

BNP Paribas Open

Wednesday, March 13, 2024

Emma Navarro

Press Conference



E. NAVARRO/A. Sabalenka

6-3, 3-6, 6-2

THE MODERATOR: Emma, congratulations. Just begin with telling us what are the top-line emotions after a result like that?

EMMA NAVARRO: Yeah, feeling excited. I've worked really hard over the years to kind of just get to this point and be able to play at a level that can compete with the best players in the world. I think that showed today.

Yeah, just excited to get the win. I'm ready for the next one.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. Two of the best scramble points I've seen all week have come from you, and I wonder if you could talk a little bit about the role of fitness and footwork in your preparation over the last few years and how it's helping you get to this level.

EMMA NAVARRO: Yeah, well, first off, I love to scramble, I love to get scrappy, as my coach says. It's one of the things that I love the most about the game. Just kind of that cat-and-mouse aspect of sort of playing.

Then, yeah, I think I've put a ton of effort into fitness and just making sure that I'm strong enough and I'm fit enough and I'm able to go the distance.

I think having that gives me a lot of confidence knowing that I can stay out on the court for as long as it takes. You know, I'm not going to lose because I got tired or I wasn't fit enough.

That's definitely something that gives me a lot of confidence. I've been working with the same trainer since I was maybe 12 years old, so we've put a lot of work in together over the years.

Q. More and more matches I'm watching about you, and I always see this kind of composure and discipline

on court. You probably didn't have match experience to go to face big players like Aryna or Rybakina in Doha. You always force them to do better and better and better. I wonder if you felt this discipline, you felt already in yourself, or you discover it time after time and match after match?

EMMA NAVARRO: Yeah, it's always kind of interesting to see how I feel once I step on the court against opponents like Rybakina or Sabalenka. They are just, I guess, more experienced than I am and have played on these stages more than I have.

But I think that one of the things I love about playing is that I get to challenge myself every single week. So playing an opponent like that on that stage is the same challenge as improving my forehand or improving my backhand. It's one of the things that keeps me invested in playing, and it makes things interesting and pushes me to be a better player.

Yeah, I always step on the court believing that I have a chance to win, and it's always my priority to just put my best foot forward. If a win comes from that, then that's awesome.

But, yeah, it's definitely cool to be able to play an opponent like that and feel like, you know, I can hang and I can win.

Q. In January you were saying you were still getting used to the ranking number that was next to your name and maybe not always feeling like you had caught up mentally with that fact. Now closing in on top 20 and beating the world No. 2, are you getting more comfortable with that fact? What does beating Sabalenka mean to you? What does it tell you?

EMMA NAVARRO: Yeah, for sure. I guess I would say that I wasn't as comfortable with the ranking, but I also just felt like once I got to this point that maybe I would care more about my ranking, and I still don't really care (smiling).

I just want to play good tennis, and just keep getting better. Yeah, I think there has been a couple of times since I've



been on tour that I've lost that mindset, where it's, like, I was close to breaking top 100, and I was, like, Okay, if I can just get top 100, then I'll be happy.

Once I kind of made these milestones, I was like, okay, that's cool that I did that but what's next? A ranking, it's just a number. Yeah, realizing that I really don't care about rankings.

Q. You said you always step onto the court believing that you have a chance. At what point today did that belief become a little bit stronger? Because I would imagine you're going up against Aryna and there is still some convincing to do that happens during the match. How did her ball feel? You haven't played her before; right?

EMMA NAVARRO: No, I haven't.

Q. How did it feel going up against her and her ball?

EMMA NAVARRO: Yeah, I think it's important to come out on the court ready to play. I felt like I was able to do that today.

So I think getting that first hold was really important for me. Then, yeah, second game was close. Then I think after I held a second time, I was, like, Okay, I'm in this. I feel good. I can win this.

Yeah, it was nice that it only took maybe two or three games to feel like that. So yeah, I guess holding after that third game.

Q. Sort of an unusual question, but by a happy coincidence, our publication is doing some work on grandmothers in tennis, and you've been shouting out your grandmother. Can you talk a little bit about her. Does she inspire you? Did she help you with your tennis early? Is there anything we can talk about there?

EMMA NAVARRO: Yeah, I always say that I want to be my grandmother when I grow up (smiling). She's the epitome of a strong woman. Maybe besides my mom, she's the most caring woman I've ever met. She's 92, but she always has something to bring to the table, which I think is so cool about her.

She, yeah, just always shows up with energy and positivity. She's a real light in every room she walks into, and she's always been around sports.

My grandfather, he played football and then he coached football. You know, she loves sports. I think for her being

able to see her granddaughter play is really special. It's special for me that she's able to watch me play.

Yeah, seriously, I said the other day that she hasn't missed a match, and she really hasn't. Even when I was in Australia, she would be up at 4 a.m. watching me play.

Yeah, it's really cool to just have someone like that in my corner, and she texts me after every single match, win or lose. If I win, it's some congratulatory text, and if I don't, it's, you know, just telling me, on to the next.

