

BNP Paribas Open

Tuesday, October 12, 2021

Jessica Pegula

Press Conference



J. PEGULA/E. Svitolina

6-1, 6-1

THE MODERATOR: Walk us through that match and your performance today.

JESSICA PEGULA: Really solid win today. Didn't really do a lot, you know, wrong, I don't think. Didn't make a lot of errors. Was still aggressive and I thought played the big points really well and played every point really tough.

Yeah, just happy to get a straightforward win. It was a beautiful day, so can't really ask for much else.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. This is your second time at the main draw in Indian Wells. You had a prior round-of-64 finish. Now you have at least a quarterfinal finish. What is it that you need to do to stay satisfied to want to win more? And as a follow-up, how does your Buffalo Bills-supporting family influence that?

JESSICA PEGULA: Well, I think I just need to do what I have been doing, is playing really aggressive at times, serving smart, and just playing every point. I think I have just been really mentally tough this week, maybe better than the last in Chicago, I think.

I think I've just been fighting for every single point and finding my game a little bit here, different conditions, seems to be suiting me.

I think I just have to go out there, whoever I play, with the same mentality being focused every single point and not being afraid to step in when I have to. That's very important.

As far as the Bills, my Buffalo Bills, my family, how they support me, yeah, I think, I don't know, they have a lot going on with the Bills right now, but they always like to watch me. They were excited the other night. I played during the prime time game, and I actually finished really quick, so they were happy that I got the win and finished

quick and got to watch the rest of the game, and we also got a win in some crazy conditions.

No, I think they know I'm older now, it's my own career, and they like to give their two cents' sometimes whether it's wanted or not (smiling).

You know, they know I'm out here working hard and they always support me and, you know, think I can play at the top of the game. So they are just very supportive.

Q. A question about your record at the top 10. I mean, clearly you have made enormous strides in your game, your fitness over the last couple years, but that's still no guarantee that you would have this type of success against the elite players. I think you were 0-4 against top 10 before the season. 7-6 this year. I wonder, for you personally, is there something that triggered the belief that you could get these kind of wins, not just get one or two of them but get them on a regular basis?

JESSICA PEGULA: I definitely think that last, coming out of COVID, I kind of, almost sounds kind of weird, but I kind of made the decision, Okay, I'm going to really work on my fitness. I feel really healthy, and I'm coming out here and I'm going to be ready to go. Whether I knew some players weren't going to be, whether their conditions didn't suit them or they couldn't train, whatever it was.

I decided that I got to train in COVID times and I got to do what I needed to do. Being in Florida, restrictions not being that hard. So I just made a decision that I was going to come out and be ready to go. I think that mentality really kick-started, I don't know, just a new belief.

Then obviously I did well at Cincinnati and US Open for the first time. That was I think really big for me. Going into Australia, I played a tough match against Azarenka, regardless of the situation first round. Obviously getting to the quarters I think just kick-started again some more confidence and belief in myself.

I was able to kind of use that as momentum and keep it going, and again, stay healthy pretty much the whole year

while playing a lot of matches.

Q. Do you find there is a key element for you mindset-wise when you face players that are a little bit higher ranked than you?

JESSICA PEGULA: I just, I don't know what it is. Like it's just this belief that I didn't have before where, you know, you're still nervous and you're still excited and you're still a little on edge maybe, but I think I'm just managing that so much better and using it as a challenge and for fun and for learning and not kind of stress, where maybe before I was more stressed. You know, I have to win this point or I have to win this game or I have to break them.

It's like, okay, I'm managing each point so much better. I think throughout the match it's just showing that I'm able to be more consistent in the bigger moments and make better decisions and pull out those wins.

Q. You said before a couple matches ago that this was potentially your last WTA tournament of the season before Billie Jean King Cup and obviously getting married afterwards. Did you feel going into this event, despite the size of it and how important it is as an event on the calendar, do you feel more free or kind of different than, you know, going into Rome or going into Miami at the start of the season, Dubai? Is there some of that in your game right now?

