

Rolex Monte-Carlo Masters

Principality of Monaco

Sunday, 17 April 2022

Zeljko Franulovic

Press Conference



ZELJKO FRANULOVIC: (Through translation.)

Ladies and gentlemen, dear friends, this is Easter Sunday, and I'm very happy to welcome you for this 125th edition of our tournament.

This year was unique, because we had the crowd coming back after two years of absence, and we were very pleased to see that we were sold out starting on Wednesday on. We had this year a total of 132,500 spectators.

Matches took place before a crowd and stands that were completely full, and also with very mild, nice spring weather. The spectators were thrilled all along the week by very tight matches, often with a very high intensity.

This was particularly true for this historical Friday for the quarterfinals. The four matches were played, and 12 hours of tennis nonstop was offered on Court Rainier III with keen spectators who stayed very late into the night to support the players in a very overheated atmosphere. Since the Open Era, it's the first time that all of the quarterfinals were played in three sets.

The matches showed the emergence or the confirmation of new talents. In particular, I'm thinking about the Monegasque player Lucas Catarina who did a very good performance against Taylor Fritz in the first round. He confirmed that he has all the weapons needed to compete on equal terms with the top players.

I'm thinking also about the Italians, Lorenzo Musetti and Jannik Sinner, who thrilled the Italian crowd that was very numerous here this week representing 35% of total attendance.

I'm also thinking about the young finalist, Alejandro Davidovich Fokina. In fact, I must confess that he was not the Spaniard I was expecting in the final, but after his victory over Novak Djokovic, he was able to maintain a very high-level of game.

This edition was very successful and was marked by three

new sponsors joining us, Generali, Maserati, and Replay, along with very numerous and faithful sponsors. So this is the time to remind you that Rolex has renewed its partnership for the next ten years, and BNP Paribas for another three years.

We have prestigious sponsors who in fact give to our tournament and participate in the outreach of our tournament and to the animation of the VIP Village. We had the presence of very famous personalities like the football players Neymar and Verratti, the Formula 1 driver Charles Leclerc, the swimmer Florent Manaudou, and basketball players from the Roca Team.

Monaco in fact vibrated in tune with the tournament for the whole week. We had 850 people involved in the organization plus 80 ball boys and girls recruited in the Monte-Carlo Country Club but also from other clubs in the area.

We had 80 linesmen and women who in fact complemented the staff working for the competition. In the end, we also had 300 people employed for catering.

To celebrate the return of the crowd and the spectators, tennis was invited on the Casino Square. It's a very special place in the Principality, and the fans were able to watch a tiebreaker played between Novak Djokovic who won this title twice, and Stan Wawrinka who won here in 2014.

Before this unprecedented final is played between the Spaniard, Alejandro Davidovich Fokina, and the titleholder, Stefanos Tsitsipas, I would like to give the floor to Andre Vatrican and Sonny Folchery from the communication department. They organized with passion the traditional tournament for the journalists. In the final on the Court des Princes we had Laurent Orsini of Monaco Info and Franck Triviaux from Canal+. We will give them their rewards after your questions.

Thank you, Diane.

Q. (In English.) First of all, thanks a lot, well done, congratulations. You were modest. You didn't say

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anything about the fact that you started to be tournament director here in 2005 for 18 years in a row, together with Rafa Nadal when he came. I'd like to know if there is anything new about you and about this tournament.

ZELJKO FRANULOVIC: (In English.) What a surprise, Ubaldo, asking the first question. But it goes into tradition, like a tournament tradition, Ubaldo, prestigious questions.

It's 17 years, you're right, 17 years of devoted services and passionate organization and me on the head of the tournament.

You're right. I started with Nadal, and we felt something was wrong this year because Nadal pulled out. It doesn't mean that I pulled out with him, but symbolically, yes, this is my last tournament. You could have seen it in the Quotidien. After 17 years, I think it's time to move on, let other people run the tournament.

I can only say that I'm leaving the tournament in good hands, and I think it's not up to me to say that the tournament was successful. We made great progress. We never stopped growing. We never stopped building.

But at one stage, our site, as you know, it's limited, so one day we will stop building, but we will not stop making progress with the tournament. What I said the other day, there is room for improvement, especially in the media part, new technologies, live streaming, social media, et cetera, et cetera.

Q. (In English.) I just want to say thanks to you.

ZELJKO FRANULOVIC: (In English.) Thank you.

(Applause.)

(Through translation.)

The question was about keeping the press conference room upstairs, over there.

The answer is yes, we try to please everyone. First we want to please the players, and two and three, we want to please the media, the crowd, the ATP, television, and I believe we satisfied many people. We did a lot.

Q. (In English.) Mr. Director, thank you very much for your devoted services for the past 17 years. At this moment, would there be an anecdote that you would be willing to share with us from the time of your tenure as the tournament director?

ZELJKO FRANULOVIC: (In English.) An anecdote? Well, maybe I will be repeating myself. But there are so many, and I wish I had one with Novak that marked the tournament, but with Novak there is no anecdote. Was always the most friendly relationship that I could have with a player.

An anecdote, I will mention the same one because you obviously didn't read it. It is about our mini tennis exhibition on the Casino Square that I pushed and invented in 2006 with Federer/Nadal playing, and the other one was at the Palace Square, and both of them, nobody really realized but they ended up in an anecdoted end that we came to the Casino Square with Federer and Nadal all enthusiastic, the crowd was there, first year.

It was in front of the Louis XV. The terrace was full of celebrities. The players arrive in a vintage car that, I don't know how much it cost, and then we had to play. The problem is Rafa Nadal didn't have racquets (smiling).

So I said to Roger, Roger, talk a little bit to the kids, sign a few autographs. Rafa's agent left quickly on the scooter, went back to The Monte-Carlo Bay, which is really not a long distance, but to me, it seemed like an eternity. He came back with the racquets. Nobody really realized it.

You say how can you make the same mistake twice? It happened. We were in front of the Palace this time, and again, Andy Murray and Rafa again. We even had the stands built for you, the press, so it makes it more important.

We arrive there. We were all full of ourselves in front of -- it never happened I think that tennis was played in front of the Palace. Monsignor was there, his Serene Highness, our dear supporter and our most fervent supporter, and again, we are there and nothing is happening. This time we forgot the balls.

But there is no sports shop around the Palace. So what do we do? Again, saved by the bell and by Monsignor who quickly ran into the Palace and brought us a can of balls. Two anecdotes that were funny, but at one moment we felt a little bit embarrassed. Everything ended well. Thank you.

Q. (In English.) I would like to know if you feel sorry that the ATP computers started to work three years after you won Monte-Carlo, you were in the final at Roland Garros, and so they say, Oh, Franulovic has been at his best ranking No. 6, while if the computer was born before, you would have been much better.

ZELJKO FRANULOVIC: (In English.) You cannot blame

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the ATP. There are things that happens at their own time, because the ranking came in '72, '73, and then the ATP Tour was incepted in 1990. So things happen on the administrative level.

More important than ranking was that you mentioned in 1970, '71, I had good results. I might have been 6 or 4 or 10. The problem after that, when the ranking came, I was injured. So I'm sure I would have been ranked better than then, but in '72 I had a severe shoulder injury, got operated.

In those days, you know, they didn't have these arthroscopies where they do their jobs like watch makers, with small things. It was a big injury. So it slowed me down, and the ranking came out and I was 29 or something. So that was the reason. But before that, since the ranking didn't exist, you can put me 5, 6. I have no problem with that.

Q. (In English.) Can I just add, because we're making the transcript, that you forgot one Italian sponsor who is here for the first year, Valmora, this year. So since you mentioned all the sponsors, maybe you need to put them too.

ZELJKO FRANULOVIC: (In English.) Yes, we can put Valmora. But you know how it goes in the sponsorship world. You try to put the three major ones, and then if you start adding others, then you have to add others also. So I thought it would be interesting for the journalists to know the three major sponsors, and Valmora, of course, it is one of our sponsors, but...

Q. (In English.) Okay. Sorry.

ZELJKO FRANULOVIC: (In English.) Okay. No, it's okay. We appreciate greatly our relationship with Valmora.

Thank you very much.

(Applause.)