

BNP Paribas Open

Tuesday, March 15, 2022

Maria Sakkari

Press Conference



M. SAKKARI/D. Saville

4-1 (ret.)

THE MODERATOR: Short match, but what was your overall takeaway from today?

MARIA SAKKARI: Yeah, I mean, it was super unfortunate because I was really looking forward to play against Dasha because I think she plays different than a lot of other players. I just wanted to challenge myself and see how I can just fit my game into hers.

Obviously it's sad to see someone being injured. But I'm happy with the level I could bring out today for these five games.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. You gave her a very warm send-off when she walked off the court. Do you do that for all players or do you have a special relationship with her?

MARIA SAKKARI: I mean, we know each other for a long time. But it's not like -- I think we like each other, but it's not like we're best friends or anything.

I have a lot of respect for everyone. I just felt it. I would say the same for any other player. It's just that I know how it feels -- actually, I don't know, thank God, I didn't have that many injuries as her. She was out for a long time. Obviously in Australia, they had so many lockdowns, she couldn't travel. For two years she was trapped back in Australia.

I can feel her, that she wanted to play the match today.

Q. Can playing only five games like that throw your planning into a weird place where you feel you should go out on court to put some work in? How does it affect you going into a quarterfinal?

MARIA SAKKARI: It was five games, but it was five long games, especially the first two. I had a half an hour warmup, then I played for 40 minutes. It's an hour and 10

minutes, so it's plenty enough for a day on a tennis court between matches.

Never thought, like, I needed to go and practice more. I put the hours before coming to the tournament. I think it's clever to just do what you have to do during the tournament and not overdo it.

I was just thinking of how can I protect my body so I can go deep here.

Q. Raducanu was talking about how if it was last year, her goal would be to just win a round at the slam, this is before winning the US Open. This year she did that at the Australian Open. For you, you've now made quarterfinals or better the last three events, you're consistently in these rounds. If you were to flash back to four years ago, these results seem amazing. Now you're taking them in stride. At what point along the process did this become what you expected of yourself and you don't get so excited about making a quarter at a 1000?

MARIA SAKKARI: I would say last year when I made, I don't really remember the number, seven or eight semifinals.

Q. Eight.

MARIA SAKKARI: Eight.

Then it felt like the tournament didn't feel long. Now I feel like I still have a lot in the tank for three more matches. Might be one, might be two, might be three. I'm used to going deep. Now I feel like it's not something new for me.

I would say from last year I started feeling like, you know, it doesn't feel like very tiring to go deep into a tournament.

It takes time. It takes different amount of time for every player. It depends also when you break through, I guess. For me, as we mentioned so many times, last year was a very crucial year for me.

I think I just feel very comfortable now being in the later



stages of the tournament.

Q. You started your tournament with the Tie Break Tens event. What was that like for this event, getting some practice in there? Everyone at that event was pretty young. I'm curious how you learn to play XOs? Sort of a unique entertainment skill.

MARIA SAKKARI: For sure. I mean, I don't have the experience on playing so many exhibition tournaments. It was a little fun. I saw you guys after that. Actually a lot of people came up to me and said they really enjoyed it. That also made me feel like -- I didn't know how people would react in Tie Break Tens, Tie Break Tens format.

But I think it was fun. You get to spend a little bit of time with the other players. I was chatting with a couple of players that I never had the chance to chat more than the usual.

I think it's a very nice way to get your mind a little bit out of the tournament but still play some tennis.

We also played in night conditions, which for me, it's not my favorite here. I just felt like I could try different things in case I play a night match in the tournament.

Q. What is it like socially? Usually you're not having to sit next to each other, watching matches. Who did you talk to?

MARIA SAKKARI: I have a pretty good relationship with most of the players. I had long chats with Simona, that I admire a lot. She was the oldest one in the group, so she was making fun of it.

Then with all the girls before entering the court, obviously I know Ons really well, Paula. I spoke a little bit with Amanda, Naomi, that I haven't spent so much time with them.