JESSICA PEGULA: Yes, I think I definitely made the decision, maybe a lot of players have, whether I was getting married or not, it was kind of, All right, this is how I'm ending the year. I have had a great year. Let's not -- Chicago, I didn't feel great in Chicago, even though I won two good matches and lost to Ons, but I feel I wasn't there mentally as I have been this week.

I think I just made the decision, we got here early, got a lot of practice days in, to really just enjoy it, have fun and not leave the year on a sour note of I'm tired, I just want to go get married, I just want to do this, because I think I could have easily done that. Definitely that would have been the easy way out, and I didn't want to take the easy way out. Even though it would have been fine either way, I wanted to challenge myself and, you know, this is a good chance to do well, and I have been doing well at these 1000s, anyway.

Why not take advantage? Obviously it helps that I'm I think finding my game a little bit here this week. I felt better in practice than I did in Chicago. That obviously always helps, but, yeah, I didn't want to take the easy way out and just bail on the year.

Q. This can be a tricky event for players who hit the ball big and who like a flat ball. Difficult to control with the conditions sometimes. You seem to be managing it obviously very, very well through your three matches. What do you think has been the key for you to be able to play the game that you want to play and with controlled aggression on these courts?

JESSICA PEGULA: Yes, I have played here before and the ball always flies. It's just weird conditions, and I honestly never really liked it that much. But I think I have gotten so much better though since then where I realize I don't have to overhit the ball.

I have the ability to come in to hit some slices, to do a lot more things than I was before, so I don't feel like I need to bail out and hit, you know, make errors and go for winners. I feel like I'm setting up the point so much better.

It's weird. These courts are playing, at least to me, they seem really slow. Usually I'm not a fan of slow courts, but I think because my game all around is just so much better at setting up these points, I don't feel rushed on the point. I feel like I can construct the point better, and I think that's why I'm playing a lot better here this year.

Q. Obviously today Svitolina wasn't at her best. Taking nothing away from you. You have had your own injury struggles, including a hip surgery, but you seem to have recovered beautifully. What's your off-court strategy when you're dealing with an injury, and how much do you feel for Elina today now that the match is over?

JESSICA PEGULA: You could kind of tell she was struggling with a little something, but there were a couple of games there in, especially in the second early on, where she was still competing and she was still fighting and she was still trying to find a way to work her way into the match.

I didn't think at any time she was ever going to give it to me, but I did kind of get the sense that, okay, this is a big game. It was hard, because she was kind of in that mode where she was going for more because she was maybe kind of annoyed, which obviously everyone has been there, and she was still trying.

It was tough. Do I try to step in and be aggressive, or do I kind of let her make mistakes? It was kind of that awkward moment where I think every player kind of knows what I'm talking about. You have those matches.

I think she was still competing early on in the second, and I just really wanted to not get frustrated and focus on those games to win those, because I think they were going to be

big momentum changers.

So I feel for her. I think we have all been in those positions, but at the same time, tennis can be kind of, you know, ruthless where, you know, you see that on the other side of the court and you realize, Wow, this is a great opportunity, you know, she's not playing that well, maybe she is not feeling well, but I need to still win this match, and this is a great chance to get to the quarters because, you know, unfortunately it's just part of the game. Staying healthy is very important. I have learned that over my many injuries.

For me, off court I just found a very good trainer, and I'm just taking so much better care of my body, doing a lot more than I have in the past and being very detail-oriented with that stuff, I think learning from other athletes. You see the top athletes, Djokovic or someone, who does everything possible off the court to feel good on the court. I think that's helped in giving me confidence on the court in that I'm taking care of all the things I can off the court, and that kind of allows you to gain confidence when you go out there and you play.

Q. Just looking ahead to facing either Azarenka or Sasnovich for a spot in the semis, can you talk about the challenges of facing each player?

JESSICA PEGULA: Well, Sasnovich seems like, again, she's playing pretty loose, has had some really good wins. I can see her being dangerous on the slower courts. I played her in doubles a couple of times, but on faster courts, I can see why she likes these conditions.

Yeah, Vika, I mean, always tough, always going to be a battle no matter what. It will be interesting to see who wins that match, but I'm feeling good going into that, you know, either person. I think if I just keep playing my game, I will give myself the best chance.

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