

BNP Paribas Open

Saturday, March 11, 2023

Tommy Paul

Press Conference



T. PAUL/J.L. Struff

6-3, 6-3

THE MODERATOR: Congratulations, Tommy. Clean win for you today. How would you rate your performance here at Indian Wells?

TOMMY PAUL: I would give it -- like out of 10? Like an 8.5 probably today. I thought I played pretty well. In tennis I think 8.5 is pretty good. No one ever plays 10 out of 10.

I usually play pretty well here in Indian Wells, so definitely excited to be back.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. It's been a process for you last couple of years, and clearly turned the corner this year with the Aussie Open semifinals, top 20 ranking. Just wondered if you look at it and could pinpoint it to maybe one, two, three things that really made the difference and helped you turn this corner, could you name a few things off that you've gone through?

TOMMY PAUL: I don't know, because it hasn't really been like to the next day, like one day to the next, it's like a full turnaround. It's kind of been more like every day it's gotten a little bit better, a little bit better. If you look at my ranking over the past four years, every year it's just moved up a bit, moved up a bit, moved up a bit.

So I think it's been slow and steady on the rise, and I think every year I've gotten better. I have fixed a couple of things that I didn't like in my game, and made a couple of things better.

I think playing a lot more big matches last year, I played, I don't know, like 10 quarterfinal matches last year, and a few of them were Masters 1000s. So, I mean, those are big matches, and I didn't get through those last year but just having that experience really helps going into this year.

I hope playing the big matches I'm playing this year will help going into the next year.

Q. Can I ask you about post-Australia? You played a bunch. What was the process of like sort of putting -- not putting Australia behind you because it was a pretty good experience -- but moving on from the end of it, getting the perspective out from it, and going on to the next match and next tournament?

TOMMY PAUL: Well, there's no easier way to forget about a good result in Australia than going straight to Uzbekistan to play Davis Cup (smiling).

That was a quick turnaround, and I told the captain and the team that I was going to play. So, I mean, it didn't matter what result I had in Australia, I was going to go play. I mean, I love Davis Cup. I want to, I said to everyone, I want to win that event so bad.

To answer your question, just playing that and then playing a home event in Delray, I wasn't really feeling well that week, and didn't play my best tennis. So I got humbled pretty quickly there. Then went straight to Acapulco and played well.

It's just week after week, you know, you have good weeks and have bad weeks. Tennis is all about short-term memory loss. You need to be able to forget and move on and take confidence and move on.

Q. I guess I was thinking about wanting to remember. Curious, short-term memory loss about the end of it, but made your first semifinal and things like that, did you feel different going onto the court in the next tournaments in terms of expectations or you were a Grand Slam semifinalist?

TOMMY PAUL: No, I don't like try and -- I don't want my head to get big. You know, I try and like not get too confident. I think overconfidence is almost worse than no confidence. I've been told that since a young age.

You know, it's important to have that happy medium of being confident when you need to be confident, and being humble when you need to be humble.



So I think obviously I'm pretty happy with the way I played in Australia and the result. But, I mean, I looked at it like, all right, my last match in Australia, I got absolutely pummeled, and I was not happy about that match. I left Australia ultimately thinking, like, all right, what do I need to do to win that match next time or play better in that match?

I think that's probably the best way to move forward from any result really.

Q. Piggybacking off that, did you come to any conclusions? Novak is a beast. It's a crazy challenge. Have you talked it out? Are there things you realize, I need to do this, this, this, to get to that crazy level?

TOMMY PAUL: Yeah, I mean, it's a pretty crazy level, definitely. But I think he just handles every situation, every moment in massive matches so well.

I mean, if I want to be where I want to be, I think or I know that's something I'm going to have to get a lot better at, and something I'm working on big time. I think mentally he's the best in the game.

That's where you see the difference in those matches at least. I think that's where most of the difference was in that match. Like you say, Oh, the only difference was mentality? Or like his mental game was better? But, like, that's big, you know. Like it was like 7-5, 6-1, 6-1 or something. It was all mental, I think.

Q. Has there been an effort with you in the last couple of years to go maybe more from a counter-punching style of play that maybe relies on wheels a bit to getting up to where you have more of a balance of attack in your game?

TOMMY PAUL: Definitely. I think every player at the top of the game has a weapon, and I want my weapon to be being like super dangerous at the net and trying to attack as much as I can.

Q. Does net play and moving forward come into that? Where would you say you are in terms of that type of play?

TOMMY PAUL: What do you mean?

Q. Is getting to net a part of that attacking style that you seek?

TOMMY PAUL: Absolutely. My coach couldn't be more vocal about the fact that he wants me to come to the net way more. Like I said it in my on-court interview after, I could come in 40 times and he would tell me, like, Why

didn't you come in on this point? Why didn't you come in on this point? He sees opportunities to come in a lot better than I do right now. I think his whole idea is to try and get me to be able to see every opportunity in a match to come to the net.

I think last year I played -- or two years ago I played Rublev here at night, and it was so slow, and the only way to win points was either the other guy had to miss -- and Rublev is pretty good, he's not missing that much -- or get to the net and finish the point here. I think I came in like 30 or 40 times in that match, and he always like goes back to that match to try and use it as an example.

Q. The difference between overconfidence and confidence, where do you find that balance?

TOMMY PAUL: It's different for everyone. Like every single person.

Q. Other things you do in order to get yourself ready, now that you have accomplished some big things in terms of dealing with expectations for yourself and those that others put on you.

TOMMY PAUL: I don't know. Like I try and like -- like, I don't play for anybody else, so no one else's expectations are ever going to, like, affect me, I don't think. I mean, at least I don't plan on having them affect me or I don't see them affecting me.

Obviously like at some point you put pressure on yourself to play well, but, I don't know, I think that's where practice comes in. And also confidence of your last matches, like that's where you need a little bit of confidence that you're getting from winning matches.

Q. I know we ask you guys a lot about the culture of American men's tennis, which is great right now, 10 guys in the top 50. Specifically, could you give thoughts on Taylor, maybe taking that position as the lead dog and the composure and the mental toughness he's shown being top 5 right now?

TOMMY PAUL: Yeah, I mean, he's had an unbelievable past year. I mean, even more, really. He's been the most consistent of the Americans and had the best results of the Americans.

That's why he is where he is. That's why he's No. 1 American and that's why he's top 5. Yeah, playing him is not always fun. It's constant pressure. He's got a great serve. He's improved so much, to me. I think the thing he's improved the most is probably his movement.

He has good defense now. I think when he first came on tour he always had the offense but the defense maybe lacked a little bit and now he's moving better and he's getting out of the corners better. He's super dangerous to any single player in the world.

But, I mean, obviously, you know, like me, Frances, Sebi, all the Americans, we want to be where he's at and we want to take that spot from him. That's what we want. That's where we want to be.

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