

Internazionali BNL d'Italia

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Roma, Italia

Maria Sakkari

Press Conference

M. SAKKARI/E. Alexandrova

6-3, 6-2

THE MODERATOR: Maria, solid match today. Your first match here in Rome. Talk us through your thoughts on the match.

MARIA SAKKARI: I think it was a pretty solid win. I was dominant from the baseline, served really well the entire match. Handled a situation like in the beginning when we were, like, holding serves, I handled it well. I broke when I had the chance.

I'm very, very happy with the way I played.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. Coming from a Mediterranean country, coming here to Italy, does it feel any closer to home or do you feel any differently when you're here? What kind of things do you do that remind you of home?

MARIA SAKKARI: Of course, there are a lot of Greek people here because it's only an hour and a half flight from Athens. Yeah, Greece and Italy, we're very similar in a lot of things. We like each other a lot. We do get a lot of support here. I saw a lot of Greek flags as well.

I think it's by far the nicest city to walk around. I hate walking in general, but yeah, I've been walking -- on my days off, I would do seven or eight Ks by myself downtown, then we would have dinners and stuff. Obviously the food is unreal.

I have part of my family here, of course the boys. I'm enjoying my time on court and off court, of course.

Q. When you got to Rome, practicing on the outer courts, now through your matches, does it feel like you're on clay?

MARIA SAKKARI: Yeah, finally I do feel on clay again.

Q. Can you articulate what that means, coming from



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Stuttgart and Madrid, what is it about the courts in Rome and Paris that make it feel like clay?

MARIA SAKKARI: Of course, we know the difficulty of the court in Stuttgart. It's not a real clay. What I mean, it's not real clay, I've spoken to people there, they don't water the court and everything. It's a special play just for that tournament. I like it, and they're doing a great job. It was just unlucky that I had that stomach issue.

Madrid, obviously I don't see it as a regular clay court tournament because of the altitude and everything.

But here, once the ball bounces, there's a high bounce. It's just more of a clay court tournament here than the rest - for myself at least.

Of course, I enjoy a lot the atmosphere here and in Paris because those two tournaments, I think they attract more people than any other tournaments in Europe, which I really enjoy.

As Rheem said, it's that Mediterranean temper and mentality. It suits me better (smiling).

Q. What matters more to you when you gauge a clay court, the bounce or the movement, what's happening under your feet?

MARIA SAKKARI: I would say both. Of course, moving is a huge part of the game. I think the way you hit the ball and the way you make it bounce, it's more important than anything else. That's what I worked on in those few days I had off after Madrid. I really tried to get back my clay court game, which I had last year.

Today I felt like it's here, it's here with me (smiling).

Q. Am I right in saying you play Gauff next?

MARIA SAKKARI: I think so, yes.

Q. A rematch from last year.

MARIA SAKKARI: Yes.

Q. How do you reflect on last year's match and how do you look ahead on this year's match? For someone so



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young, she seems to be quite steady. What do you make of how she handled her big breakthrough at 15?

MARIA SAKKARI: You know how much I admire her because she's a great athlete. She's a wonderful girl, which for me is more important than anything else.

The way she has handled her success... She was, what, 15 when she broke through? It was very clever from herself and from the people around her the way they handled everything. Obviously she's very athletic, has a great game. Clay court I think suits her better.

We played each other in Doha, which was of course hard court, different conditions. As I said before, I trust my clay court game. I think it's going to be a great match for everyone to watch. I'm going to go out there, enjoy my game, play my clay court specialist game (smiling).

Q. Sorry to keep asking you about other people, but for us, we're quite excited that Bianca Andreescu is back. From a player's perspective, what do you think Bianca brings to the game?

MARIA SAKKARI: I think she has a slightly different game than a lot of other people. Her variety. She likes to do different things when she's on court, like play high balls, slice, dropshot, hit.

Obviously I had two matches with her, and they were both brutal (smiling). She's a very tough opponent. I think when players play against her, and she's on, the opponent can have a very tough time playing against her.

It's great to see players that have been doing well, had a little blip, now they're back again. Everyone deserves the best and everyone deserves to be happy and to enjoy themselves.

Q. You're one of the many players who have been more comfortable on clay, but then really improved your hard court comfort, game. Big success. Iga, Casper Ruud on the men's side. Casper was saying yesterday he almost has to play a hard court game on clay now. Can there be not a negative, but if you make all those adjustments on hard court, you return to clay, is the adjustment a lot harder or is it easy to slip back in?

MARIA SAKKARI: You mean from hard to clay?

Q. Yes. Can you port the improvements you made on your clay game or do you have to make adjustments?

MARIA SAKKARI: I believe you always have to make

adjustments, no matter if you go from different hard court surface. Let's say US Open is very fast, then you go to Indian Wells, but it's very slow and bouncy. You always have to make adjustments no matter if it's the same or different surface.

Obviously I'm not going to speak about the grass, it's obvious. But clay court is one of the surface which I personally do adjustments. At the same time you have to keep playing aggressive. If you start playing passive, clay court tennis - no offense, but long time ago - girls and guys now, they just hit so hard, they're going to eat you alive.

Personally I study a lot how the surface plays, stringing tension, the balls, everything. You have to be very clever. You need to have the right people around you that you have to make adjustments. That's how I see it.

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