

BNP Paribas Open

Sunday, March 12, 2023

Maria Sakkari

Press Conference



M. SAKKARI/A. Kalinina

3-6, 6-2, 6-4

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. Is it making a difference? You've overcome some demons, two players you beat already. Can you talk about what it means to have win these two matches against these particular opponents in the early rounds?

MARIA SAKKARI: Obviously they are two players that I struggled in the past, and they are very good players, both.

I'm just, as I said on the court, my tennis is not where I want it to be. I'm making too many unforced errors from the baseline, but all that matters is that I'm finding a way to win and just, you know, just fighting.

As I said, that's the only thing, finding a way to win, winning ugly, but at the end, winning, which is very important (smiling).

Q. Do you consider yourself a perfectionist? Does it bother you to win ugly? Are you just very, whatever it takes, generally?

MARIA SAKKARI: No, I don't mind winning ugly. What really concerns me is why am I making so many unforced errors? But again, I feel like it's something that I can change it overnight. I don't think that it's something I'm gonna lose my sleep about. I have done it many times to just come back from not playing good tennis.

I've heard so many stories of people just not playing good in the beginning of the tournament but eventually just improving their game. I always have this, let's say my former coach, Thomas, he always told me when he won Australian Open, his first matches were horrible at the tournament.

So I always have that in mind that, you know, it doesn't really matter. I just give myself another chance to play better the next day.

Q. In terms of fighting and your reaction today and the other day as well, being able to tap into that spirit, I know that that's something you're very proud of yourself as one of your strengths, but have there ever been weeks, months of your career where you found it hard to fight?

MARIA SAKKARI: Yeah. I mean, last year there were a couple of weeks, maybe more. One of them was San Jose, I just couldn't be on the court. I wanted, but I couldn't. It's not like I was going on the court to tank the match. I didn't want to be there. It's just I couldn't. Madrid I was also struggling big time.

I mean, there were a few, yes, and I'm a human being. I think I'm allowed also to have those weeks.

Q. 100%. That's what I was wondering. Can you describe in words what that feels like to want to do it and not be able to tap into it.

MARIA SAKKARI: It's a horrible feeling. It's horrible. Because it's not like, you know, if you don't try, then you didn't try. But when you try and you just cannot, it's like, what am I doing wrong? Why can I not find a way to at least fight, at least try my best?

But I have to say that the last two matches, I started the match terrible, like I was -- today and the other day, I was making so many mistakes. My energy levels were like very low. But then I felt like I couldn't, but then I found a way, you know, to just fight and come back. Which is different than last year, which I'm very happy about (smiling).

Q. When you feel that way, do you just talk to your team from tennis? Is that something you can open up to with your family? Who do you turn to for the support for that mental aspect?

MARIA SAKKARI: Well, I speak to my team. For sure my psychologist, because I think that's something mental. Of course with my mom. I do talk about it with my mom. She, you know, she does help (smiling).

Q. Kind of going through the first three months of the season, having big wins, struggles and everything like that, how are you feeling as of March, as of this point in the season?

MARIA SAKKARI: Well, it hasn't been, you know, a perfect start of the season, but it hasn't been a bad one, as well.

I think that from now on, because, I mean, I don't want to be hiding, I have basically nothing to defend up until Mexico, I mean, excluding this week. I think that there are only positives to look into. I just feel like I have a good chance on doing well on the clay, because my game is very good for the clay.

So I have to say that I had some very good wins, especially in Doha. I played very good matches. I had some tough losses, of course, but at the same time, I feel like, you know, I'm surviving, which is a very good thing, because I'm always giving myself a chance the next day, the next match, to play even better.

Q. Looking ahead, you play Kaja Pliskova.

MARIA SAKKARI: She won?

Q. Yeah. Obviously very familiar with both of your games and all of that. What is the challenge, especially here on this court in these conditions?

MARIA SAKKARI: Well, I think it's going to be tough. Obviously we played in Dubai, which is a horrible court for my game, and very good for her. It's going to be tough. If it's warm, because the ball flies and the ball, you know, flies through the air actually very fast.

But, you know, from now on, like even in the first rounds like against Shelby, you cannot expect an easy match. Especially against someone like Pliskova, she's serving big, and she likes, you know, to hit the ball hard, I have to for sure reduce my unforced errors. That won't be accepted against her.

Just be as solid as I can, because that's something that's going to give me a chance to win. Otherwise she's gonna dominate and she's gonna take advantage of it.

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