She always signs her text, Love Gram, as if I don't know where it's coming from. I get a good kick out of that.

Yeah, it's amazing.

Q. Your grandfather's coaching, what was that?

EMMA NAVARRO: He coached college football. He coached at Williams for a few years, Wabash for a few years, and Princeton for a little bit.

Q. You said on court today that you are approaching your game with more aggression. For you, is that more like a tactical thing? You want to end points quicker, hit bigger, or is it a personality/temperament thing? Like you just changed your attitude?

EMMA NAVARRO: Yeah, I would say mainly it's a mindset shift. When I was younger, I played in a way where I wanted to work myself into points and work myself into matches and kind of just react to what my opponent was doing, kind of take a step back and see, okay, how are they going to play?

But at this level, there's no time for that, and there's not an opportunity for that. You are either striking or you're getting struck. I'd rather do the former. So I think just the beginning of the points, being really strong at the beginning of points, is really important.

So it's just a mindset with how I take on returns and serve and ball after the serve, that kind of thing. Just, yeah, being comfortable enough to make the first move.

Q. Your celebration seemed a little bit subdued on court. What's it like with your background in college to suddenly have these big victories that must produce personal joy but experience a process that personal joy in such a public space?

EMMA NAVARRO: Yeah. It's definitely unique. I would say it's a little bit unnatural for me to be in the spotlight and be playing on a court like that with, you know, a ton of fans

and TVs and, yeah, just eyes on me. It's not my natural way.

So it's unique, but I feel I'm definitely getting more comfortable with it and just feeling like, you know, I can be myself even if there's however many people watching.

Yeah, also, I think maybe that was my second or third fist pump ever. If it was a little weird, cut me some slack (smiling).

But, yeah, even if I don't show it, I'm really excited and I feel just really grateful for the people around me and all the work they put in over the years and every day to help me get to this point.

Q. Can you just explain how you felt going into the third set and what you thought you had to do to get on top of that set and close out the match? And then as a follow-on to that, bouncing back after the biggest win of your career to play another match the next day or two.

EMMA NAVARRO: Yeah. Third set I knew I had to serve better than I had been serving. I think I was able to do that. Definitely that helped me to hold my service games and just gave me a confidence boost on return games too. Like, I know I can count on my serve when it comes back around.

That was the only adjustment I made physically. Then just mentally I wanted to just, like, really lock in and play aggressively and put a lot of pressure on her serve and, yeah, just return really aggressively.

Then, yeah, looking forward, it's another opportunity, another challenge. Yeah, obviously I want to enjoy the win today, but I'm just really excited to survive another day and get to come out and play another match tomorrow. This is why I play. Yeah, I'm excited.

Q. It wasn't all about the match against Sabalenka. It was also a bit windy, not always regular. I don't know if it was a bit of a disadvantage for you, because of the way you play, aggressive and quite flat with the shot. I wonder if you had to make any kind of adjustment and if that was easy. Because in the end you made it feel like it was easy for you to adapt to the condition.

EMMA NAVARRO: Yeah, I feel like I played a lot of windy tennis this year, and wind was something that I used to run from, and it would make me uncomfortable, and I felt like I just couldn't get my timing right on windy days.

I think I've had a lot more practice playing in wind. When I

won the title in Hobart, it was super windy all week. Yeah, just being able to have experiences like those have helped me a lot.

Yeah, didn't really adjust too much. Just maybe hit some more kick serves out wide and used the wind a little bit more to my advantage on the serve. Other than that, yeah, didn't make too many wind adjustments. It just stays gusty in there. It's not really like a steady wind.

Q. You said you don't necessarily feel super comfortable expressing emotions on court. How are you processing them during the highs and lows of a match? Do you talk to yourself? What's the internal monologue that's happening?

EMMA NAVARRO: Yeah, I think I feel the best when it's really quiet in my head. And things happen, and obviously I'll feel a certain way about them, but it's, like, a three-second emotion and then it's gone.

A lot of people have said it, but just having a short-term memory is so important in tennis. Yeah, I feel the best when things just don't get under my skin and I don't have too many highs or lows. I just kind of feel pretty steady throughout.

That's what I felt today. That was good. Yeah, it's awesome to beat a player like that, but as I said, it's kind of, What's next? Yeah, I'm excited to play again.

Q. You said in Doha you have kind of different personality on court and off the court, and these are merging into one. How does it help in order to play this kind of tough match, if it does?

EMMA NAVARRO: Yeah, I think I used to have a different, I don't know, just kind of a different mindset on the court. I felt like, I don't know, just different to how I felt off the court, and I kind of felt that's how it had to be, because it's how it always was.

But yeah, like you said, now that those two are kind of merging into one, I definitely enjoy myself more on the court. I feel like, yeah, just feeling like myself is a better place to be than not. So, yeah, I think that's contributed a lot to just having more fun on the court. I think when I'm enjoying myself, I play better tennis. So I think, yeah, that's helped me.

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