

# Internazionali BNL d'Italia

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Roma, Italia

## Novak Djokovic

### Press Conference



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THE MODERATOR: We'll start with questions.

**Q. Why didn't you play Madrid? Did you feel you needed to train more than make matches?**

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Well, it was not part of the schedule. The plan was to come here. That's basically it.

**Q. Physically how are you feeling? Is everything all right since Monte-Carlo? Were there some issues? Have you worked on that over the past month?**

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Yeah, I did. I had plenty of time to also rest and train. Had a good training block. I arrived here two days ago to get a hit on the center court, as well, obviously stay four or five days training before my first match with top players.

Obviously it's different when you train with them, playing practice sets, seeing where your game is at, kind of working your way towards the fine form for the first official match, so...

I think I'm on a good route to peak at Roland Garros in Paris. Hopefully here in Rome I can play better than I did in Monte-Carlo. That's the wish, obviously, is always to go far.

But let's see. It's a different concept now. It's the first time that Rome and Madrid are almost two weeks' events, like Indian Wells, Miami. It gives you I guess more time to recover between matches if you keep going in the tournament, which I think is useful for me.

**Q. I want to ask about the recent changes in your team because everyone is trying to guess maybe it's about motivation, maybe is about something else. I ask you how the fitness work has changed since then.**

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: I am working currently with a fitness coach that I worked with for many years. It didn't take much time to adapt to his program and approach. We know each other really well. That's why I feel like we're synchronized from the very beginning in terms of what we want to do, how we want to approach the program of

training on and off the court. With Nenad of course, as well.

So, yeah, I'm pleased with the way the last 10 days, 14 days went in terms of training, in terms of preparation and looking ahead to this tournament, but particularly Roland Garros, Wimbledon and Olympic Games. That's the block for which we are preparing the most.

Yeah, we just have to see, wait and see, how it's going to be translated, that work, or transformed into a good performance on the court.

As I said, the training that you do with sparring partners, maybe not top players, is completely different than the ones you have with the guys who are top five, top 10 in the world, your biggest rivals.

I got to play with Dimitrov yesterday, today with Rune, practice sets. It's a great opportunity for me to get that kind of play feeling on the court and build momentum.

**Q. A lot of the younger players have been expanding their teams. You're seeing more and more entourages, more people around them. How important is it for you to have the right people around you at the right time? Also, has there ever been a period where there's been too many people around you maybe?**

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Well, look, I'm always a proponent of having a quality team and entourage around you, having people who are experts in their field, who have experience, who have knowledge, who also understand psychology as well, who know how to emotionally approach you when you need help or when you need space.

It's also important for a fitness coach, tennis coach, to also have that kind of ability because you spend a lot of time on the tour together. You see them much more than you see your family, especially when you're younger, when you're traveling literally every single week of the year.

Of course, for me it's different than for the younger guys. I didn't have my, I guess, proper team until I was, yeah, 18 or something like that. Up to that point I was sharing coaches, traveling coaches, traveling in groups and stuff. It was a different time.

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I was also growing up in Serbia, which at that point was going through a lot of difficult times. Economically it was almost impossible for us. It was impossible actually to have a personal coach and the other things. If you don't have a sponsor, if you don't have somebody backing you financially, then you can't do it, a federation or something like that.

For me, it was different kind of circumstances than maybe some other guys we see today on the tour. It's quite different. But if you're coming from an Italian federation, French or American or British, it's different. You have all these conditions, all this infrastructure and support system that really makes your life easier.

At the same time, you know, life shouldn't be easy always. You have to also learn through hardship. I really valued my time where I was traveling for some time, challengers that I played, by myself, without anybody. I thought that that was also a very valuable life experience for me, to understand how I can take care of myself, be independent.

It's important to have the mix of the two, I guess, for a young player, yeah.

**Q. This is expected to be Rafa's last Roland Garros. Could you just describe what it's like playing him at the French Open.**

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Yeah, it's probably one of the biggest challenges that you can have in the tennis tour, playing Rafa at Roland Garros. We know his records there. I played him probably more than any other player has played him on that court.

The court is bigger. There is more space, which affects visually the play a lot and the feeling of the player on the court. He likes to stand behind quite far back, return. You have sometimes when he's really in the zone and in the groove, not making many errors. You feel like he's impenetrable. He's like a wall.

It's really a paramount challenge to play him in Roland Garros. He's an incredible athlete. The tenacity and intensity he brings on the court, particularly there, is something that was very rarely seen I think in the history of this sport.

I'm sure that it's going to be very emotional tournament for him, as it probably was in Madrid and here. But there in particular because of the records he has.

**Q. In Austria there are currently some rumors going on about Dominic Thiem retiring at the end of the year. What do you think of that, your rivalry with him, and**

**what he's given to the sport?**

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Well, I haven't heard of that. I mean, unless he confirms it, I will not comment on the retirement because rumors are rumors.

I can speak about him.

First of all, a great guy, very good person, someone that has very good manners, good values, family man, somebody that always took time to say hello, always showed respect on the court, off the court.

I really like Dominic. I think he's a great example of somebody who never gives up after the difficult time he had and still has with injuries, trying to work his way back to the level where he was when he was winning Grand Slams and being in top of the world.

Of course, we all understand how difficult it is to come back. I mean, I was having an injury myself back in 2018, a major injury of the elbow, trying to work my way back. I know that kind of a feeling. Fortunately for me, I didn't stay in that kind of feeling for too long. I managed come back and find the desired level maybe six or seven months after that.

For him, it's been a struggle to build rankings and find the level of tennis for quite a few years. I definitely empathize with him and I wish him all the best.

We are all hoping as tennis fans and colleagues of his that he can find the level because he was always very exciting to watch. Spectacular shots, incredible one-handed backhand, forehands, so much power and intensity he brings on the court.

Yeah, hopefully he can stay, to play as long as he can, because he's also a very important player for our sport. But he decides, so only he knows how long he's going to play.

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