

BNP Paribas Open

Wednesday, March 13, 2024

Maria Sakkari

Press Conference



M. SAKKARI/D. Parry

6-2, 3-6, 6-3

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. Can you just talk through the match and what the key was in terms of turning that around in the third set?

MARIA SAKKARI: Well, you know, I played a very good first set. I was just very solid, very patient. Served really well. You know, I made the right choices.

I think that early in the second set I had a chance that it was Love-30 on her serve, and then deuce, I didn't take that. Then I started rushing a little bit. But, you know, just staying patient and staying aggressive in that third set was the key.

She's a very good player. You know, that's first time I played her and I'm impressed. If she can develop her game, she can be Mauresmo No. 2, 2.0. She plays different. That's what makes her difficult and tricky.

You know, I'm just happy that I got this out of the way.

Q. Back to Diane, her game. Can you say more? Backhand slice? Talk about what she brings to the court that makes it tricky to face her.

MARIA SAKKARI: I would say she's the only one-handed backhand player right now on the tour.

Q. Tatjana.

MARIA SAKKARI: Tatjana Maria, too. You know, she has a good slice. Not many players have a good slice nowadays.

She has a good forehand and good serve. That's why I say, if she can develop her game, she can be very good. I mean, she's already a very good player. Like, what is she, 56 in the world? She's still young. I think she has a great future ahead of her.

Q. Today I saw you working out after your match. You were running and doing resistance-band training.

MARIA SAKKARI: Oh, yeah. No, it wasn't a workout. It was a cooldown.

I don't know. My fitness coach, he believes that just because I'm playing tomorrow I needed to flex the legs. And my physio also wants me to do, like, band workout every time after a match just for my shoulders and for my back. That's, you know, a normal routine for me (smiling).

Don't be too impressed by that (smiling). There's no reason to be impressed.

Q. I watched some footage of you guys doing volunteer, selling popcorn.

MARIA SAKKARI: That was so fun.

Q. I was wondering, throughout that kind of experience, did you find something new about this tournament or spectators and things?

MARIA SAKKARI: Well, you know, people here love tennis. I mean, I knew it from being inside the court, but just being, you know, working, kind of working, you know, on the grounds, it was very nice to interact with people, because we don't really get to, you know, to talk to them and just have, you know, a normal chat as two regular human beings, not as, you know, a tennis player and a fan.

I love this tournament so much. I wanted to stay out there longer, but, you know, people started recognizing me, so I had to go back.

But it is, you know, a very nice place to be working and to be obviously visiting and just spending time here.

Q. Was there any period of adjustment with getting used to a new coach after so many years with Tom? What is the sort of most important thing you think David told you? I imagine he is sort of rolling things out slowly, but where did it start?



MARIA SAKKARI: Well, you know, because it's only been one week with him. He cannot just come in and change everything. Especially, you know, before a very big tournament.

You know, I said it in my previous press conference, he's just very relaxed and very laid back. That's what I need, because I'm very hard on myself. So I just need someone that, you know, he doesn't stress me, and that's what David does really well. Obviously has, you know, an incredible experience on the tennis side.

But, like, on the mental side, I just feel like he's just very, very relaxed. That's what I really like. As I said, he's so funny that I just enjoy my time with him on and off the court.

He's bonding really well with the rest of the team, which is a very important thing, because, you know, we spend a lot of time with each other. You know, we created a very nice team the last few days.

Q. Is there something he said, like, the one thing I want you to maybe try this week?

MARIA SAKKARI: Well, we've worked a little bit on the serve, just on my toss. And then on my returns, you know, stepping in a little bit more, because that was something I used to do really well, maybe two, three years ago, and then for some reasons I stopped.

It's been feeling really good. But obviously, you know, he cannot just come in and start changing things.

Q. What is it you want to get out of a new association, a new coaching/player relationship? Is there anything specific that you want to change or adapt?

MARIA SAKKARI: Well, I want to improve. You know, I got to No. 3 and I just feel like I can get better. There are things out there, I think I spoke to Courtney last year, I said that there are a couple of girls that have made an extra step in their careers, and I just want to try and, you know, catch them.

