

Internazionali BNL d'Italia

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Roma, Italia

Reilly Opelka

Press Conference

R. OPELKA/F. Delbonis

7-5, 7-6

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. Your record on clay, as you well know, has not exactly been stellar. What do you attribute your rise this week? Is clay for you harder on the mind or on the body?

REILLY OPELKA: I haven't played much on clay, so it's kind of hard to say with my record. Played 2019 a few matches, only one season. I was injured for half of it, so hard to assess my record on clay.

But, I mean, it's tough on both, just as the sport always is, you know.

Q. But is it more difficult for you, the grinding? You're a big, tall guy. You're not much of a grinder.

REILLY OPELKA: I mean, if you watch me play, there hasn't been much grinding.

Q. In January you and I spoke from Delray, and you talked about sort of the nightmare of travel during this pandemic and during COVID times. Then you got hit by COVID. Did that change your perspective on the sport, on travel, on the bubble, on all of these necessities?

REILLY OPELKA: No.

Q. So what are your thoughts?

REILLY OPELKA: My thoughts are the same. I mean, we are the only sport that's bubbling. I mean, there is things that can be done to be safe and be preventative. I'm all for that. It's great. Let's be safe. Let's be smart. We're the only ones bubbling. I think there needs to be some more responsibility on the players.

I mean, I don't know. It's hard to say. At least in the States I think there is a lot of people that are vaccinated. I'm not --



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I'm just completely against an optics bubble. Key word there "optics." I'm fine for bubbling. Miami Open was a great bubble. I'm fine staying in the hotel and not leaving as long as it makes sense, which it did there. There was no outside guests. It was all for us.

But when we're, you know, in a bubble and we can't leave and then, you know, I'm getting in an elevator with four strangers that are just flying in and the flight attendant said, It doesn't make much sense.

It's all about logic for me, and I can't wrap my head around that one.

Q. I'm curious to know how you feel about potentially facing Nadal in the next round? How would you overall assess your play? How pleased are you with your performance so far not dropping a set and beating some really good players?

REILLY OPELKA: Yeah, I'm really pleased. We have been working hard. I made some adjustments on my game. It's nice to see them come into play.

Rafa's brutal. Zverev is brutal. Arguably the two best clay courters in the world right now. Obviously you have to put Thiem in there and Tsitsipas, I guess. We have a lot of tough guys.

But it will be a good test. I have never played either. I've never played Rafa. I've never played Zverev. It will be a good test, you know, against either the greatest player of all time or one of the greatest players in the world right now.

Q. I wondered if you could tell us about the Art Gallery patch on the hat. I know you're a big art enthusiast. Is that the first time you have worn an Art Gallery patch on the court? Is it a paid partnership? Just what's the significance of it for you?

REILLY OPELKA: Yeah, Tim Van Lare (phonetic) and I, we started the patch in Madrid. He's a friend of mine, and he's a guy I actually learn a lot from. He loves tennis.

So he's calling me. He's asking me some questions about tennis -- he actually has a great understanding of the game -- and I'm asking him a lot of questions about art, you



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know, which is basically a history lesson. Some of the things he's telling me and I'm learning from him are great.

He showcases some of my favorite artists ever. I mean, a guy Friedrich Kunath is the reason why I really fell in love with art, and he shows in Tim's gallery. Once I discovered Friedrich, I have a Kunath myself in my collection. I discovered a guy named Renis Van De Velde (phonetic) and a guy named Ben Sledsens who are my favorite artists. Those three. They are all showing in Tim's gallery coincidentally.

I go to tons of galleries across the world, and my three favorite artists have a lot of work and a lot of shows with Tim. Tim and I just connected through that. We became good friends.

It's a really exciting partnership for me, just because, like I said, I love art and I love tennis and so does Tim.

Q. I have a quick Wimbledon question for you, if you don't mind. I'm thinking about the art of diving on the grass. I was curious to know your thoughts on it. I talked to Isner, another big guy, said it's really not his style, he doesn't want to do it. Do you ever dive on the grass? Would you ever? And are you aware of the diving that goes on at Wimbledon, the classics like Becker, guys like Dustin Brown? Is that part of the game fun in your opinion?

REILLY OPELKA: Yeah, I mean, I'm not gonna be diving. I'm 240 pounds. Doesn't make much sense (smiling). I mean, yeah. I think it's different now. The grass isn't as soft. I mean, I think it's sometimes comical. I think some guys overdo it. It's kind of pathetic in some cases (smiling).

Yeah, Dustin actually has some great highlights. If it happens, maybe it would be like match point and it's just there and it just naturally takes over, but I'm not like, Oh, we are on grass this week, I'm gonna be diving, you know. It's not really a thought process of mine.

Q. Can you just talk about going into Roland Garros on this wave of confidence? Second to that, there has been much made about the Americans dropping out of the top 30. Can you just give your thoughts on that?

REILLY OPELKA: Yeah, I mean, I have been asked about that a few times. Yeah, it definitely gives me confidence going to Roland Garros. Slams are a different, a whole different breed, something I've still got to improve on and I have a lot to learn from.

But as far as the Americans in the top 30, I mean, the only

reason there is not is because Isner has taken some time off, given the circumstances with his family and not being able to travel with all of his family. He has a wife and two little kids. It's hard. If he's traveling, we have a guaranteed not only top 30, guaranteed top 20.

But, I mean, it's a weird year. I don't know. It's funny, like I'm not directing this like specifically towards you, but it's funny how the American press is like the first one, like they are super excited to see Americans drop out of the top 30 so they can talk about it.

I don't know. The press and the media, you know, I see from a lot of the American journalists is negative. That's fine, I get it, whatever. But I mean, me, Tommy, Frances, Fritz, we are all super tight, we all work hard. We respect the ones that support us unconditionally, you know. That's how we support each other. That's how we go about things.

It's funny to me that that's how the American tennis media, they're excited to report about there not being an American in the top 30. It is what it is. We will be there. I'm not worried.

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