

BNP Paribas Open

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Maria Sakkari

Press Conference



I. SWIATEK/M. Sakkari

6-4, 6-0

THE MODERATOR: Maria, a tough one today, but a good tournament overall. Your thoughts on your two weeks here.

MARIA SAKKARI: Yeah, well, obviously, you know, you never want to lose and leave the tournament as a loser, but at the same time, there are so many good things that happened the last two weeks that, you know, I cannot just ignore.

I think I'll get this one day (smiling).

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. Tough loss but obviously a very good week for you. A very solid first set. What do you attribute the second set to? Was it fatigue? Was it Iga trying something different?

MARIA SAKKARI: I don't think she was trying anything different. Yeah, I think I was a little bit tired, I have to say. Not that it's an excuse. I'm not saying that. She still played very good.

You know, probably maybe things would have been different for me, like, the way I felt on the court if my previous match didn't go, you know, as long as it went. You know, that's why it's important to close out matches when you have to.

I feel like that's why, you know, Iga does so well. If you look at her records, she rarely plays three sets. Then that really helps her in those later stages of the tournament.

But, you know, it is what it is right now. I'm now already thinking about Miami, not losing first round again (smiling) because I don't have a very good record the last couple of years after going deep here.

Q. A tough one today, but the margins can be quite small despite the 6-4, 6-Love scoreline, the first set

having clawed it back. What changed after 3-Love that got you to where you were and what ultimately kind of made the difference to get Iga that set?

MARIA SAKKARI: You know, it's always tough when you start a final. Iga, she's aggressive. Obviously I've played bigger hitters, but at the same time she takes away time from you.

It took me a couple of games to just get used to her timing and the wind and the wind direction, I mean, and how to, you know, play my shots when she was playing, like, a heavy one. That took me a little bit of time, but then eventually I got used to her timing.

I just feel like in order to beat her right now, I mean, if you look at her record, the players that she loses to are very aggressive players. Like if you try and play her game, you have no chance. You have to be very, very -- you have to be ultra aggressive playing her.

Q. Definitely not a loser.

MARIA SAKKARI: Thank you (smiling).

Q. You said you have to be very aggressive playing her. Is there a point where you're, like, playing her where you feel like you have to be perfect in a way? Or is she the kind of player that sort of forces that mindset into your head? Is there a kind of battle that ensues, because nobody can be perfect?

MARIA SAKKARI: You don't have to be perfect, but you'll have less chances against her. That's the thing.

That's I think the difference between the top, top players and players in a lower ranking. Like when you play Iga, Sabalenka, Rybakina, all the players, Coco, Jess, you have like two, three chances in the match and you have to take them. If you don't take them, then it's ciao-ciao, as I say.

That's the thing, and especially with her, she's aggressive, but at the same time she's solid. You have to take advantage of those chances she's giving you. Like, from



3-Love to 3-All to 4-All, she started missing.

But then if you don't take that small chance, like it was 4-All, and I played a very loose returning game. I missed three backhand returns. That's not acceptable with players like her.

Q. You said you're going to get this title one day. Is there something that makes you want this one more than other 1000 events?

MARIA SAKKARI: Yeah, I think it's the best 1000 of the season. I just really enjoy being here (smiling).

You know, I'll be honest, like, I like the conditions here. It bounces high, the ball goes. I've played two finals and a semi in the last three years. I really believe that I'm going to get this one day.

But we'll see. No one knows, you know, what's going to happen in the future.

Q. You said that you know that Iga has a quite good record in the final and she rarely drops a set in the final. With knowing that kind of record, and then you dropped the first set, did you feel extra pressure because of that record?

MARIA SAKKARI: No, I wasn't thinking about it in the match. Like, I know she usually wins her finals. Like, she rarely loses her finals the last two years, but that wasn't something I had in my mind.

I just felt, like, you know, I wasn't good enough today, I wasn't competitive enough today. My energy level was low, and in order for me to beat her I have to be at my best.

Yeah, not much was going through my mind.

Q. There was a point at I think Love-2 in the second set you were having a little exchange with David, you were saying something to the effect of, I don't know what to do. He said, Make some first serves. You said, I don't even know how. I'm paraphrasing. Was that frustration? You knew what to do but you just felt like things were going in the wrong direction? Were you voicing a little frustration there or were you really kind of lost in that moment?

MARIA SAKKARI: I wouldn't say I was frustrated. I was just, as I said, I was a little bit slow in the beginning of the match, I was not reading her game very well. That's why probably I felt like I don't know what to do, but then eventually I got back into the match with that first set.

You are going to have those exchanges, but it wasn't, like, anything he did or anything. Just it was, yeah, I didn't know basically how to start the point, like, the structure of the point. I was a little confused.

But then with two, three words from David, you know, was clear enough what I had to do.

Q. My question was about this new collaboration with the new coach. With this nice result that you had immediately, I wonder what he told you before the match and if you already spoke with him right after, if he said anything about, I don't know, he said anything about the match and what could have been the key to play today?

MARIA SAKKARI: We didn't go into too many details about the match. Everyone was trying to make me smile and to make me feel good about what I achieved the last two weeks, especially with where I was coming from.

You know, that's important. Like, we'll go into details once I get back on the court, but I don't think it's always about, you know, forehands and backhands. It's also just to embrace and accept and just enjoy the moment and just, you know, just have some fun and enjoy, you know -- yeah, it was a very good week. Obviously I would have loved to, you know, see my face down there next year, but it's fine, you know. It's all good.

Q. I think during kind of the bulk of your career as a top-10 player you've had two dominant No. 1s. It's been Iga and I think before probably Ash. Does it feel different, like Iga's No. 1-ness compared to Ash's No. 1-ness, or is it kind of the same as a player who's trying to chase these players down?

MARIA SAKKARI: We're talking about two very different styles obviously. But what they have in common is that you always feel, I'm not going to say you have to be perfect, but, you know, you have to raise your level.

You know that you're not going to get gifts in an important point. Like, you have to play every single point. And if they give you anything, that's bonus.

But they were both very disciplined, I would say, with their game. I think in order to be No. 1 you have to be like that. Otherwise, you know, if you're too unstable, like, you might get there but you won't last like those two players have done.

Q. You talk about the kinds of players that have beaten Iga in the past. Obviously Elena and Aryna are physically different players than you are, but you've

beaten Iga twice. I'm curious...

MARIA SAKKARI: Three times. I know my record.
(Laughter.)

Q. Not just about taking advantage, but what do you feel that you have done against her in the past that helps you create those opportunities?

MARIA SAKKARI: Well, last time I beat her was Ostrava 2021. That's long time ago.

Q. WTA Finals, 2021.

MARIA SAKKARI: You're right. You got that one right (smiling). Yeah, I totally forgot. That was, you know, before she changed her coach, before she changed her team.

I think she has started working with Tomasz. She's very different to what she was before. Obviously she has had an incredible success the last two years, and she's a different player to when I beat her.

You know, it requires something extra for me in order to get back on that winning record against her. She just doesn't miss as much as she did before, and she's on top of it all the time, but yeah, you have to be very aggressive, because you see, like, Noskova beat her. Noskova is an ultra-aggressive player. She's not going to grind with Iga.

Elena knows, she has a big serve, she's going to hit hard. Same with Sabalenka. They are all going to try to be aggressive with her. Nobody is going to stay two meters behind the baseline and grind with her because they have no chance. That's how it is.

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