

Nitto ATP Finals

Wednesday, 17 November 2021

Turin, Italy

Pala Alpitour, Torino

Novak Djokovic

Press Conference



N. DJOKOVIC/A. Rublev

6-3, 6-2

THE MODERATOR: Questions in English.

Q. I wanted to ask you something about something else, because this last week I think it's obvious that you're a huge football fan, given your celebrations over Serbia and the visit from Ibrahimovic. I wanted to ask you about your opinion on Allen Holon (phonetic) and if you're sometimes inspired by other athletes in other sports?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Thank you. I didn't hear the part of the question where you asked me my opinion of who, sorry?

Q. Allen Holon (phonetic).

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Oh, okay, okay. Allen Holon (phonetic), of course, of course. He's incredibly impressive, of course. I'm not a football expert to talk about, you know, his abilities on the football pitch, but, you know, as a fan, I'm super impressed of his skills, and his goal-scoring results so far, I mean, are amazing.

He's definitely one of the best young players in last couple of decades. I like his confidence. I like his working ethic, and, you know, we chatted a little bit over the phone. Didn't get a chance to meet, but hopefully I can meet with him soon and maybe play some football and tennis, as well.

Yes, I am, as probably most of the other tennis players or athletes a fan, a football fan or other sports. Ibrahimovic is a dear friend for over 10 years. We have known each other. We speak the same language. His roots are from our region, and so he's also someone that has made history of football, legend of that sport, and a dear friend.

It's always a pleasure to see him and always nice to have a big star of sports globally coming to the tennis. You know,

it means a lot for our sport, obviously football being the most popular sport on this planet. He's followed by millions of people. It's great he brings a little bit of attention with his presence to our sport, as well.

Yeah, we had a lot of fun. We were singing a little bit, as well. Recorded a few videos. You know, exchanged couple of words. You know, hopefully get to see each other soon. I can also hopefully see him play, him perform. In tennis, scheduling is very tight so we don't get much free time to really go around and watch other sports compete.

We try to do that when we are in States, NBA maybe for Indian Wells, Miami, if we get a day or two. Same for the European soccer, football, that's what I love. That's what I follow the most.

Q. You will play Cam Norrie for the first time on Friday. I just wondered, what have you made of his season and how impressed are you to see him here?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Well, even though he got in as a second alternate, it's not undeserved. Actually, in contrary, he had a fantastic year, winning Indian Wells and being one of the most consistent players on the tour. He definitely deserves to be playing in Turin.

I just saw him arrive a few days ago, so he probably did not expect to get in. So, you know, it's going to be interesting to see him play tonight, to see how he adjusts to these conditions. They are quite different.

You know, there is a bit of an altitude. The ball is kind of tough to control. The ball is flying all over the place.

You know, let's see how it goes, you know, tonight, see his match, do some homework, analyze his game and try to prepare myself for that match in two days.

The good thing is that I qualified for semifinals, so I won't have that much pressure to win the match, last match of the group, but obviously every match matters, so I will go with the intention to win.



Q. I'm wondering if you heard the news about Roger Federer. He did this interview and said he might not even play Wimbledon. He's not sure. He's not sure he can ever play a slam again, actually, but he will try. What's kind of your reaction to hearing that as someone who has been his rival for so long?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: I have not heard that. I read what Ivan Ljubicic, his coach, was saying some days ago, that Australian Open is a question mark, and he thinks it's still unrealistic for Roger to come back in Australia. That's what I have seen latest.

Obviously Roger is an icon of our sport and people around the world love him. They love watching him play, love seeing him around. He's very important for our sport on and off the court.

So for the sake of our sport, I sincerely hope that we can see him play at least another time. You know, I'm sure he doesn't want to end his career this way. I think he's gonna definitely try to give it a last push, a last try. I'm not sure what his injury is, and I know he's been struggling with a knee for quite a few years. So, yeah, let's see.

You know, I think for everything that he has achieved and created for this sport, he deserves to play and he deserves to have a proper farewell, I mean, if his injury is not allowing him to play, so to say, more frequently on the tour.

Q. Do you know that among all your records today you have beat another one outside of Serbia. You have been almost 15 minutes signing autographs for kids. I mean, that is unbelievable. I have never seen a No. 1 player in the world dedicating so much time to the young kids. I'd like to know, first, if you remember when you did ask autographs, and to who? And second, what that means for you? Is it because you like to have Italians around and...

