all a new experience, which is also a way to make it fun and make it exciting.

Yeah, I think I have just been gaining confidence. I don't know. Just trying to ride the wave right now (smiling).

Q. You grew up not playing on red clay either. I'm wondering, how have you been able to adapt to it?

JESSICA PEGULA: I don't know. I grew up on green clay a lot, actually. So I am familiar with the sliding and stuff. But like I said, I just played the French last year.

So I felt really uncomfortable probably when I switched from hard after like Doha, Dubai, going back into the clay, or after Miami I felt pretty uncomfortable. Took me longer honestly than I thought. But again, it's just building confidence with those matches.

It was nice that I got to play a match the other day where she just got a bye. I think it's just building that comfort level with it.

Again, I'm sure she will be fine on clay eventually. She has

a good game for it, so I'm sure she'll adjust.

Yeah, it can be frustrating on a surface when you're just not feeling comfortable. She's obviously dominated on hard court, so it's just different. But I'm just trying to figure it out, and I have been feeling more and more comfortable every day.

Q. Some players have come out of the pandemic and really sort of hated what's going on. They don't like being in the bubble, haven't done well. Karolina Pliskova says she just doesn't like it. And yet you have arrived. What is it in your mind that has allowed you to come back from this pandemic stronger, more thoughtful, and better than ever?

JESSICA PEGULA: Yeah, I don't know. I think I worked on my fitness, worked on getting healthy. I think I just decided that, you know, maybe for the top-ranked players it wasn't as big of a deal. I was high ranked but not where I am now.

I think I just decided that this was a really good chance to kind of get mentally tougher, because I knew girls, some girls weren't going to be okay with what was going on. They were going to be annoyed, they were going to be kind of tapped out at tournaments.

I think I honestly just decided, Okay, I'm going to be the tough one through all of this. It is what it is. There are times I don't like it and it sucks and it's not fun and obviously I wish things were back to normal, but I think I have done a really good job and along with the other group of players who have done the same thing of taking advantage of the situation almost in a good way and coming out better and stronger. I really think it's just a mindset.

You know, also I think too sometimes we're used to not playing with a lot of fans and in big stadiums too, which sometimes feels normal to me, whereas maybe the top players are used to playing in a stadium full every match, feature matches and stuff like that, they miss that, which is understandable.

But, you know, I think it's just it is what it is. Just try to be grateful for the situations and that we are able to play. Yeah, just take it as a positive, I guess.

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