

Rolex Paris Masters

Sunday, 6 November 2022

Paris, France

Patrick Mouratoglou

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Questions in English.

Q. Congratulations. Once again an amazing feat and yet another star coming out of the Mouratoglou Academy. You're well known to know the ethos of Serbian tennis players. So your experience in that regard, how did it help Holger for today's match?

PATRICK MOURATOGLU: Serbian tennis players? No, I know Serbian, especially one (smiling).

I don't know if you can categorize Novak as a Serbian tennis player. Of course he's Serbian, but I think he's much more than Serbian. He's an exceptional champion. Maybe the greatest. We'll see.

So it's probably, to play Novak in a final of a tournament is probably the greatest challenge possible.

The only way to prepare a match against him is to have a very clear plan and be able to manage one's emotions and manage all the situations you will have to go through. We went through so many different scenarios during this match.

Holger has been able to find answers most of the time. That's why he ended up winning. But I don't think you can teach anyone to win against Novak. You have to have something special and something extra, and he definitely has.

THE MODERATOR: Questions in French.

Q. We know that between Holger and your academy, it's not recent. The first time you met him, what actually struck you? What made you think that he had something extra?

PATRICK MOURATOGLU: He was not impressive in his level of play. He played very well. He was already among the best among the under-14, but he was not standing out. He didn't have a specific shot. He didn't play loose. He didn't have what some observers were trying to look for.

However, his mindset, his determination, he had them already, and this is what made him stand out.

As for the rest, he developed them throughout the time. He's managed to progress very much. His forehand, his backhand, his serve, he's built it throughout time. The making of champions is not tennis. It's built throughout time with a good mindset.

He had a champion's mindset from the start, and this is what struck me. He was very determined. He has so much self-confidence. When I say that, there is a difference. There is a difference between being strongly self-confident and we just need to talk to him the way he looks around him. We see that he really believes in a success. His personality struck me more than anything else.

Q. Congrats. How do you judge his evolution since the beginning of the year? He was ranked 103, and now he's won the finals. What changed in his play? Did you see a rise in power throughout tournaments?

PATRICK MOURATOGLU: I couldn't say that something changed throughout the months. He's had ups and downs. There was a very much up in Roland Garros, and then there was a low. He had nine losses in a row after Roland Garros. It was very low.

What has changed is more during the last weeks, he's found two things. First of all, he managed to control his emotions. That was very important. That has allowed him to win the match today. He was very close to being defeated.

If he was broken during the first set, then it's not the same match. Every time he didn't panic. He managed to remain focused, to find the right keys. He's gotten actually outstanding mental capacities. Before he could not manage his emotions enough.

Now he's more stable from an emotional point of view during the match, so he manages to be mentally stronger. It was this tournament that was the key, but before that, he had managed to find it already and managed the match

even before that as well.

When you are actually Love-40 and you manage to overturn the match, it's actually very important, because he's not very tall. He's not 2 meters 10, like other players. His level of play is more structured. It's very hard to be consistent throughout a match and throughout a season.

When you don't have a clear vision of your game we have to go through phases, even if it was a case today, there were defensive stages, but the extremes were higher, and he could be on a defensive approach throughout the whole match.

So he's more structured. There is still a lot of work to achieve, but he managed to reach every milestone. In January he already had all the capacities, but then when you actually have a winning streak, it's easier.

Q. There was a willingness from him to bring Novak to the net. Was it actually the strategy and it worked well afterwards?

PATRICK MOURATOGLU: That was part and parcel of the plan, but I cannot tell you all the plan. Not everything was actually on this, because otherwise you can't beat Novak.

The aim was to put him out of his comfort zone, to make him do things that he likes to do less. Holger managed to do that, and he managed to have a lot of winners on dropshots. Having a lot of winners on dropshots is not easy, but he managed to do it at the crucial moments when Novak was going to the back of the court, so that's impressive.

But let's say that the game plan was not really that, but it was part and parcel of the game plan.

Q. If we make a comparison between Carlos and Holger, what defines them? It's actually the fact that they are very creative, that they are all-rounders. Those that knew Carlos very young, they said that he was able to do that early on. Was it the same for Holger? Seemed that it was not the case for Holger. Did you think, Okay, any top player needs to be an all-rounder to be a top player, or did it happen more recently? Was it a long-term vision from you or not or more recently?

PATRICK MOURATOGLU: Well, you know, today we can't have weaknesses. It was true before. We could be a top player with two strong shots. But now tennis players are so strong that every time there is a weakness, the opponent uses it.