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Grazie, Ubaldo, for your kind words. What I said on the court, I truly mean it. I really feel at home here in Italy, and it definitely helps me connect with people, the fact that I speak Italian. People love tennis and they support me and appreciate me being here, so I can feel that energy and I can feel that connection.

So I understand how unique the opportunity is for a lot of children that maybe come for one match to see top players play, and they want to make a picture or they want to have something, a souvenir, or they want to have an autograph.

I try, it's not possible to satisfy everyone, but I try to be there, especially for the young people and kids, because I was in that position, as well. I wasn't that lucky, I would

say, as a kid to have in Serbia some big events. We were having mostly, you know, futures or maybe the best was a challenger-level tournament.

I remember, you know, I was already a junior, but then Nadal, Gasquet came over, Mario Ancic, over to Serbia to play this challenger many years ago, and for me that was an incredible feeling, you know, to have already these stars that at that time they were young stars but they were very famous in the tennis world.

I was getting mostly the autographs when I was a kid and being a ball kid for international tournaments like futures and satellites. You know, those were the events that were most important events in our country. We were not that lucky to have a big event like this.

But of course when I was a junior, traveling for Grand Slams, I was asking photo from all the players, you know, at the time that were playing, you know, that were the top. So I know the feeling, and I really try to be conscious of the importance for these kids, not to only watch you play but to actually see you from up close, get an autograph or exchange a few words with you.

Q. With Sampras?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Pete Sampras actually retired maybe a year or two before I started to play professional tennis, I mean, being out on the tour. So I didn't get a chance to see him play live, but 2010 was the first time I met him in Indian Wells.

I was very, very nervous. He was in La Quinta resort, one of the practice courts. He came over. We got a chance to speak and to hit few balls. Yeah, it was very simple moment for him but very special moment and unforgettable moment for me.

Q. Something you said in one of your on-court interviews, you want to learn the saxophone. I know you're into learning things in general. I'm curious what interests you about the saxophone? What's been the most difficult thing for you to learn outside of tennis?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Saxophone was one of the most difficult things to learn. I haven't been really dedicated to practice, I must say, lately. I do have it with me here. I did not unpackage it yet. It's still in the bag.

Due to the constrictions I have in the hotel, and I want to spare my wife and my team and everybody who is staying in the hotel, I want to spare them the terrible noise that comes out from my saxophone as I am a beginner, so I still have to learn.

I love the instrument. You know, I love all the instruments, but saxophone somehow attracts me because it's a very universal instrument that can go with different type of music in a different, so to say, environments and different ambience, and I just like it very much.

Also, it's inspiring that it's very challenging to learn saxophone, probably more difficult than quite a few other instruments. So I don't know. Maybe one day I'll be able to play it well so that I could perform together with this great DJ that Torino has here, so maybe in few more years' time. Who knows?

Q. Do you remember your first win in the ATP Finals?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: That's a good question. First win in the ATP Finals would probably be in 2008, because in 2007 I was participating for the first time in Finals but I lost all three matches in group stage. So 2008, it's difficult to remember who it was against.

I won that year. I remember I won the whole title. But maybe against Gasquet or somebody. I can't remember exactly who it was. But I do remember it, and it seems like ages and ages ago, you know, quite a long time ago. But, you know, it's still staying in a very nice memory to me.

Q. Del Potro is your first win.

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Del Potro? Okay. Thank you.

Q. In the last few days, Nick Kyrgios has made a few comments, some he's retracted. But as you obviously know, he's been on your case regarding vaccines and all that, but he's come through and said that you've got every right to make your own decision about vaccines and whether you divulge the information or not. What are your thoughts on that aspect and the fact that in one sense Nick has actually come out in support of you?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: That was unexpected (laughter) knowing what was coming from him towards me in the last couple of years. But this time I must agree with him that the freedom of choice is essential for everyone, whether it's me or somebody else.

Doesn't really matter whether it's vaccination or anything else in life. You should have the freedom to choose, to decide what you want to do. In this particular case, what you want to put in your body.

I have been always a proponent of that and always a supporter of freedom of choice, and I will be always

supporting that because freedom is essential for I'd say a happy and prosperous life.

Q. Had you heard his comments before I just mentioned them to you?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: I have read, yes, few days ago.

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