

# Nitto ATP Finals

Friday, 20 November 2020

London, England, UK

## Novak Djokovic

Press Conference



N. DJOKOVIC/A. Zverev

6-3, 7-6

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

**Q. There is a lot of excitement around Dominic Thiem this year with what he's achieved. I'm asking the question of when tennis players know they can achieve great things. When did you know you could reach the top of the game? Was it when you won your first Grand Slam or way before that?**

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Well, I think majority of the tennis players, when they are young and starting to play the sport that they love, obviously 99.9% I guess of us when we are kids, we start to play the sport that we love because we just love playing it. We have passion for it.

Of course most of us dream of becoming the world's best player and winning biggest events in sport which are Grand Slams.

So I was dreaming already when I was very young, you know, between five and seven years old to win Wimbledon. I mean, for me that was always a pinnacle of tennis, you know, to win the most, I guess, in my eyes, most valuable slam. But also because the first match that I ever seen on TV was Sampras finals of Wimbledon back in I think '92.

So, you know, I always had that dream, and I always nurtured that dream. That kind of always inspired me and created that drive and motivation for anything that was coming up in my career.

So I must say that I always kind of believed that I can achieve it. But when it actually happened, when I won Australian Open in 2008 for the first time, you know, winning a slam, the feeling was so new and so, in a way, unexpected -- expected but also unexpected in a way. I don't know how to explain it. It was very thrilling feeling.

But it was completely different when I actually won Wimbledon in 2011. That was the third slam I think that

came for me and also clinching the No. 1 for the first time.

Yeah, so that was probably the most exciting and fulfilling day of my professional career of all time.

**Q. You're in the right path to reach your sixth title at the ATP Finals. The fifth would be in London. But as you mentioned, Wimbledon is something really special for you guys. How does it feel to end the season on the right mood but a season where Wimbledon didn't happen? It feels strange a bit.**

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Well, it is. I mean, "strange" is probably the right word to describe the season, but nevertheless I still feel like we played a lot of tournaments, considering we had a six-months gap in the middle of the season.

We still managed to play three out of four Grand Slams and the ATP Finals and some bigger, big Masters 1000 events like Cincinnati and Rome.

You know, I think there was a lot of doubt that indoor season might happen and might not happen, because, you know, indoor and outdoor with this virus, obviously it's quite different and people were quite skeptical whether we're going to have the tournaments. I think it was pretty much clear we're not gonna have any crowd. So it is strange. Hopefully this kind of feeling of walking into an empty stadium is just very temporary feeling.

If Australia happens, I'm hearing that we are going to have at least I think 50% of the capacity of the stadium, so, I mean, that's a lot. I think even 10% would be huge for us at this stage. You know, just hearing the applause and hearing the fans and, you know, sensing their energy and their emotion and their kind of excitement for being there and cheering you on on the court, that's something that I think we are all missing.

Yes, I mean, Wimbledon was the only slam that wasn't played this year, but it was, you know, very difficult for them to organize an event that late in a year, you know, on the grass that is very unique and very particular surface that requires a lot of maintenance. Any other surface, it's



much easier to host an event, you know, any period of the year depending on the climate. But for them it's climate plus obviously the surface.

Yeah, I'm just hoping, as I said, all is temporary, that it's going to pass very soon, that we're going to get back on track as soon as hopefully first part of next season.

**Q. I know you're somebody who has studied how other leagues are organized, as you have been involved in player organizing efforts. One thing that's happened in some of the big North American leagues like NFL, NBA is they have developed domestic violence policies after incidents involving their athletes. This is something that ATP does not currently have any version of in order to investigate such incidents, and there has been a couple different players who faced accusations of these sorts of things this year. Wondering if you think this is something the ATP should do to develop a policy to be able to handle these sorts of incidents going forward?**

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Well, yes, I know who you are alluding to. I mean, yeah, I mean, I heard what happened. We don't know what happened truly. I mean, we are going to find out obviously.

