

Miami Open presented by Itaú

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Miami, Florida, USA

Simona Halep

Press Conference

P. BADOSA/S. Halep

1-6, 6-4, 6-3

THE MODERATOR: Simona, just talk us through your first match back and how you felt out on the court today.

SIMONA HALEP: Well, it felt really good. I had emotions, but positive emotions. To see the crowd supporting me so nice gave me a lot of energy. The level of tennis was pretty good. Unexpected, I think, for most of the people.

Yeah, at this high level, like Paula played, I think I did a good job today. So I'm happy with the first match coming back.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. You've had some amazing highs in your career. Despite the result today, where would you rate this day, coming back and playing a first match?

SIMONA HALEP: I would rate it as a special day, honestly, considering the period I had. Playing so well, feeling so well on court, feeling so well outside of the court with so many people that are very nice to me and giving me the love, I would say that this day is going to stay very special for me.

Of course, I had many results in the past, big results. But here it's something more than tennis, it's something personal. I really love to see that people are appreciating me beside tennis and beside everything that happened.

Q. Can you take us through the emotions while you were on the court. At what point were you able to focus on the match? What was that moment like where you felt back, it's a reality?

SIMONA HALEP: After the first five points that I lost, I was pretty nervous (smiling). I just thought that it's going to be tough. I didn't know actually what to expect. But then slowly I got back the rhythm. I took the first game.

Then I just relaxed myself and I said, Okay, I'm not that



bad, it's going to be okay. I just had to believe and to just be focused. I knew it's going to be tough, but it was really good in the end.

Q. When you have such a possibility of four years out of the sport, lots of people have written that would effectively have been the end of your career, if what happened hadn't had happened, do you think that would have been it for you?

SIMONA HALEP: Yes, I said that. Four years is a lot. I'm not that young anymore. Yeah, four years would have been very difficult and probably the end of the career.

But didn't happen, so I'm happy I'm here today.

Q. Caroline Wozniacki was here today earlier and said she doesn't believe people out of the game for the reasons you were shouldn't be given wild cards for competition. I wonder what your reaction is to that?

SIMONA HALEP: Why did she say that?

Q. In the press conference.

SIMONA HALEP: Yeah, but why? I didn't do anything wrong. I didn't cheat. I didn't dope. So it's better if we read the decision from CAS that it was a contaminated supplement, it wasn't doping. I never had something to do with doping. I never doped, so I'm not a cheater.

Thank you to the tournament for giving me the wild card and have the possibility to play in such a big tournament. It was great to be back.

Only one person being negative about me is not that important because I have hundreds of people that giving me love, so I will take that.

Q. You've been out for so long. You played pretty well in that match. How do you keep fit? Were you practicing a lot throughout the whole time off?

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SIMONA HALEP: Well, yeah, I always said that even if you practice a lot, is not like an official match. So today was really difficult to get the rhythm back.

But I kept in shape doing trainings in the gym. I didn't play much tennis in the last months because I was a little bit tired mentally. I was in the gym almost every day. I didn't get kilos, so it was a good thing for me.

I feel fit. Of course, I'm not at the highest level physically, but I'm not bad, so... Working every day in the gym, it helps.

Q. Have you set yourself goals and targets or is it still very early at this stage?

SIMONA HALEP: Very early. Actually, I didn't know what to expect from the decision. I didn't plan anything. I said, I'm going to wait and then I will plan.

Here I came just because the boost, the love for tennis, just brought me here. It was fast because it was just few days after the decision, but I'm really happy that I did it. I came here and I felt again the love for sport.

Saying about goals and plans in the future, it's too early. I'm going home. I will need to practice harder because the level is very high these days, and then I will see.

Q. In terms of when you were out, were you watching tennis?

SIMONA HALEP: Not much.

Q. How engaged were you or aware are you of the landscape of the tour as you begin to come back?

SIMONA HALEP: I didn't watch a lot, but I watched some matches. I had a feeling that it's very powerful, even more powerful than two years ago. I was a little bit worried how I'm going to handle. But it was not that bad. At least it's just the first match, so we will see in the future.

But, yeah, tennis is very powerful now. Many girls are playing very well. We will see how it's going to be.

Q. I would like to ask you about your former coach Patrick. He is together with Holger Rune. What are your relationship to him now?

SIMONA HALEP: Well, we saw each other two days ago. We said hello to each other. I wish him good luck with Rune. I know they do a good job.

But it's done, so I finish with them working. Yeah, we say hello. I actually say hello to everyone, so I don't have, like, hate inside myself. It's good.

Q. A lot of young players were following your case. They are afraid that this might happen to them. What would be your advice for the young generation?

SIMONA HALEP: Well, I always supported a clean sport. I've always been loud about it. I'm still doing that.

They have to be worried about everything they eat, they do. Sometimes it can happen unexpected. It's a stress for everybody. We have just to believe that something like it happened to me doesn't happen to them because it's terrible. It has been a terrible period for me and very stressful emotionally.

The advice is just to check what they take and to be aware about everything. It's tough to say to give an advice because I don't wish anyone to go through what I went through.

But, yeah, we have to be a little bit, like, safer.

Q. Over those 18 months, what was the lowest point? Was it hard to try and keep believing something would change, that the wrong would be righted?

SIMONA HALEP: Well, my parents always taught me, taught, whatever you say in English, that good always prevails. I trust it 100% from the first day until the last day that the truth will come out and the decision will be taken in a fair way.

I knew I'm clean. I knew I didn't do anything wrong. I believed that it's impossible to stay four years for something that doesn't exist.

Q. And the lowest point?

SIMONA HALEP: Lowest point? What do you mean? When I felt the lowest?

Q. Yes.

SIMONA HALEP: When I got four years. You get four years for something you didn't do, it's pretty tough to handle. So that decision was breaking me a little bit.

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