

BNP Paribas Open

Saturday, March 9, 2024

Novak Djokovic

Press Conference



N. DJOKOVIC/A. Vukic

6-2, 5-7, 6-3

THE MODERATOR: Well done. How did it feel to be back on Stadium Court after five years?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: It feels great obviously to come back with the win. It's been five years, and, you know, the great feeling is still there. Enjoyed myself very much. Beautiful stadium. Great atmosphere.

Obviously I was a bit, you know, nervous at the beginning, you know, whether I'm going to start off well. Haven't played a match in more than five weeks. I thought the start was good. Obviously 6-2. Then, you know, I think he upped his game.

I probably, yeah, lost a little bit of the momentum. We got into the third set, I thought the level of the tennis was pretty good in the third. Great points. He made me, you know, produce some really important points in games in order to prevail in this match.

You know, I'm glad that I was pushed, as well, which is important. It's always great. You know, looking forward to the next one.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. I'd like to ask a very general question, if I could. You've had such a spectacular career. An incredible student of the game. My question is, this sport gives us so much. If you had to boil it down to just the one or two key lessons that this sport has provided you, what would that be?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Well, very good question (smiling). I need a little prep on that to give you a right answer. But I would say out of the blue it definitely made me more resilient, I think, just for everything else in life, really. Competing at the highest level for 20 years has allowed me to tap into the parts of myself mentally, physically, emotionally that I didn't know existed. I had to really dig deep so many times to really, you know, overcome

challenges and reach history and great achievements.

But it also taught me that if you do things in the right way, if you're dedicated on a daily basis to constant improvement approach of trying to perfect your skills, yourself as a person, as an athlete, it will get you to stars and even further. So nothing really is impossible if you, first of all, strongly believe in it, visualize it, and then, you know, create a right short-term and long-term plan in order to execute everything that you have, you're dreaming of.

I achieved my childhood dreams in 2011, and then I had to, you know, come up with new dreams and new goals and set new horizons to reach.

Also, I think it taught me to be accepting the small losses in life with, you know, figuratively speaking, with more optimism. And that also whatever happens, if you lose a tennis match, there's always another one coming around the corner.

It is very demanding sport. It is a sport that has a longest season of all sports, but it's a very beautiful sport that, as I say in this regard, always gives you another opportunity, another chance, another week where you can shine and win a trophy and kind of reinvent yourself.

So I think that's probably the three things that, you know, I'll have to -- next time you will give me a little bit of a heads-up when you ask me something like that. Thank you.

Q. Novak, how important do you think it was for you to have a competitive match in your first one of this tournament?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Well, it was very important. Obviously at one point I was, you know, a bit worried because I lost a set, and then in beginning of third it was kind of going toe to toe.

But I thought, you know, the chances will come, you know, as I, you know, stay in the match and try to raise the level of tennis.

I have to, you know, give him credit because he stepped it up. He served well, ripping forehands towards the end of the second, beginning of the third, and was just deservedly still in the match.

Could I have done some things better? Yeah, of course I could. But, you know, hopefully the rust is a bit, you know, off or at least a bit less rust that I'm feeling for the next match, and the continuation of this tournament.

Q. A few days ago, Andy Murray talked about how he interacted with a fan that was loudly cheering for him during his match and how it kind of helped him just to look at him, to hear him. You said that it have happen to you to refocus on one or two fan and to use that energy, positive or negative energy?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Many times (smiling). Many, many times. I was fortunate to play so many matches in my life where I have experienced positive and negative, you know, kind of experiences on the court with fans.

And, yeah, I try to, you know, stick to the kind of things and routines and maybe movements or thought process that I have on the court that make me feel centered and present and able to, you know, focus or refocus or, you know, perform well.

But at times atmosphere really gets to you, you know, in a good or bad way. So then you use it as a fuel, and you connect maybe with a specific person, you know. I saw that the other day with Andy, and that was a beautiful moment. Also Grigor I think earlier in the season did something very nice when he went to the stands and gave his towel or shirt or cap to one of the fans that was in a wheelchair.

Those types of moments are really something that stays with these people forever. But it also feeds our soul. You know, it makes us feel great and very grateful and appreciative of the fact that they paid tickets to come and watch you and support you and, you know.

So good or bad, you know, in the end of the day, we are all there to celebrate a sport, and tennis players, this tournament. When it's all said and done, I do really appreciate everyone who is contributing to the tennis ecosystem. Of course I always want to be on a more positive note or positive side of the cheering coming from the stands.

So those kind of moments that Andy lived a few days ago is something that really transcends sport and sends a great message.

Q. Novak, welcome back. I mean, being away for five years, does it give you a new appreciation of this tournament, of this state, of California that we're in, and what would it mean to you if you were to get that sixth crown here and hold the record?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: I would love to (smiling). Obviously still a long way to get to the title match, but it's a good start.

I know I can always produce better tennis. Obviously very self-critical, and I think some extent it's also important because then it puts you in the right mindset of wanting to work more and being engaged in the process of improving on a daily basis, or trying to perfect your game and right the wrongs that you've done in a previous match or previous practice session.

So that's what I'm going to keep doing and hopefully building my game as this tournament is played over 10 to 14 days, so it allows you to have the practice days also between matches, which then, you know, of course allows you to work on certain specifics in the game. I think as the tournament progresses, I believe my game will get better as well, I will feel more confident about myself and my chances to go far in the tournament.

I have to take it step by step.

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