It was fun. I really enjoyed it.

Q. You come from a country known for some great food. Here? The desert, a lot of the players go to In-N-Out Burger. It's a rumor you've been there. What do you think about that?

MARIA SAKKARI: I'm a huge fan of cheeseburgers. I think it's my go-to meal, especially when I come to the States. In Greece, I would say we're very good in food in general, but cheeseburgers are not our, how do you say, specialty.

I rarely eat a burger when I'm back home actually. But

there are very good things about American food, but then there are some that are very caloric. You go to Cheesecake Factory, a regular-size meal, it's like 1,000 calories. And then you're like, Oh, God, I have to practice more to earn this.

I'm spoiled, yes, in a way because I grew up with very good ingredients and food. But at the same time I'm just enjoying something different here in the U.S. I'm strict with my nutrition. Not that day, obviously (smiling).

Q. The rumor is true?

MARIA SAKKARI: The rumor is true, yeah.

Q. You're proud of it.

MARIA SAKKARI: I am actually. I don't see anything weird about it. Sometimes I do it more than I have to, but in general I don't.

That was one of the days. I earned it. I earned it. I made the final, so...

Q. About going deep in majors, getting used to it, we had Petra Martic in here earlier, she felt empty, she went through so much emotionally to get to the quarterfinals. Is that one of the ways you can benefit, be more even, relaxed, not such a big deal that you have a big match coming up?

MARIA SAKKARI: Yeah, I just feel like -- it might sound a little cocky, might sound weird as well, but I feel like the tournament starts now for me emotionally. I try not to spend so much energy on unnecessary things.

Having my little sister with me here makes my life outside the court more fun. Of course, having a team like mine, it also makes very entertaining time outside the court and inside the court. I think that helps.

I'm actually very fresh. I don't feel like in any way that I'm empty or I have spent a lot of energy, unnecessary energy, in the matches.

Q. Looking ahead, either Golubic or Rybakina. Talk about each of them as opponents.

MARIA SAKKARI: They're two very, very, very different players. Obviously I lost to Viktorija here in October. She likes to make balls, she likes that slice, the one-handed backhand. She likes to change the pace.

I think I have a better game now than I had six months ago. I'm more aggressive player. I know how, in case she wins

that match, how to play her.

Of course, Rybakina is one of the best servers on the game. I know what she likes, what she doesn't like. She likes to hit hard.

I'm just going to try and make her life tough. No matter who wins, I'm going to try to make their life tougher on court.

I'm just enjoying myself right now. I think I have the game to go deeper in this tournament.

Q. As a cultural experience as a European, when you get to Cheesecake Factory and they hand you a book that is the menu, you see the calorie counts, what do you make of that as a document?

MARIA SAKKARI: Do you mean if I like the fact?

Q. What emotions do you have when you see the menu?

MARIA SAKKARI: I don't actually look at the menu anymore. I know what I'm getting. I get the same thing every time.

Q. What is that?

MARIA SAKKARI: Da Vinci pasta, extra chicken. I make sure it is extra protein. Sometimes I ask for less sauce because it can be too saucy. Actually Cheesecake Factory is one of my favorite places in the U.S.

Q. You often hear that if players are in a good place in their head it translates to results on the court. How much truth does that hold for you?

MARIA SAKKARI: Yeah, I mean, I have a very normal life outside the court. When I'm back home, I go out with my friends. I mean, not partying, just having a normal life, like going to dinners and stuff. If there was someone to tell me you have to stop playing tennis tomorrow, I have a lot of things I could do, which I think makes my life a lot more calm.

I can enjoy my life outside the court. Especially right now that I'm more settled player, on the top. Of course, as I said before, having a team that is fun and is not miserable, you can spend time with them. As I said, now in the U.S. I have my sister because she lives here. I try to have people around me, whether it's my boyfriend or some friend of mine or my family. It always makes your life on the tour a lot easier.

But I like the fact that I'm a normal person outside the court. I consider myself a fun person to spend time with.

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