

Internazionali BNL d'Italia

Sunday, 14 May 2023

Roma, Italia

Novak Djokovic

Press Conference

N. DJOKOVIC/G. Dimitrov

6-3, 4-6, 6-1

THE MODERATOR: Well done, Novak. Do you think your level today was better than your first match here in Rome?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: I think so (smiling).

Yeah, it was a good match to be part of. Of course, playing Grigor is always a challenge. I know that he's going to deliver his quality. He is one of the most talented players on the tour, without a doubt, for many years.

Towards the end of the second set, he showed what he's capable of. He started to raise the level. He obviously had a good support of the crowd. The momentum shifted to his side. I was set and 4-2 up, had chances to close out the match, but I didn't.

I was very pleased that I managed to kind of find again the right rhythm in the first game of the third set right away. That was super important to make a break early and kind of hold things under control, which is what happened.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. On Friday you said that it takes you time to adapt to clay court tennis. I was wondering how you feel you've adapted to the surface since Friday's match?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Look, the more matches you play, this is kind of a surface that the more matches you play, the better you will feel. Of course, I would love to play a maximum amount of matches in this tournament. That's why I'm here.

It's a different scheduling this year than any other year that I played in Rome. Obviously with an extended duration of the tournament, you have a day off between matches, which in some way it's good because you get a chance to recover more, to work on a practice court on the specifics of your game, then perform on the court in best possible way.



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I think I'm getting closer to the desired level. Of course, you can always play better, but today I had a really good quality opponent and I think I delivered for most part of the match except the last four games of the second set. Other than that I think I was really solid, served well, moved well. When I had opportunities, I was capitalizing on those opportunities.

Just overall a really solid performance and definitely a better level than in the first match. Hopefully I can keep the same trajectory in the next one.

Q. What was the problem with the court conditions? Are you surprised it seems like it's always having the same problem here?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Kind of. I mean, Rome never had a great reputation for the quality of the court, to be honest with you. Even though I know all the guys, Marco is the chief of staff of the guys who are taking care of the courts. I consider them friends. I've known them for 15 years, and I get along with them very well. Again, I cannot blame them for this.

What is interesting would be to understand how much tennis they're playing on the court actually before the tournament starts. I think the other year I was asking, and they were not playing much at all. They played pre-qualifies.

If you don't use the court, and you have a clay court, these things happen. The court breaks. You have many holes. You have uneven surface, really bad bounces, a lot of clay.

Look, it's part of the clay court season, so we have to accept the fact that you're going to have lots of uneven, irregular bounces. In Rome, it has been happening quite a few years.

Actually I remember maybe about 10 years, someone told me they brought Roland Garros people in, and that year the court was best. I don't know why they don't call them again because obviously they're the best clay court specialists in the world.

I had a feeling that these days training on Court No. 5, that actually is better quality than center court because they play on the court more. It's just that kind of surface that

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requires the court to be played on.

Yeah, I'm not sure what happened this year in terms of how much play time this court had before the tournament, but I'm pretty sure that they haven't used it that much. That's always an issue.

Now there's really not much you can do. It's just kind of covering the holes here and there. Yeah, I guess that's a reality that you just have to I guess accept. Hopefully as the days pass and the tournament progresses, the court will get better.

Q. Clay court gives a surprise to yourself, but in life I don't think you can have new surprise because you are an old one, you have a lot of experience. Do you still have some surprise on tennis? Is some opponent to gives you a surprise, or a more dangerous surprise can come from yourself?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: When you talk about 'surprise'...

Q. Something new you don't expect.

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: On the court?

Q. Yes.

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Are you referring to the opponents, how they play?

Q. Yes.

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: I guess as the time passes, I mean, I have more new opponents, new guys that I've never faced. I've had that actually lately more than I had for many years. I had more young opponents that I faced for the first time than I have in many years.

I think I faced Etcheverry for the first time here. Yes, Van Assche in Banja Luka for the first time. In Monte-Carlo my first match, as well, for the first time I faced the Russian opponent.

It's not something that is normal that I'm used to, so of course every time you play somebody new, I guess you get surprised with the way they play, if they play on a high level, things like that, because they don't have much to lose.

But I try to have good preparation so I have less surprise as possible because you kind of want to in a way predict what's going to happen so you have different scenarios of how to respond to a certain, I would say, way that your opponent is playing.

I guess every match you have certain surprises, maybe how badly you play the certain point (smiling). It's always kind of regrouping and getting back to the focus and optimal state.

Q. How about from yourself?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: From myself? As I said, I surprise myself sometimes with some good points and also some bad points.

Today I surprised myself with a terrible start. I lost first four points of the match and handed the break to my opponent. Very poor opening game. It's not something that is normally happening. I normally hold serve. I mean, it is happening. When it happens, it's important to kind of, like, just reset.

Q. What do you think about the new format with the 96-player draw? Do you think it's an advantage to the older guys to get the time to recover between?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: It depends really from which angle you're looking at it.

I mean, I'm personally overall not a fan of that because I feel like we already have four Grand Slams a year that take two plus one week eventually if you go all the way with training. You spend 10 to 12 weeks only in Grand Slams. Now we're going to have eight out of nine 1000 events be the same for next year: pretty much a two-week event.

As I said, it depends from which perspective you're looking at it. If you're a fan, of course an extra day of seeing the top players is great because you have more tennis in your city. I understand from that point of view.

You mentioned that it might be advantage because of the recovery. Yes, it could be the case in that given tournament. But then if you play all the big events on clay, for example, you played Indian Wells and Miami, that is also kind of a month duration for two events, then you play Monte-Carlo, Barcelona, then back to back Rome and Madrid, if you play really well and go all the way, you're maybe not the freshest for Roland Garros.

It really depends what you as a player value the most, what are your goals. For me it's Roland Garros on clay, for sure, the most important event. I'm trying to do everything in terms of the schedule to set up so that I can play my best there.

It's not a guarantee that I will, but I've had some experience over the years, and I know what I need to do

with my team and my preparation in order to peak in slams.
As I mentioned, those are the most important tournaments for me.

I don't want to get into the financials. That's a completely different discussion. We can spend all day talking about it. I think it's just really a matter of which perspective you're looking at it.

I think the positive thing is you're giving more players the opportunity to be in the draw, the main draw. Obviously they expanded the draw so you have more players.

For organization, I see it is a big challenge. It's a big hustle to welcome so many additional players with their respective player staff members for transportation and everything. It just puts the organization to even a bigger task. There's been complaints about Madrid and Rome tournaments from players, with their accommodations, transportation.

It's challenging. Obviously the first year if you're not expanding your facilities even more, you'll have struggles. When you have two raining days, you'll have problems with the practice courts. All these things maybe the regular tennis fans doesn't know about or care about much. We as players, it's very important for us to have those particular conditions that we're able to practice and to prepare ourselves the best possible way.

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