

BNP Paribas Open

Friday, October 15, 2021

Victoria Azarenka

Press Conference



V. AZARENKA/J. Ostapenko

3-6, 6-3, 7-5

THE MODERATOR: Vika, if you could talk us through your match tonight.

VICTORIA AZARENKA: Long match. I thought the most important I would say today was my fight, that I can be really proud of.

Analyzing the game, it was a lot of probably things that I could have maybe do a little bit better. Overall she was playing really incredible in the first set, not giving me much to do. I was just trying to find opportunity, actually create opportunity, for me to get back into the match, to take a little bit more control in the match, really fight for every ball.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. You talked earlier in the week about the importance of being brave in big moments. Do you think you were brave tonight? What were the key brave points, if you were?

VICTORIA AZARENKA: I mean, have you seen how I saved that breakpoint at 6-5? Can you be more brave than that (smiling)?

I was thinking in my head, I'm going to use one dropshot. I chose the perfect timing. I think based on that point, it answers your question.

Q. Tonight hearing the adulation, last fall in Cincinnati and New York, having them be fan-less, how did that feel tonight?

VICTORIA AZARENKA: Well, definitely I wouldn't necessarily say the crowd is the only motivation when you play. Like last year we were without fans and I still was able to bring that fight and that energy. But it does take a little bit extra. I think the crowd does help to kind of get you fired up.

But I'm very grateful that we actually have fans now

because it's been such a weird year. Somewhere you have fans, somewhere you don't have fans. Somewhere there's more strict rules, somewhere there's less strict rules.

I'm looking forward to how we can organize our house with the WTA, with the ATP, so we can have a better experience with fans hopefully next year and more open tournaments. That's what I'm really looking forward to.

But the crowd tonight was great. This whole week they've been super supportive, make me feel really, really special out there with a lot of people behind me. That was awesome.

Q. You talked about your fight as being the main reason for the victory. I think it's the first time you've come back from a set down this season. How difficult is it to be down a set and a break against somebody playing as well as she was, stay positive in that situation? Do you think you were able to do it tonight better than you have all season?

VICTORIA AZARENKA: Well, definitely. I think my season has been tricky. There were parts where I physically couldn't necessarily bring that extra level, extra fight, which was very frustrating. Then there were parts where I felt that I was looking for something to add, and I didn't necessarily know what it was. It was a lot of searching in the season, a lot of kind of stepping into unknown.

I feel like right now I'm a bit more settled with a bit more structure, a little bit more discipline, which makes it not necessarily easier but a bit clearer what I need to do. So it doesn't take extra energy on that so I can kind of focus my energy more on the fighting for every ball.

I think overall I would say it's not a great season but there was a lot of learning experience for me. I think from that standpoint I can be pretty positive with that.

Q. If you look ahead, could you preview Badosa and then Ons.



VICTORIA AZARENKA: I think both of the players fully deserve to play in that semifinal. Either one has worked I think really, really hard this season. You can see how much improvement both of those players done throughout the year. I think we are all Australian Open quarantine, the 14-day hard quarantine group (smiling).

I've never played against Paula. I've never really practiced against her. That would be something, a new challenge for me to even understand her ball, her pace. Will be definitely a bit of adaptation there.

If it's going to be Ons, she's my dream player to play in the final. I'm such a huge fan of her. I think she's amazing. The history that she's making in the part of the world where sports are not necessarily that accessible, I just can't wait to see how far she can go further. It will be my honor to play her in the final.

Obviously she's an incredible player. The improvement she has done throughout I wouldn't necessarily only talk this year, but the last couple years, to really step up her game, improve her fitness level.

I'm a huge fan. I'm just fan-girling here completely (laughter).

Q. Do you think there's any advantage for you with the final considering you've played two singles finals at this tournament before?

VICTORIA AZARENKA: I don't necessarily look at it that way because every match is about writing your different story. None of the years are the same. Different day, different conditions can be.

I don't necessarily think of that. I think it's more about how you are able to handle the moment that is going to be there.

Q. We were looking at the stats. We saw you hit 15 winners, she hit 45. You won. Is there any other player against who this is possible?

VICTORIA AZARENKA: I mean, statistics are not necessarily that accurate because sometimes statistics can show that a player has won more points but the other one won the match.

I wouldn't necessarily be able to tell the whole story about statistics, as well as sometimes you cannot tell the whole story about the match if you haven't watched by the score. That's really up to whoever is going to take that.

If you can make a lot of winners, you take a lot of risk, you

can make also a lot of errors. So being able to resist that pressure, I think that's sort of a skill.

Looking at the statistics, I don't know, I'm not always convinced that they were pretty accurate of the outcome.

Q. Thinking about some hard court finals you've played in the past, with two Australian Open finals, straight sets, your two previous finals here that you won in straight sets. What has your mindset been like to win the big championships in straight sets and how does that compare to your mindset this year?

VICTORIA AZARENKA: I would say every tournament is very different. When you play your first Grand Slam final, it's completely different than when you're defending it, even though it's the same occasion. But the way you approach, there's different pressure, there's different emotions as well.

This match finals here were also different opponents. As I said before, it's always a different story. Now with tennis being a bit unpredictable because the depth of women's game is so, so deep, I always take one match at a time. I think that's always worked for me, honestly, before. Now more than ever I think it's even more important.

Q. (Question about the quarantine helping.)

VICTORIA AZARENKA: The quarantine helping? The quarantine experience definitely is not helping in no way. There is no possible way quarantine in any way has helped me. It only was really damaging. There's no other way to put it. It was damaging mentally, the end of it. It was damaging physically the most for me. I've never stopped for two weeks not doing anything. In no way that was helpful.

I will say that everything after that, how I approached, was a learning experience. It was, Okay, am I going to dwell on that or am I going to try to figure out? It took time, a lot of patience. I felt at some point I was really discouraged.

I'm type of person who will never give up no matter the situation is. I always knew I'm going to keep fighting. But sometimes it doesn't feel good. You're not motivated to keep searching, but it's up to you. Either you're going to -- that moment is going to define you or you're going to take that into your own hands.

From that standpoint I think I've been pretty consistent climbing myself out of challenging situations and moving forward.

Q. You mentioned the physical struggles you had this



year. Also you didn't close out matches you probably thought you should have. Tonight it felt like both of those things flipped. Does that make this win even more satisfying, almost all the things that derailed you this year, you flipped them on their head?

VICTORIA AZARENKA: I think the good part and the dangerous part is to judge that because I have won, like moving forward, and just base that on the result. I think the more important for me really today is to assess have I done the things that I wanted to do and did they help me to win.

As long as I can kind of analyze that and the reason why I couldn't maybe close those matches is because I was focusing on maybe winning rather than what I had to do. I think that change is something that is really important.

Winning or not winning is sometimes a very, like, high or low emotion. I try to focus more on what I can actually do. I think that works much better. It makes me play, makes me feel much more consistent.

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