If you have actually a bad backhand, you have to run very quickly to be able to do forehands every time. They all know how to do everything nowadays. There are some things that they know how to do better, and then there is play style, the style of play is very definite.

But, you know, we try to teach young players to have a wide array of shots. They need to have strong shots, of course, because otherwise knowing how to do everything is not enough. They need to have strong weapons.

Novak doesn't have one single weapon, but he does everything exceptionally well. He doesn't have one single shot that is incredible. But if we give him a small margin, he will do the perfect shot, taking the ball early on. His return game is just outstanding.

Q. What is the danger for him nowadays? How will you manage moving forward? Because it was incredible. His level of play is incredible. It's the end of the season now. I hope that he will play the Masters because he's the first substitute. But how will he hold his own mentally for the next season? What is the danger for him?

PATRICK MOURATOGLU: I'm not thinking in terms of danger. I'm rather thinking in terms of, well, he's playing a level of play that is incredible, and has been doing so for three weeks for the reasons that I have explained earlier. But there is also enthusiasm that is obvious, and this is why he managed to develop that type of tennis play.

We have to be very transparent on this. He can progress. He can improve much more. There are elements where he can actually improve very much.

We are reaching the end of the season. We will work on that. It's not really that there is a danger, but there is a lot of work to provide. He's top 10. It's not his ambition. It's wonderful, but it's not his ambition.

I don't know we have seen actually his top tennis. It's higher than before, but we have to upgrade his average tennis play and to make sure that his normal average play is as excellent as we have seen so far.

Q. Mentally, will it be easy to motivate him?

PATRICK MOURATOGLU: It won't be a problem. He's a hard worker. He's really, really motivated. Some, when they win, they are unmotivated. They are more motivated when they are in difficulties. But that's not a problem for him. When he wins he's even more motivated so that's not a problem.

Q. Geopolitically we see emerging countries like Norway, Denmark, and we see that France is suffering a lot. What is fashionable is family projects. Do you have an explanation, an analysis to give on that?

PATRICK MOURATOGLU: Geopolitics is not my cup of tea, but I have been saying for 20 years that parents are essential, and they were not taken into consideration. However, it was obvious. High-level female players had a mother or a father who were present, who were on their side. I saw that, and I tried to find a reason for this.

Tennis is a sport which is really difficult. There is a lot of disappointments. The capacity to keep faith and self-confidence and to have resilience is an essential element to reach the top level.

This resilience has been missing a lot. Parents in general, actually for all the players I knew, are the only ones that believe 100% in their kids no matter what, and they are always standing at their sides.

When you have a coach or a fitness trainer, they can be there one day and not be there the day after. This is a job that is very difficult, because we change every week. This is why that quality No. 1 is adjustment capacity. The surface, the ball, the opponent, the game conditions change every week, and we have to adapt.

We travel every week. We have no usual place of residence, and it's difficult to have balance. When we have a family member -- this is why tennis players would get married very early back in the day. We have to be very solid from an emotional point of view. There are lots of reasons that explain why. We need to have a strong family around a tennis player, and this is very important. People didn't believe it was important before.

Q. I guess that you must be delighted to see such a young player reaching the peak like this. Did he surprise you? Because you said that was the most difficult thing to defeat Djokovic.

PATRICK MOURATOGLU: Yes, I confirm. At the end of the match, he said to me, That's the toughest match I ever played. Yes, he amazed me, but he's been surprising me very much throughout the week. For three weeks in a row. He's got mental capacities that are really outstanding.

As for his level of play, I know it by heart. He's capable of sizzling shots that are amazing, of course, but his capacity to change pace is incredible. His pace is pom, pom, pom, and then pom, he speeds up all of a sudden. He's like a boxer with an upper cut, you know, at any time.

It can actually upset opponents, his capacity to outplay others, his capacity to dictate rallies from the start. It's difficult what I asked him to do three weeks ago, and he did it from the onset, every match, and better and better every time. That's impressive, and it's seldom can you find that.

But he found more stability and he managed to do amazing shots. Saving the first match points during the first round, we can think that it's a miracle, but, you know, when you do it every time, it's not a miracle anymore.

Q. Patrick, you mentioned that Holger can make huge improvements still. When Carlos won, he said that he was 70% of his capacity.

PATRICK MOURATOGLU: He's 50%. No, I'm joking (smiling).

He still has 50% of capacity, of improvement margin.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports