

# Internazionali BNL d'Italia

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Roma, Italia

## Jessica Pegula

Press Conference



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THE MODERATOR: How does it feel to be back in Rome?

JESSICA PEGULA: It feels good to be back. I love the city. It's always so much fun. We were in Madrid for a while, so it's always nice to change it up finally.

Yeah, it's my first day here, so I'm just kind of getting used to the conditions and the courts. Yeah, hopefully I'll be ready to go in a couple days.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

**Q. I wanted to ask about Madrid, the trophy ceremony that didn't happen, just your understanding of what happened, what you were told by the organization.**

JESSICA PEGULA: Yeah, what happened in Madrid, it was really disappointing. I know a lot of like what happened, detail leading up to the event, just because Vika and I are on players council. I had a feeling something was going to happen.

Did I think we were not going to be able to speak, no. I've never heard of that, like, in my life. Even in a 10K challenger final you would speak. I don't know what century everyone was living in when they made that decision or how they actually had a conversation and decided, like, Wow, this is a great decision we're going to do and there's going to be no-backlash against this.

To be honest, it kind of spoke for itself. We were upset when it happened, especially being told during the trophy ceremony we weren't going to be allowed to speak. We were kind of like, Well, I guess this just kind of proves a point. We didn't really do anything, and here we are. It kind of speaks for itself.

At the same time there was also that aspect where we were kind of like, Well, we don't have to say anything else. Everyone kind of picked up on it and was very disappointed.

I mean, yeah, we'll see what happens. I don't really know what's going to happen after that or what decision is going to be made, statements or anything regarding that. It was

just very disappointing.

I think everyone kind of felt that way.

**Q. Do you think it's then because of things that happened, Vika had issues with scheduling in the tournament, do you think it was because of that, or...**

JESSICA PEGULA: I think it was a buildup. There seemed to be a lot of drama in Madrid this year on a variety of different things.

I think, yeah, there was just a buildup of a lot of tension. It just kind of got worse and worse and worse regarding a lot of issues that you guys see online, funny tweets or whatever. I think, yeah, that didn't help the situation.

I don't know if it was, like, the sole reason, but I think there were just a lot of things built up that led to that decision, which is unfortunate. I wish they could have handled it in a more mature, professional way. That's not what happened, so...

**Q. I'm sorry if this is a technical question, but you just mentioned they told you on court that you will not be allowed to speak. They phrased it that way, You will not be allowed to speak?**

JESSICA PEGULA: No. It was kind of awkward. Nobody really knew what to do. We got our trophies. Vika and Bea got theirs. The guy was like, Now you go up on the podium and take one together.

Then Vika turned to us and said, There's no speeches.

We were like, What?

She was like, We're not allowed to talk.

We kind of realized there's no microphone set up, there's nothing. It was very kind of like rushed.

I don't know who told her specifically or what they specifically said to her, but that's kind of why we were all on the podium talking. She was so confused. We were all kind of like, What, this is so weird.

The guy was like, Turn around, take pictures, take pictures.

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We were like, What? What is going on?

We kind of took a quick picture and stormed off the court, to be honest.

**Q. Sorry to keep going on this one, but my question was, as far as Madrid goes, I don't think it's anything new that the WTA have always sort of struggled there, if you had conversations with players council, et cetera. Do you think there's something that you can collectively do to address the situation?**

JESSICA PEGULA: Yeah, I mean, out of all the drama, I think our end goal is to figure out solutions, for us on our side, to make recommendations of, This is what everyone is telling us, this is what's happening.

We did have several meetings with them at the beginning. I think the ATP council, and I was part of WTA council, meeting with tournament directors. There were good conversations. They were fine.

I think they're aware. Hopefully next year we can kind of prepare in advance. I think sometimes we get there and there's problems. Sometimes it's too late to really fix things when everything is already up and running.

I'm hoping, yeah, that out of what happened, even though it wasn't great, that we can, yeah, come to just, like, some sort of decision-making process where we can start preparing for next year. Okay, these problems cannot happen again and this needs to be changed.

I think everyone, it seems like everyone notices is, so I don't know why it keeps kind of going unchanged. Hopefully this was kind of like the tipping point like, We need to see some change for next year.

I remember last year, the men, Zverev, complaining about late matches having to play Alcaraz. It's hard there. They say, which is true, a lot of people with the late matches, they eat at like 11 p.m. It's kind of a cultural difference, too, which is on their side I think fair statement. At the same time there has to be, like, meet halfway kind of thing. I think hopefully we can get there.

But I know as players council, yeah, we do a lot with the tournaments and stuff like that, making recommendations for the next years, what things should change.

We'll definitely have that conversation with them.

**Q. Just a question on Asian-American Pacific Heritage Month back in the States. In terms of your**

**Asian-American identity, how you kind of articulate it? What does it mean to you? It's different for all of us. Not the month, but what your identity means to you.**

JESSICA PEGULA: Heritage? I feel like mine is kind of maybe a little bit different. I'm half Korean. But my mom was adopted, she was adopted very young. She doesn't speak Korean. She's really not Korean at all in that aspect. Even when we came over, my grandparents, which were her adopted parents, that she didn't like anything they recommended we feed her. She wanted spaghetti and meatballs and candy.

