

BNP Paribas Open

Monday, March 11, 2024

Elise Mertens

Press Conference



E. MERTENS/N. Osaka

7-5, 6-4

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. Tell us how big this win is for you.

ELISE MERTENS: I mean, it's definitely a big win, through to the fourth round.

But yeah, it is a big win, because she's coming back, but she's a tricky player. She can hit some big shots. It's been a long time since I won against her. So yeah, I'm very pleased about the performance and I'm actually winning the match, especially that last game, so happy to win it in two (smiling).

Q. She said that she felt like she was on the defensive quite a bit in the match. And she was surprised by that, given how you guys have played each other in the past. From your perspective, did you see it similarly? Did you feel more in control of that match from the baseline? If so, was that because of tactics and execution by you, or did you sense she was pushing herself back?

ELISE MERTENS: Well, I mean, she's a tricky player. If she hits the ball well, then you're in defense, for sure. Yeah, I think tactically, one of the things was to get her in defense a little bit more, to get her running a little bit more. I think it's also adjustment from my game, from my side.

Yeah, I think future tennis is not to be in the defense a lot of times -- right? -- to get in neutral or into the court. That's what I'm trying to do.

Q. So the first set you have a lead, 3-0, and then she managed to come back, and she had breakpoint again at 4-5, I think. Back in that time, what was your mindset? How did you manage to get through that crucial point?

ELISE MERTENS: Well, yeah, she came back. My game was a little bit up and down at that time, but I felt like, okay,

mentally I had to stay there, of course, and I have to, like, try to get my serve in, and then let's see. Because she serves pretty big sometimes.

But yeah, I think just mentally play point by point a little bit more and not really look at the score, which I did in the first and second set at the end a bit more. I think that was the key, just play a bit more point by point and my tactics, and get that first serve in was really important too.

Q. Another thing she mentioned you served much bigger than she remembered. Is that the ideal kind of compliment or the ideal way of measuring your own game, that you're actually playing better or differently?

ELISE MERTENS: Yeah, definitely. Definitely. That's very nice of her to say that, too. Serving big, and as you said, hitting the ball a bit bigger, I would say.

I think those two things we really worked on the last couple of months. Of course sometimes it's difficult, but this time I felt like if I had the opportunity I really had to do it because she is an offensive player.

So I'm pretty pleased about that I actually did that. But also, defense-wise, I felt like, okay, especially the last couple of points, that I was becoming a wall or trying to be, at least.

Q. I think if I heard you correctly just now, you said that the future is not in defensive tennis. I'm wondering if you can elaborate a little bit on that and also how much -- yeah, it doesn't sound like this change to play more aggressively is just about Naomi.

ELISE MERTENS: No, no, in general. It's in general. I think if you see top-10 players' first strike, it's very important. But you see everybody, you know, playing bigger, playing through the lines more or also playing that big first serve. I think nobody is really in the defense and just, like, okay, let's play ten shots just like this with a little bit of spin here and there.

No, I think if you really get a ball into the court, everybody is going for it. So yeah, I think everybody is taking their



opportunities or trying to.

Q. So for you to make the adjustment in your game because you have that base game, not unlike, like Coco is a good example, you guys can run all day and defend all day, but the change to get more into the court and be more aggressive, is that just tactical or mental for you to make the move or...

ELISE MERTENS: I think a little bit of both. I think you have to, of course, see it pretty quickly, see it fast. If you're two meters behind the baseline and if you want to go into that court it's pretty difficult.

So I think tactically it takes less energy, I would say. Of course you have to control it, but I think future-wise it's the right thing to do.

Q. Take us through that last game, and especially talk about the second-serve ace you did on breakpoint.

ELISE MERTENS: Yes, I don't even know myself. Yeah, she had a couple of breakpoints. I was just trying to maybe a little less speed on my first serve just to get it in a little bit more because second serve she will attack.

Of course it's pretty nerve-racking if you have to hit a second serve for 5-All. Yeah, that 30-40, I'm like, okay, I'm going to go T, I was sure about that, but not that T, but I was pretty happy that it went in.

But, you know, it's a little bit of a bonus, a little bit of, okay, I actually was going for my shot, and I got the reward. I'm very happy that I won that game, but I think it's just a reward of, okay, the ball is in at that time.

Q. It might be tough to compare your opponent to the past, but did you find any differences in Naomi's game compared to three or four years ago?

ELISE MERTENS: I mean, the way she's coming back so quickly is pretty impressive. She has a lot of talent, of course, and that's what we saw today too. If her first serve is in it's pretty difficult to return or to even get that neutral position.

I looked a couple times how big she was serving. The speed was really coming off, especially also when she's in her reach, I would say, she's really comfortable hitting the ball pretty big.

Yeah, all compliments to her for coming back so quickly, and, you know, raising up her game so quickly, too, because it's not easy at all.

Q. Last year or the year before you changed your equipment, your racquet midseason, I remember.

ELISE MERTENS: Yes, I did.

Q. Was that all part of playing more aggressively in the future?

ELISE MERTENS: I think with the gear that I'm playing with right now, I feel like it gives me a lot of control but also power. I think it's a kind of a mixed. Also changed my strings to the Tecnifibre Black Code. So I'm very happy, yeah, about that change.

So yeah, I think I really had to adjust a little bit with the racquet, and I'm finding my thing that I would like to do, but I feel like with this one, I'm, like, today getting really the speed out of it, and that's the goal.

Q. Speaking of being aggressive, do you think that being very successful on doubles helps you to attack or maybe, you know, improving your serve?

ELISE MERTENS: Yeah, definitely. I started playing doubles on Thursday. My first-round singles was on Saturday. I played actually on the same court, so I knew the circumstances already a little bit.

But yeah, definitely, the serve and the return, also the reflexes, being comfortable at the net. So for me personally that helped a lot, feeling comfortable on the court. Also, it's a pretty individual sport so it's nice to be side by side with someone sometimes, and see what they have, like, the tactics and everything, so we can talk a little bit.

But yeah, it definitely helped me reflexes, but also seeing it pretty quickly, like, the return, okay, have to see it pretty quickly, go down the line or cross court.

Q. Is your sister still a pilot?

ELISE MERTENS: She is.

Q. Have you ever been on a plane when she's flown the plane?

ELISE MERTENS: Once. Only once.

Q. What was that like?

ELISE MERTENS: In Norway. Actually, I was sitting right behind her. She was the pilot, of course, and we saw the Northern Lights. It was pretty, pretty impressive.

But yeah, only once. We're not on the same flights at all. Her husband is also a pilot. Yeah, we're both traveling the world, I guess.

Q. Were you nervous at all?

ELISE MERTENS: No, not at all. I have been into a plane a lot of times so I trust her.

Q. Looking ahead to playing Coco, what are your thoughts on that match? Just kind of how your games match up in terms of style and what the keys are on this court?

ELISE MERTENS: I think every tournament is a bit different. I've played her in different circumstances. Didn't really get the win yet. Didn't really go my way. I'm feeling good. I got a day off tomorrow. Of course tennis, day to recover.

But yeah, I think I have to work on my own game and see how far I can go instead of seeing, okay, what is she doing all the time?

Of course I know a little bit how she plays already. I've played her a couple times in doubles too. I think the goal is just to improve myself.

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