I have known Sascha for a very long time since he was very young. I always had a great relationship with him. Very nice guy. I have a lot of respect for him, his family. I'm same age and generation as his older brother Mischa, so I was sad to hear and to know he's going through something like this.

Again, I don't know what happened. Of course, I mean, obviously I'm not supporting any kind of violence. So we will have to wait and see.

Whether ATP should develop the kind of a policy, yeah, I mean, why not? Probably it should be there in place. But I guess it wasn't developed and it wasn't there because we just did not have the cases like this, I think, previously -- I might be wrong, correct me -- I mean, in the history of sport. But I have not heard that we had maybe top players involved in such instances.

So maybe that kind of case will, you know, in a way inspire ATP to do something like that. So, yeah.

**Q. Wondering if you could give us your thoughts on your upcoming match against Dominic. Maybe if you could refer to the match you played against him last year. It would be kind of revenge for you, I guess?**

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Well, I lost to him last year in the

group stage. It was a thriller. 7-6 in the third set. You know, I have lots of respect for Dominic, his game, his work ethic. Nico Massu, all his team, very nice people and they are very dedicated and humble.

You know, every time we got to play I think in the last three, four matches, it was some marathon, thrilling encounters. Five-setter in the finals of Australian Open earlier this year. It's semifinals, so I'm expecting a tough battle, no question about it.

He's in a very good form. He loves to play in this surface. Obviously he played finals last year. He beat Roger and myself last year in the O2 Arena.

He's a Grand Slam champion. Obviously that's a huge boost for him. Got that kind of pressure and expectation off his back. So I'm sure that allows him to kind of also swing freely on the court and play even better than he did before.

You know, if I manage to play as well as I did today and show up with a high quality of tennis, I think I have a good chance to win. I mean, I'm just hoping I can start off the match as well as I did today.

**Q. Dominic was saying yesterday that he sort of feels physically fresher probably than he would have done at this stage normally in a season because he hasn't played so many matches. But at the same time it's been a very challenging season for lots of reasons. I just wonder how do you feel in terms of freshness mentally and physically?**

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Well, in a way, yes, I don't feel maybe as exhausted this year at the end of the season as most of the other seasons, but I think mentally and emotionally it has taken a lot out of players because it's very demanding, I think, to be constantly in the quarantine and not be able to go out and, you know, walk around or not even being able to open your window for some fresh air here in the hotel.

So that's something I feel like sometimes we take for granted, and we are reminded with these kind of circumstances how important it is to have some fresh air and have some space, you know.

It's unfortunate we don't have that, but I think when you draw a line we have to be grateful to have the opportunity to play and compete and to finish the season that is obviously different from any other season that we have experienced so far.

But, yes, I mean, we did not play for six months in the

middle of the season, but at the same time there was quite a lot of matches and intensified calendar in the last three months. You had every single week a tournament here and there, and for me obviously a battle for year-end No. 1, as well. Constantly being present and being in that competitive mode, even if you are not competing in a specific week, you're still training and thinking about the season and what is coming next.

So I look forward to hopefully finish off the season in the best possible manner, but I also look forward to rest before the next one.

**Q. Have you spoken to Sascha to get his side of the story? Do you feel that he is treated differently in the locker room now since the allegations became public?**

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: I will answer your second question first. I have not noticed that he has been treated differently from the locker room. I mean, at least in my case, you know, as I said, always had a very good relationship with him.

We got to spend time during Adria Tour this year. Privately, as well. Talked about a lot of different things in life. So it was very nice to go kind of in depth with him and really get closer and get more personal than just, you know, kind of the common themes and subjects and conversations that we get to have on the tour.

Then your first question, I have not talked with him about that specific case. You know, I did tell him that I'm here if he needs to talk. Of course he's got, you know, big family and team of people around him.

He's been handling it well, by the looks of his results in the last month and a half or so. He's been doing well considering he's got a lot on his plate off the court.

So I sincerely wish for him that he overcomes this soon and that he can focus on his life and tennis career.

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