

BNP Paribas Open

Sunday, March 12, 2023

Jessica Pegula

Press Conference



J. PEGULA/A. Potapova

3-6, 6-4, 7-5

THE MODERATOR: That was a tough fight from you today. Can you give your thoughts on the match.

JESSICA PEGULA: Yeah, that was definitely a battle today. Yeah, I just felt like I started off a little slow. She had some confidence, you know, going, obviously going for a lot of her shots. She just won a tournament as well.

I've played her before, once where I won a little bit easier and once where I also had a really tough match with her. I wasn't completely surprised. I know she can play really well, and she definitely came out hitting her shots and painting lines and going after it.

So I'm just glad I was able to work my way back into the match, and, you know, ended up playing much better than how I started (smiling).

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. What's the internal conversation after that 3-6 first set?

JESSICA PEGULA: Yeah, I mean, I was like, I wish I didn't start off so slow, this is going to be tough. I try to just focus on my service games and kind of just give myself chances on the return games. You just try to keep it as positive as you can. Sometimes it's not always like that.

But I just tried to stay calm and focused and focused on what I was trying to do, especially on my service games. Because I felt like I could break her. I was going to get chances. I just wanted to focus on holding serve, because she was returning well as well. I felt like if I could just do that, then other opportunities would hopefully open up.

Q. Big-picture question a little bit. You're relatively new to top 10, top 5. Just wanted to ask you a little bit about the adjustment, you've been able to manage it so well, still play so consistently well throughout. Has it been an adjustment for you? Has there been an

issue with maybe inventing pressure here and there, or have you found it relatively easy just to be the same player and be on the same trajectory?

JESSICA PEGULA: Yeah, maybe at first I felt a little bit of pressure. I don't know, at the same time I feel the same, where I guess that's good that I have approached every match the same way. Yeah, of course, maybe people talk about you more, you become a favorite more.

But at the end of the day, I feel like when I'm out there, like that ever doesn't really enter my mind. What enters my mind is just trying to win the match I'm in. Sometimes it can be easy and sometimes it can be matches like today.

I think I'm very good at just not taking that part for granted or not overthinking that where I know every match is going to be tough. I'm good at just thinking one match at a time.

I think that's helped where I haven't felt really too much pressure as far as being top 5 and being able to maintain it somewhat pretty well, at least still winning matches. Yeah, it's weird, it's weird. I don't know. It's so weird to think that I'm like 3 in the world. I don't know. It's just weird (smiling). I don't even like to say it. It's awkward. I don't know. I guess it's a good thing.

Q. Everyone knows that being a WTA touring pro year after year is one of the hardest professions you can really have. Then you have had these two incredibly impactful experiences with your mom and Damar, and you wrote so beautifully about it and spoke --

JESSICA PEGULA: Thank you.

Q. -- such a helpful piece and spoke about your gratitude. Can you talk about how you've grown as a person as a result of these two incredible experiences?

JESSICA PEGULA: Oh, yeah. I mean, I feel like the last, I don't even know, since I came back from my injury, I've grown a lot. But then also the last year really going through two really just crazy, interesting experiences.



I don't know, I think I've said before I'm good at compartmentalizing certain things. I know when I need to deal with that at home and then I know what I need to do for my tennis.

I think at the same time it just makes you appreciate more. Your perception of everything kind of changes a little bit. Not that it changed too much, but I think having a family member that, you know, she probably shouldn't have lived through something like that, that you just shift your perspective and you're just -- you realize like all the other things that bother you aren't really that big of a deal. It just changes your perspective, I would say, in that way.

Maybe alleviates some pressure, makes you enjoy playing, traveling more. I think I have appreciated that more often. Also just because I think at first like being home was also very stressful.

In a way, even though I didn't want to be away, it was kind of nice being away, you know. You get to have a little bit of a break and appreciate, wow, I get to go to this amazing city and play in a Grand Slam or in a big event. I think I have also, yeah, appreciated that part a little bit more. I think just learned how to balance things better as well.

I think becoming a top player has taught me that but then also going through something like that has definitely taught me more about how to keep things balanced throughout my career and personal life.

Q. You've been to the quarters of four of the last five majors. Incredible consistency. You're a student of the game. What do you need to do specifically, what have you been thinking about, to get to the next level?

JESSICA PEGULA: I would definitely say, like to go further in a slam or just start winning more tournaments maybe, I really try to work on my serve, get some more miles per hour, which I think I actually have the last at least this year. I've definitely been serving I think a little bit bigger. Getting some more free points on my serve always helps.

Always working on my movement because I'm not, you know, the most natural mover (smiling). You know, not like a Coco or Iga. I think always doing that.

Then just working on implementing little things in my game and still trying to play aggressive. Today I don't think I played as aggressive as I wanted to. Also, I didn't feel comfortable playing aggressive because the ball felt like it was flying on me. I felt like I didn't have my footing and my footwork as a little bit off.

So being able to win that not playing the way I want to play is still, I think, a positive. But I think playing against the bigger hitters I've got to be able to take my chances and move forward and stuff like that.

So, I mean, it's kind of a little bit of everything, the margins become very small. So at the same time you don't need to change your game but I think just little, you know, fine-tuning things.