It's kind of funny. I don't know a lot of my heritage because she really didn't want to know that much and she didn't really grow up in it.

I think for me it means maybe a little bit different, but sometimes I forget the impact you have on especially like when I see a young Korean girl or family, they come up to me and they, like, love my mom and they love me just because they see themselves being represented on a bigger stage or an area where there's not a lot of Asian-Americans, let alone Asian-American women, especially in sports. Especially my mom being in the NFL, NHL, it's kind of like non-existent.

I don't think I realized it till maybe, I don't know, three or four years ago when I started to play better, have better results. My mom was more in the spotlight. You get those people that come up to you, Oh, my God, my daughters love you, they're such big fans. They're also half Asian. We're from Korea, we came over here. You realize the importance of representation.

I think for me that's kind of what it means, is seeing the difference you make. Even though I didn't exactly grow up fully Korean, it's something that now I think me and my family and my sister have also wanted to learn more about because we realize how important it is for those that come over here and those that are in Asia and they see us in these different lights kind of representing them when there's not a lot of us.

Yeah, that's what it means to me.

**Q. I want to ask about injury layoffs. You had a couple of pretty long injury layoffs when you were younger. I want to ask what the biggest challenge you found coming back was, what advice you'd give to a younger player such as Emma Raducanu?**

JESSICA PEGULA: I would say definitely for me it was a time I definitely learned a lot about myself, if you want to keep playing, how hard do you want to come back, stuff



like that. Also spending days in rehab for months on end, which she's going to have a lot of that, it's really tough mentally.

I think you just have to, I don't know, kind of embrace the suckiness of it because it's not fun. Anyone that tries to tell you it's fun, it's not.

You just have to kind of embrace the aspect of I'm going to grind this out. It's not going to be the most fun, but I have to find ways to get through it and appreciate that I'm able to go through this rehab and find other ways to get better.

I read a lot of books. I read a lot of autobiographies on athletes that I liked. I also was able to be normal, have somewhat of a normal life, which I think for her probably would be nice, spending time with her friends and her family, going back to normalcy, especially how she kind of catapulted to the top so quickly.

I think you just have to take advantage of the things that you don't normally get to do, but then at the same time, yeah, put in the work, the effort to come back, know that it's definitely a journey and it takes a while. They say it's the process, but it's true. It's not going to be a quick fix.

I think every athlete kind of goes through that at some point with injuries. It's mostly just about perspective, so...

**Q. Of course now you've enjoyed a very clean state of health the past few years. Is there something you changed about working out, preparation, to become a healthy athlete?**

JESSICA PEGULA: I think in rehab I definitely learned a lot about my body, where now I feel like I know my body so well, I know what I need, I know what I don't need. I wasn't afraid to try different things.

I changed my training a lot. I got a new trainer I started with, like, not right after my hip surgery, but probably 10 months after, maybe like a year after, and did a lot more - at least for me - mobility work and stuff like that, which really made a huge difference, keeping me more injury-free, just being a lot more professional about my warmup, recovery.

I think I always worked hard when I was in the gym, but sometimes it's not always working hard in the gym, it's like how you're preparing your matches, for your practices, how your recovery is going after every single match. That definitely plays into it.

When mentally you know you're taking care of everything, it makes it so much easier when you go out there on the

court, whether it's practice, tournaments or matches.

That's really important. I definitely became a lot more detail-oriented with that stuff.

**Q. Curious how Swiatek has changed the tour. Feels like this year there's a lot of top players stepping up, beating her, including yourself. How has her dominant year changed things for some players?**

JESSICA PEGULA: For her?

**Q. For other players to step up.**

JESSICA PEGULA: Yeah, I think in a way whoever's winning or losing, we all push each other, right? When you see someone come up and kind of set the bar higher, someone like Iga did, it forces girls like myself, Rybakina, Sabalenka, to also have to raise their game because there's no choice.

I think when you see that happening, that's how people get better. Kind of like Federer, Nadal, Djokovic, they all say if it wasn't for one of the others, they probably wouldn't have been as good.

I think in a way, even though we're all competing against each other, I think there's a lot of mutual respect where we're all pushing each other to be better, raise our level, raise our game.

I think that's something that Iga probably set the bar so high last year. I think also - this isn't against her - for her to keep up that level this year, I mean that would have been crazy. I don't think she really expected that. She's kind of like, No, I just want to keep getting better as a player.

When you start looking at it that way, winning matches, records and stuff, I think you lose sight of the process of your entire career, especially for someone like her who is so young.

I definitely think other girls are dissecting more how to beat her, playing better. You can't really expect her to play lights out forever, nobody can do that, not even the best players in the world.

I think, yeah, it's just a different year. It's a new year. It's a different change. I think some girls have gotten better, some girls are more confident. I don't know, just gotten better in general.

I think we've all just pushed each other. That's kind of why you see, I mean, me a little bit, but more specifically like Sabalenka, Iga, kind of meeting in the finals a lot this year,

Rybakina-Sabalenka matchups, because I think they're all kind of pushing each other, showing that they want to compete and win these tournaments. Yeah, they're improving.

**Q. As far as the doubles ceremony, they haven't given you a reason...**

JESSICA PEGULA: No, but they sent me an apology letter. The letter made everything okay (smiling).

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