

# Rolex Monte-Carlo Masters

Principality of Monaco

Tuesday, 11 April 2023

## Novak Djokovic

Press Conference



N. DJOKOVIC/I. Gakhov

7-6, 6-2

THE MODERATOR: Novak, you said on court it was like winning ugly today and you didn't know much about your opponent. Can you just elaborate a little bit?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: I'm glad to start a clay season with a win against opponent I didn't know much about, honestly, prior to today. I actually watched a little bit of his video from the first-round win he had yesterday.

That's it. I knew he was a left-handed player, and I haven't actually practiced with left-handed players for a few weeks.

So it took some adjustment to return the serve and to, you know, kind of deal with the heavy topspin from his forehand.

Very good player. I mean, I think that he plays a little bit atypical for a Russian guy, but I heard he has been training and living in Spain for quite a long time, so I can see why he's been successful on clay. Credit to him for playing some really good tennis in the first set.

I haven't played well in the first set, but the second set was, you know, better. I think I raised the level, and just ended out the match in good style.

THE MODERATOR: Questions in English, please.

**Q. You remind me a little bit the match you had last year here against Davidovich. That match you lost. One year after, you win it in two straight sets. You're getting used of this kind of situation of not playing for so long and then coming back and adjusting yourself, finding a way to win?**

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Well, you know, I can speak on my own behalf. I mean, clay surface for me is the most challenging surface to adapt, you know, to get into the rhythm.

Historically, I mean, throughout my career I needed one,

two weeks of tournaments to really start to play the way I want to play. So, you know, it's the case again this year, you know, even though I trained for three weeks and I felt good playing practice points, but, you know, it's different when you play a match, especially, you know, today was quite windy on the court so not easy to find the rhythm, to have the ball right, the ball toss, and playing a lefty, playing someone that has not much to lose. All these things are playing a factor in the way you feel on the court.

I'm really glad I overcome the first step, because I hope things will be better and easier from this point onwards.

**Q. With your experience, can you explain why it takes for you so long to adapt to the clay?**

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: I mean, it's my game. I don't know. Maybe for some other guys it's more natural, I guess it's easier for them to adjust to this surface, to the movement, to the ball striking, in a way finding the right tempo on the shots.

I don't know. For me, it just takes more maybe than some other guys. That's how it is, how it always was.

**Q. Are you more anxious before your first game on clay or because...**

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: No, not really, but look, I always try. Of course that was my mentality throughout my entire career to always get better every year, every time I'd step out on the court, to have the right objectives and the right goals to work on certain things that are going to improve my game, I guess, and the way I feel on the court.

But, you know, with clay it's just different than other surfaces. It takes slightly more. Match play is what I need. Practice points is something that helps, but nothing helps as playing an official match. So that's why I'm hoping I can have as many matches as possible this week.

THE MODERATOR: Questions in French.

**Q. You're back in competition after one month away. Not everything was perfect today, but are you**



**reassured?**

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: I'm happy that I was able to leave the court today with a victory. Of course there is a lot of space for me to improve my game. The level of my game is not very high right now, but as I said in English, I'm a player who needs more time, more matches or weeks to adapt on clay and to really have the good feelings and the good rhythm I need on that surface.

This is again the situation this year. The good feelings might come as soon as the next match or later. I don't know. Anyway, we'll keep working on practice courts and we'll see what happens.

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