Q. In a two-week tournament with weather being fairly extreme here, do you tinker with your strings at all?

JESSICA PEGULA: Oh, yeah. I went through like four different racquet tensions this match, and I still wasn't happy with the one that I ended with. That's an ongoing thing, especially here. Specifically here, the conditions, gosh, they change so much throughout the day.

I don't know, yeah, if fans or people can really see it, but it's very prominent, I think, and everyone knows, all the players know how it can switch.

So I think before the tournament started I tried to get a couple tensions that I liked, tried to practice at a couple different times during the day to see what felt better then and go with that. I would like to say that that helped me today, but it didn't really help me, because I think I just did the opposite of what I thought I was going to do.

So sometimes there's no rhyme or reason. Sometimes it's just whatever feels good, I guess.

Q. Do you put Post-it notes on there saying, This is for this weather?

JESSICA PEGULA: Well, I kind of just know if it's hotter, I like to go higher in tension; if it's lower, I don't. But then I ended up playing with the lower tension today, so I don't know.

Sometimes it feels good on serve, feels good on the ground, but then it feels bad on volleys or returns. I don't know. Sometimes I just am like maybe I'm just crazy, I don't know.

Q. Wanted to ask you about your win over Iga at United Cup, which was incredibly impressive. Maybe it was downplayed a little bit, surface specific and some of the details that went into that match. For you personally does it help you chip away at the aura of invincibility of Iga? Do you think it was a very helpful for you to get that win?

JESSICA PEGULA: Yeah, of course. She's definitely not

invincible in my mind. I have played her in pretty close matches. But obviously with her winning, you know, a lot of matches and the streak she went on last year, yeah, she definitely was feeling it for a while there. But it definitely helps. I think it helps just knowing what I have to do to win, knowing what worked, what didn't work.

You know, I played a pretty flawless match, to be honest, that match. I kind of did everything I wanted to do was just working. Some days are like that and you take it. But I think, you know, obviously there was a lot of different, the conditions were different, courts are pretty fast, and I think it maybe favored me a little bit.

Yeah, it definitely helps strategy-wise, what I know I need to do and knowing that it worked, for the most part, definitely gives confidence, you know, for whenever the next time I have to play her.

You just try to do it. It doesn't always execute perfectly, but I think it kind of gives an idea of what you should do and how you have to play to beat her, because she's obviously, she's the best player right now, I think.

Q. Maria Sakkari also dropped a set in each of her two matches so far. She was in earlier and she talked about it being a horrible feeling on the court and not playing that well, but even more importantly to be struggling to sort of get yourself emotionally and mentally into trying to get past it. She said that was, for her, the worst, and I just wondered if you've experienced that, and if so, do you have any kind of method of getting yourself over that hump?

JESSICA PEGULA: I mean, I think it happens to everybody and everyone handles it differently. I think Maria is definitely a lot more of an emotional player than I am. I'm pretty relaxed.

But I would say like the Giorgi match I knew that I had to get fired up. It was late. It was cold. I don't know. The vibe was just weird, and I needed to fire myself up, especially playing someone like her.

But then today, it was totally different. I felt like, okay, I just need to stay calm and focused on what I need to do. It was a little hot, I'm a little congested, I'm not feeling amazing physically. So to me it was more like, okay, conserve a little energy and just try to focus and be efficient.

I think it just changes. I think like what she's saying is you have to know, yeah, how to manage that, everyone's different, but manage that. Some days it may be different than others.

You know, I think when you become a better player, that's a major thing though that the top players I think manage, they kind of know what they need and what they don't need to do on that day, because I think every day is just very specifically different.

Yeah, it's not fun when you're out there and you're just like, what am I doing? I definitely had a couple of those moments today. But, you know, you just try to be positive and you try to work through it and think about, you know, what's gonna get me to win this next point or this game. Yeah, today I was more calm, but the other night I was definitely a lot more energy.

I guess it just depends. I think if you know yourself, you know what you need and you have to I think trust that and that you know that it's going to work, whatever it is that you need on that day.

Q. You have this great partnership with Coco. She's still a teenager, but she's pretty amazing, her poise and thoughtfulness. Could you talk to us about her as a person and her intelligence.

JESSICA PEGULA: Yeah, I mean, yeah, I love Coco. She's great. I love her team and her family. We have spent a lot of time together on the road and make it entertaining. She's fun to play with, and she's so athletic and dynamic and has all these really just like starlike qualities for someone so young. Yeah, I think she's very mature for her age and very well-spoken.

I think she has a really good head on her shoulders. It's definitely not life or death with her for tennis. I think she has a good balance of everything else with her family off the court. She likes to have fun with everything she does off the court. But I think she's definitely really close with her family, which I think keeps her very grounded and with her siblings and stuff like that.

You know, then she's kind of the star on the court. So it's cool to see how she's balanced it a lot at such a young age. I would say probably credit to her parents for helping her with that.

Yeah, she's just a fun personality, and she's got such a long, long career ahead of her. Just to see what she's done at such a young age is pretty crazy. But it's definitely fun, you know, playing doubles with her. I think we are a little bit opposite, but that's kind of why we work, as well, work well together.

Our personalities, you know, kind of mesh on court, and she says I help keep her calm. As long as, I guess, that's

good, maybe as long as that helps her, then everything is good (smiling).

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