

WTA Finals

Tuesday, November 9, 2021

Guadalajara, Mexico

Maria Sakkari

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Maria, just talk about how excited you are to have qualified for WTA Finals and to be here in Guadalajara this week.

MARIA SAKKARI: Yeah, I mean, it's very exciting. It's a dream coming true. Didn't expect that in the beginning of the year, to be honest.

But after doing well, actually after Paris, it made me realize I have a chance. It feels great to be here, playing against these top players.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. What is it like being part of this top eight, eight players that have qualified for this exclusive tournament? Getting dressed up yesterday? What does it feel like to see yourself among that group? I'm hoping it feels pretty special.

MARIA SAKKARI: It does. It makes me realize once again I'm proud of myself, proud of myself that I'm able to be among these eight top players. Actually it's pretty crazy when you think you're one of the top eight players, best players, in the world. Sometimes it's tough for me to realize that I'm even here at this point of my career. A few years back I wouldn't even believe that I could be here.

It's great to be here, live a different experience, get dressed up, be in a tournament with not a lot of players, it makes you feel so special.

Q. What has it been like having your mom here, sharing this experience with her? What have the conversations been like? How has she been soaking it all in?

MARIA SAKKARI: Well, it's great to have her here because she helps me get dressed up for the gala (laughter). She has a good taste, so it helps a lot to have her here.

No, it's great because I think it's very important for a parent to see their kid being here. It can't get any better, other

than winning a Grand Slam or winning an event like this one. It's a great experience for everyone, for my team, myself, for her, and for my dad back home.

Q. Every player has to adjust to playing in the altitude. For you has it been surprising at all? Has it been quite an adjustment to get used to playing in these conditions?

MARIA SAKKARI: Well, I think we all knew we have to come quite early here because of the conditions. I mean, we knew that there is 1,500 meters altitude here. We knew we had to adjust.

I personally know I might not play my best tennis but I have to accept it because sometimes it will feel weird. Sometimes you'll make mistakes that you wouldn't make in sea level tournament.

It's just whoever accepts the most mistakes, whoever accepts playing ugly tennis this week - 'ugly', you know what I mean - will give herself a better chance on winning the tournament.

Q. With what spirit you will facing this competition? How fresh do you feel physically after these months? I think these months were beautiful but also tiring.

MARIA SAKKARI: Well, very motivated I have to say. I think we all are, especially for players that we're playing for the first time here. It's an event that not many players can play. It's a bonus. Actually it's a celebration of a good year this season. It makes me realize how good it was for me this season. I'm just going to try my best to enjoy my game as best as I can out there. It's another tournament.

Q. What are your expectations for your group with so many players with powerful games, Aryna, Iga, Paula? I remember see you playing in the lower tiers the tennis, 15K, 25K. What do you remember from those days, and which message you can send to players who are playing in this level today?

MARIA SAKKARI: I think we are best eight players in the world, so I wouldn't expect playing an easy match against



any of these players, even from the other group. I was ready of playing, like, three very tough matches in the group.

There are three different players, but I've played with two of them already a lot of times. As I said, I'm going to just trust my game and go for it.

To answer your second question, yeah, it wasn't a long time ago when I was playing 15Ks and 25Ks. It's just a matter of who believes it the most and who works the most.

One thing I have to say is I really believed in myself all these years. Not the entire time, but most of the time (smiling). I can tell you for sure that I really worked hard to be here. It's just that it's a matter of how much you trust yourself.

Q. Reflecting on the season in general, when you look back on 2021 so far, what is the biggest memory for you, the most positive memory on court or off the court? On the flipside, what was the toughest moment for you this season?

MARIA SAKKARI: I'll start with the worst part of the season which was I think it was the two weeks of being stuck in the room, especially after playing a very good tournament in Abu Dhabi. It was very tough mentally, physically as well. Did some PLAT tests after that. I can tell you it wasn't great being stuck in a room for two weeks. It took time for me to get back in shape, back in a good mental condition.

I don't want to sound spoiled because there are so many people around the world doing that, or did that the last year and a half, the quarantine, but it was tough for me because I had to compete the next few days. That's the only reason why. That made me lose my identity, as I told you a few times this year.

Then Miami came, Roland Garros, then US Open was for me not the highlight because I cannot choose between Roland Garros and US Open, but it was a very different atmosphere, doing it twice in six months. It was a matter of confidence because I actually told myself that, Maria, you did it twice this year, it's a bloody good result (smiling).

I would have loved to have won both events, but I'm sure it's going to come at some point in my career. I'm at the point where I really believe that it's going to come. I don't know when, but it's going to come.

Q. Obviously there can be a lot of nerves playing at such a prestigious event for the first time. Does it calm you or relax you knowing your whole group has

never played the WTA Finals before and six of the eight are making their debut?

MARIA SAKKARI: Well, I did not think about that, to be honest, when I saw the group. I think I'm the oldest one in the group, but we are four rookies. It's a different approach for all of us.

As I said before, it's who accepts more, who is more motivated, who is more mentally and physically fresh, who's going to fight for it.

I'm sure I'm not going to have any easy matches in the group. I'm ready for it. If it goes well, that's great. If it doesn't, I'm still not going to be disappointed because it was a very, very good season.

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