By, you know, working with David, I feel like I can do that. I just feel like I have the athletic abilities. Mentally I can improve, of course, and tennis-wise, it's not like I need to change my game. It's just that I need to add a couple of things.

Q. Do you think you felt you were stagnant, you weren't moving?

MARIA SAKKARI: A little bit, I would say. Not blaming anyone, of course, blaming only myself.

I just feel like just trying, you know, new things and trying to, you know, be better and improve, you know. I really believe I have a good chance on just getting back to that level and giving myself the best chance to become, you know, one of the best players again.

Not that top 10 is a bad thing, but, you know, just better than that (smiling).

Q. I feel like sometimes the way people, especially online, they talk about you and your results, you would think you were not ranked in the top 10, you were ranked actually far lower. I know you mentioned paying attention to some of that. Have you tried to take a step back from the chatter and some of the things people say?

MARIA SAKKARI: I don't really care what they say. You know, if they want to just judge me because I'm 9 in the world or 10, they can go ahead and judge me. I'm one of the best players in the world.

You know, that's it. Actually, that's a very good thing, and I really want to thank them that they keep doing it, because then I remind myself what I have achieved. If they stop doing it, then maybe I stop reminding myself (smiling).

Guys, please keep doing it. Please keep talking -- sorry -- shit about me, but I'm here and I'm here to be better and I'm here to improve.

Pardon my French (laughter).

Q. Did I see you talking to Martina Navratilova earlier?

MARIA SAKKARI: Yes.

Q. What does it mean to you as a current player to have these legends of the sport, not just Martina, to just still casually be around tennis?

MARIA SAKKARI: You know, I admire her so much. She's a very cool person. What she has achieved, I'm not even going to mention, because it's pointless right now. Everyone knows she's amazing.

I just feel like having her around, and she gave me a couple of tips back in the day. It's nice, because she really cares about us, and cares about women's tennis.

Yeah, it's nice to have her around. Chrissie, as well. All of the legends that are involved are, you know, very, very

good people above everything.

Q. Looking ahead, Emma Navarro, most wins on tour of anybody. You've played her twice in your careers, split those. What's the challenge with her and what have you seen in terms of her improvement? I think a lot of people are kind of only now really paying attention to what she's doing.

MARIA SAKKARI: Well, she's very, very good. It's funny, because when we played the Tie Break Tens, Ben Shelton came up to me, Wow, she's very good. She's an amazing player. I said, Yeah, Ben, she's low key, very, very good.

I mean, she's very talented, and she's just so, you know, relaxed and laid back. She's a very nice girl, as well.

She has variety on her game. She likes to slice, likes to step in on the return. I'm just going to enjoy tomorrow's match. She's on top form, according to her results.

I'm just going to challenge myself one more time. I mean, we played only a month ago. Different conditions. But, you know, she's going to have the crowd with her as a local, and I'm just going to, you know, try my best.

Q. Back to David, I think last presser you might have said his game planning, it's very simple. What's it like going to new game planning and scouting with someone after you've been so long with Tom, is it eye-opening to do it with someone else?

MARIA SAKKARI: It is different, for sure. I think every coach has a different approach.

Yeah, he does keep it very simple. You know, we talk about it while I'm warming up on the court, and we don't go into too many details right before the match. He just reminds me of couple things. Then, you know, off I go.

You know, maybe it's going to be different. I don't know, you know, how it's going to be from now on. I just feel like the way he does it, it's working. I mean, seems like it's working (smiling).

Q. You talked about your opponent's one-handed backhand. I was wondering, at some point in your career, have you ever tried to hit the one-handed backhand?

MARIA SAKKARI: You don't want to see me hitting a one-handed backhand. I tried sometimes in practice. It's not very successful. It is very difficult.

Q. If you are hitting a backhand with both hands, do

you feel like you are using one hand more than the other hand?

MARIA SAKKARI: Oh, that's a tricky question. You know what? I'll try and feel it in practice and I will come back with an answer to you. I just cannot picture myself right now. I think I use both hands.

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