

BNP Paribas Open

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Aryna Sabalenka

Press Conference



A. SABALENKA/M. Sakkari

6-2, 6-3

THE MODERATOR: Congratulations on reaching the final. Your third of the year. How are you feeling right now?

ARYNA SABALENKA: Yeah, sounds crazy. Yeah, I'm just super happy with another final and super happy with the win against Maria. She's such a great fighter, and it's always tough matches against her. Just super happy with this win.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. There was some delay today to get things started. Wondering what's going through your head in that moment, how it resets you before you get started outside of your routine?

ARYNA SABALENKA: Yeah, for a second, I was thinking, like, oops, something is going wrong today. It's not going to be the same (smiling).

But then I remind myself that that's okay. Stuff like that can happen, and that's okay. So I just have to kind of calm down myself and relax and wait till they fix the system.

Happy that it didn't really affect my game.

Q. You were saying the other day that it's a different feeling you've got this year. Is part of the fact that you are able to handle fiddly situations and awkward situations like the delay, et cetera, a lot better, a lot easier?

ARYNA SABALENKA: I mean, yeah, I mean, definitely that's really helped to stay calm and understand that I can control myself in these kind of situation, and I can switch my focus in these kind of situations and bring myself back on court.

That's help in the future to understand that no matter what's happening on the court, I can control myself better. That's helped me to play my best tennis.

Q. What is the biggest aim for you this year?

ARYNA SABALENKA: What does it mean, "aim"?

Q. Goal.

ARYNA SABALENKA: Goal, okay. I don't know. I don't know. To be honest, I'm just super focusing on myself, on the game, on improvement.

I think the goal is just to keep playing, keep winning, keep doing myself, and keep focusing on myself.

Q. Before you came to the tournament, like in general, is it easy to imagine yourself in the final?

ARYNA SABALENKA: I mean, it's not like easier. It's just like I have this understanding that probably I'm a favorite on this tournament. One of them.

It's kind of, I can understand this, but at the same time, I'm not focusing on that. I'm like, that's okay to be on that list, but still, I have to work and I have to bring my tennis. So I'm like switching my focus from that to myself and to things what I have to do to actually reach the final.

Q. Obviously you have been saying so much of your life has been focusing just on your game, and you're also a very lighthearted person. But now that you've won the Aussie and are one of the top two players, do you start thinking about your role in the game, your leadership? Is that a part of the picture? What are your thoughts on that?

ARYNA SABALENKA: Oh, hmm. I don't know. It's a tough question (smiling).

I mean, I feel really good on court right now, but I also have understanding that it's not going to be the same all the time. So that's why I'm keep working hard, make sure in those days when things are not working my way, I still will be able to compete and to get these wins.

Yeah, that's great to be one of the best players. I don't



know. I just want to keep working, I just keep want to keep showing my best tennis and keep winning. It feels really great to keep winning (smiling).

Q. Sunday's final could be No. 1 versus No. 2, or it could be a rematch of the only slam final that we've had this year. Who would you rather play, Iga or Elena?

ARYNA SABALENKA: I don't know. It sounds great both ways, you know. I don't know. Doesn't matter. I mean, whoever wins this match, I would like to play both of them.

I mean, anyway, it's going to be tough match and a great battle. I think people will enjoy this battle. Either it's Iga or Elena, so I'm really looking forward to this final. I think it's going to be great battle.

Q. On Iga, she had the better of your meetings for most of last year, but then you beat her at the WTA Finals. Did that change the way you think about her and the way you would approach a final against her here?

ARYNA SABALENKA: Yeah, I mean, that was really important win in the WTA Finals. It didn't really change something. I mean, anyway, she's not going to come there on court and just give me this win easily. So anyway, I have to bring my best tennis to beat her.

So it's good to have some wins against her going into this final. So at least in her mind it will be like, I already lost this girl so she will understand that it's not going to be easy.

Yeah, anyway, I have to bring my best tennis and I will do my best to prepare myself as good as I can, make sure I can play my best tennis and I can get this win against her.

Q. About the conditions and the courts, speed of the courts, I was curious to know your relationship with those. Is it a good situation for you to play on this stadium, or is it not ideal?

ARYNA SABALENKA: I don't know. I don't know. I like this court. I like to have these small powers like the court a little bit slower so I can adjust better to the ball, and I can hit heavier shot. I don't know.

For me, I really like the conditions here.

Q. I guess this is going to be a difficult, awkward question for you to answer. Do you think you are the best player in the world at the moment? I understand that Iga is No. 1, but when you look at the fact that

you've been in the last three biggest finals...

ARYNA SABALENKA: I would prefer to think that I'm one of the best.

Q. You have spoken about your increasing calm, composure. That's an amazing accomplishment to have. How did you get there and can you talk about your coaching situation?

ARYNA SABALENKA: Well, I think because I was struggling a lot last year, with my serve and with so many things happen last year, I think because of that, I will say I went through hell, and I think that's why I'm able to be, yeah, more calm on court. I'm able to kind of control myself better and have this understanding that this is just tennis.

If you work hard, if you do everything you can to prepare yourself as good as you can, that's everything what I can control.

On the court, I just have to keep fighting no matter what, and I think that's why I'm able to be that way, you know.

Q. I have to ask this one, because Tsurenko said she withdrew because she had a panic attack right before going into your match. Also, Iga said there is still a lot of tension in the locker room due to the war. I'm wondering if you have any opinions on that and if, for you, maybe the WTA could have handled that better, the relationship within Russian, Belarusian, and Ukrainian players during the last year.

ARYNA SABALENKA: Well, listen, nobody can control emotions of others, you know. And I think WTA are doing their best to kind of control it.

Yeah, of course it's a lot of tension between us. I mean, I'm still have this belief that I did nothing bad to Ukraines; not me, not Russian athletes, not Belarusian athletes, not one of us did something bad. Even some of us are like helping. Like not like, how to say, publicly, yes.

So what else I can say? I think WTA are doing really great job to support both sides, and whatever -- I mean, I cannot control their emotions.

I was through so many bad things, and unfortunately, I'm not able to say that because who gonna believe Belarusian girl. I mean, talking about her coach. I have been through also through hell, and I understand that... I don't know. The more I'm talking, the better I just stop.

Yeah, I mean, I think Tsurenko withdraw, there was more

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

than panic attack or more than political situation. I think there is something more. I had really tough situation last year with her coach the way he act to me. So I think that guy put so much pressure on her, and that's why that happen.

It's nothing to do with WTA. I mean, they are doing their best job. What they can do? Nobody of us have this control in this situation. All of us just trying to, you know, keep the calmest in the locker room and keep understanding that there is no our fault and that all of us understand Ukrainians, and we really feel bad for them, you know.

That's it. I think I said a lot.

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