

WTA Finals

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Fort Worth, Texas

Maria Sakkari

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: How excited are you to be here at the WTA Finals?

MARIA SAKKARI: I think everyone is very excited to be here because it's the elite of female tennis. It's just a great reward for the good seasons that we've been having.

Personally I'm very excited that a very challenging season is going to finish in a very good way no matter how it goes here. It's just a reward that I'm in this tournament.

Q. It's been a strange year for you, like you said, but you also come in with a good amount of momentum just making the final in had Guadalajara, and players that tend to come in with momentum do well. What do you make of the situation? What do you make of how this all turned out for you?

MARIA SAKKARI: Can you repeat the question?

Q. Just coming in with a lot of momentum, how does that change how you view your season the last couple of months and to be here sort of unexpectedly perhaps?

MARIA SAKKARI: It's not unexpected because I've been a top-10 player for the last year. It's not like I just came out of nowhere.

I believed that I was going to find my rhythm again after having that blip this season. So I believe personally, and I think that that's what everyone around me has the same way of thinking, that when you have the level you're going to find it again.

My time came in Mexico. I just played a very good tournament. Already I was nearly there. It wasn't like I was far back from the last spot. I was just two spots away from that.

I believe I deserved it, and I deserve to be here. It was just a strange year that it can happen to everyone.

Q. What do you think gave you that sort of inner

confidence that things would get better ultimately because sometimes people, when they're in your situation, maybe they want to make a change, or maybe they start to panic. What gave you that inner certainty?

MARIA SAKKARI: Of course, there were moments in the season I was panicking, I didn't know what to do. But the most important thing for me was that I had the same people and the people I trust next to me.

I think in my case, if I was just to do random changes around me, it would be a mistake for me. For me, trusting everyone next to me was the key.

It's something that I'm very thankful and grateful for. I think that's what helped me get over this tough period I had.

Q. Maria, I recently got to spend a little bit of time with Giannis Antetokounmpo, and when I mentioned you, his face lit up. He said you are very good friends. He called you a fireball. Can you talk a little bit about your friendship with him. What does it mean for you for someone like him to say that about you, and what kind of conversations do you have? Do you ever talk about sports? Is there anything you can pick up from Giannis in tennis even though he plays a team sport?

MARIA SAKKARI: I think there is so many things that you can get inspired and pick up from Giannis because for me, he is my idol. He is the person that I look up to the most. Him and Rafa I would say. These two people are the people, like, I want to try and look like.

Giannis, he is an inspiration, not only because of his story and you know how it started. It's just that his focus and the way he does things during the match, in practice, off the court. Like the way he spoke to me a few times, it just makes me admire him even more.

He is just very unique. Like, I don't think there are many athletes like him around the world. I'm very grateful and thankful to have someone that I can speak to like him because he is going to dominate. He has been dominating, but I think he is very young, so he is going to



be dominating for the next few years.

Just to have someone like him, it's unbelievable because, I mean, I'm sure you admire him the same as I do. His mentality is different. He is unbelievable.

Q. Is he someone you can text, like, if you want advice? Have you done that before? Do you just wait until you guys meet or something? How does it work?

MARIA SAKKARI: We've texted a few times. But obviously he is very busy, and I'm not going to just be that annoying person just asking him for advices.

I know he is busy with his games and with his practices, with his family. I know that if it's an emergency, then I might reach out. But the fact that we had these chats already in the past, I always have them in my mind, and I always feel like he is the one that inspires me the most.

We're from the same country, so it's very big for us to have someone like him. As I said, I'm grateful. I'm thankful for having him and just having him as a role model.

Q. I wanted to ask you about the United Cup. Are you excited about playing that? What will it mean for you to be able to have one of the kind of lower-ranked Greek players - I know there's quite a bunch behind you - be part of that with you? I know you did play with Stefanos in the Hopman Cup but this is different because you get to have a woman as well. Talk a little bit about that.

