

Miami Open presented by Itaú

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Miami, Florida, USA

Kei Nishikori

Press Conference



S. OFNER/K. Nishikori

6-3, 6-4

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. Nice to see you back on the tour, first. What did you feel the most difficult on the court today to approach the high level you had?

KEI NISHIKORI: I thought I was practicing well, playing much better. I was feeling the rhythm, feeling the ball pretty good in the practice, but during the match it's completely different. It was windy. He was hitting the ball very hard, very quick. The courts are quick.

So I was having tough time making a lot of balls in the court. Just the little things that I was not making. You know, maybe I was supposed to hit the corner, but, you know, ball goes to the middle sometimes.

But I have to say he was playing pretty good tennis, that I think if I could play with someone maybe slower pace, I was feeling maybe more balls and I could feel better, but he was playing good today.

Q. You have had and continue to have an amazing career. I think you touched on this, but can you talk first about the difference between practice and actual match play and how important it is to have actual match play under your belt? And also your goals and expectations for your 2024 campaign.

KEI NISHIKORI: Well, I think during the match I get, I mean, everybody gets little nerves and you get a little bit tight, and things can completely change. You know, during the practice you very relaxed and you hit the ball very clean. But it's not going to happen during the match.

Some of these players, they don't give you free points. Important points they play good. I had couple breakpoints today, but he was playing better points so I couldn't get break any serves today.

Usually I was hitting better return, but I think today I'm

going to little bit excuse, but I think I didn't play matches so I was not feeling the right feeling.

So that's something I need some time to get used to. I mean, hopefully I can stay healthy. I think that's the only goal this year, I try to play as many match as I can play. I hope I can play, you know, those clay court season. I'm hoping to play Houston, but we'll see.

Q. Kei, after all you have been through and the amount of time you've spent away from the tour, has it diminished your desire to keep going? With this return, what have you set yourself as a goal or a target?

KEI NISHIKORI: It's actually, it's funny to me, but I never lose that motivation. It's always there. Some reason I cannot explain, but some reason motivation is always there.

I don't have the clear goal right now. You know, I just want to play a lot of matches. Today, I mean, I was almost enjoying the match, but it wasn't good enough to beat those top, you know, 50 players. But I think I'm happy enough, you know, how I played today. Maybe not the best, but I still have, you know, good desire. Yeah, I'm looking forward to play couple more tournaments.

Q. Do you feel that you have, in time once you've got back into the rhythm of regular competition of matches and so on, do you think you are capable of getting back into the elite level, do you think?

KEI NISHIKORI: Yeah. Actually, yes. Maybe not today, but during practice I was playing pretty good tennis, and I was happy how I was playing this week, you know, practicing with Ruud, couple top players this week.

I was playing pretty good, I have to say. Yeah, I'm looking forward to get my tennis back. Maybe it's not going to be soon, but I will keep fighting.

Q. When you come back on the competition after such a long time, what is the most difficult aspect? Physical or mental?



KEI NISHIKORI: Well, both, but for me, physical is the most toughest thing. I almost came back summer of last year, and I played six, seven matches. My body got hurt again.

Just, for me, it's tough to keep up my body. Schedule-wise, I have to be really smart how I play. Yes, I think example today, I think he took all the important points but I didn't, and I had two loose game, one break each, and I lost easy, 6-4, 6-3.

So I just need to play good in certain moment, and yeah, I just need to play more matches to get my feeling back.

Q. I'm going to turn back the clock a little bit. I watched you beat James Blake at the Delray Beach Open, and he's obviously the tournament director here. Kind of a full-circle moment. Do you have any thoughts about that or memories of that day and how it feels now to be back here with him as a tournament director?

KEI NISHIKORI: Well, really thanks to him he gave me good lesson when I was 18. Well, I won, but he was top 10 that time. I think he was top 10. I was, like, 250 that time.

So that tournament and he gave me a lot of confidence, and I thought I got a lot of experience from that week.

Yeah, it feels weird a little bit, you know, seeing James here after almost 15 years, so I'm feeling old too. (Laughter.)

Q. Kei, what have you got set for your schedule? Would you consider dropping down from the tour and also playing a series of challengers?

KEI NISHIKORI: Usually I play challengers when I try to come back, but I'm hoping to play Houston and Barcelona, Madrid, clay court season, because I like clay. I have a good record playing clay.

So I hope I can play good couple matches there, Houston, Barcelona. I know it's going to be tough field, but if I keep losing first round, maybe I will put some challengers in, but for now, no.

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