MARIA SAKKARI: First of all, I think it's a great opportunity for all four players, or however many we enter the team. It's a great opportunity for the second players and third that they're going to witness something that is big, and, it's like on the big stage and see all the high-level players playing with us.

But mainly what I'm most excited about is Greece is a very small country, as I have mentioned many times. We will probably be the No. 1 seeds, if you know our rankings stay the same.

I think it's pretty special for our country like this to have. I want people back home to remember that because they've been very hard on me and Stefanos sometimes.

When we lost our finals last week, we get to the finals, and we don't win. They just forget that, God, we are from Greece, and we have two top-five players. Would you ever imagine that?

If we are the No. 1 or even 2 seed in the United Cup, I

think that's enormous. Just a country like Greece in front of all the big countries like the U.S. and England, I don't know, France, Germany. Just to have a country representing like - how can I say - the leader of that cup. It's big.

Q. Just in terms of starting off your tournament with an immediate rematch against Jesse, can you talk a little bit about that and what you think you'll need to do better? Was it just an energy issue? What do you need to do to turn that around?

MARIA SAKKARI: Obviously, it was energy, but I don't want to take anything away from her. She played a great tournament and a great match. But I believe that I can do better this time. Things are going to change from my side. Obviously it's a different court, different conditions, slower conditions, which it's different to Mexico.

I haven't really thought about what I have to change. I haven't practiced today, so I think this afternoon I'm going to just speak a little bit with Tom and see what we can do differently.

But, I mean, I don't expect any match here to be easy. It's going to be strange for both of us just to face each other again in just a week time. I believe that it's a different tournament, so we'll see how it goes.

Sorry I don't have a better answer for that.

Q. Then just in terms of I think you said your grandmother is coming.

MARIA SAKKARI: Yes, she's here.

Q. So you have your mom who played on the tour, and your grandmother is here. Can you just talk about how special that is, just having those three generations here at the Finals with you?

MARIA SAKKARI: I think it's great, and it's very nice to have obviously my parents, my sister, but this time also my grandmother. I promised her this last summer that if I was going to make it when I was going through all this tough moments, that she said, I'm going to come no matter where it is, even if it's in Australia or the U.S.

Then I kept my promise. When I qualified, I think she was pretty happy that she was going to come. I think she's also happy. She watches so much tennis. It's crazy. She wakes up in the middle of the night, not just to watch me, but to watch every single tennis match.

It's very nice. I think that gives me a lot of strength and a

lot of motivation to do well here.

Q. What for you is the significance of being part of this particular tournament because it is such a small field? It does reward those who had a strong season. What does it mean to you to have qualified for this event?

MARIA SAKKARI: As I said in the beginning, it's a reward for every single player here, just the reminder that you had a very good season.

No one makes this tournament if you haven't played good. Like, it doesn't come by luck just because it happened. It's just because you were consistent or not, or you had a few good results this year that gave you the ticket to the Finals.

I know that there are a few players, including me, that probably were not as consistent as last year, but still, you know, we had some good results, and we deserve to be here.

So I don't think anyone here is here by luck. It's just that we are the best eight of the sport right now.

Q. If I could ask you about another player. Iga has had a very impressive year. You have had success against her in matches. I'm wondering, A, how would you describe her as player, and B, what is the secret to success against her because you've had some success against her?

MARIA SAKKARI: I mean, there's no secret with any player. Obviously she has been playing some great tennis this year, and she has changed a lot of things mentally and tennis-wise.

As I said, there's no secret. There's a lot of respect from my side to her side. I know it's the same from her side to my side. So, you know, it's very exciting to have someone that young that actually does all these great things for the sport. But she's a human being. She's like everyone else in this room.

I believe that it takes someone that has something very special, like, in here to achieve all those things because it's not easy to handle all this pressure. But at the same time, as I said, she's a human being. You know, everyone respects her. She respects everyone around her. There's nothing more than that.

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