

Davis Cup Finals

Friday, 26 November 2021

Team Serbia

Novak Djokovic

Press Conference

N. DJOKOVIC/D. Novak

6-3, 6-2

Serbia- 2

Austria - 0

THE MODERATOR: Great performance today. Tell us a bit about how you felt out there.

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: I felt very good. I was locked in from the first point, determined to execute the game plan. Never faced Novak - it's funny when I say 'Novak', not too many around - never faced him in official match.

I saw that he possesses a really all-around game, playing at home, Davis Cup, he has a pretty good record in Davis Cup. He didn't have much to lose. He started playing that way. He was quite aggressive.

It took me some time to adapt to the pace, start kind of swinging through the ball myself. The crucial game was the eighth game of the first set, 4-3, new balls. I managed to put in a couple of extra returns, make him play, mix up the pace. After that, there was really no looking back. I just served well, moved great.

All in all, very good performance. I'm pleased that I managed to bring a win to my country.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. I know you have played in Abu Dhabi many years.

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Yes.

Q. Full stands there. We have experienced that. I'm curious, what are your thoughts? Some people say it's going to kill the tournament, not going to have any fans.

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: I'm sorry to interrupt you, but you have to speak a bit slower. You've been interrupting.



Q. You've been in Abu Dhabi many times. There are rumors that Davis Cup is going to Abu Dhabi. In your opinion, do you agree with views from people like Hewitt, others, who are saying that they think going to Abu Dhabi will kill the competition?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: I heard the rumors, too, but it's not confirmed. Obviously we have to wait and see.

Look, in the Middle East, there is a lot of interest for tennis and other sports, big competitions. Davis Cup historically has been the most important team competition. There was a lot of negative reactions towards the change of the format.

I understand why people reacted that way because traditionally we were used to having Davis Cup in a certain way. I have said few years ago that, in my opinion, the format, ideal format, is somewhere in between where we were two years ago and where we were before the format was changed.

I did not like that you play so many different ties throughout the year, kind of having those weeks. I just didn't feel that the format, the schedule, was really in favor of players. I was proponent for change. I was supporting the change.

But I didn't like the format we had two years ago where you have only one hosting nation hosting all 16 or 18 teams, whatever it was. I like the fact that now there are three different countries that are able to host at least group stages.

I would say why not more? Why not have six different countries host one group of three teams? We lost that with the change of format, the possibility for many countries in the World Group to host the tie. I think that is something that people have not reacted well to, and I understand. You need a Davis Cup competition for development of your own national tennis.

I would definitely support more diversity in terms of the hosting nations. Then I understand that you want to have the final four or final eight in a certain location. This is something that I personally don't have anything against.

Now when it comes to location, whether it's Abu Dhabi or

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anywhere else, that's something we have to wait and see officially when it comes out and then discuss. Now it's not official yet.

As I said, there is a lot of interest to bring Davis Cup or any other big tennis competition or sports competition to the Middle East where economically they're very strong and they can finance the big demands that you have for an organization of such an important event.

Now the question is whether you follow the money, so to say, or you follow the tradition, or you find a balance between the two. That's always the big question on anybody's mind. Of course, there are a lot of differences. People think one way or another. Some people think we should improve, that we should look forward, that we should progress. Some people think we should stick to what the Davis Cup as a competition or as a format was before.

I'm somewhere in between. I think you need to respect the tradition and the history, and you need to stick to the things that are recognizable that make this competition so important for the sport. At the same time you need to move forward and find new ways to improve the competition.

Q. Would you please reflect on today a little bit (indiscernible). What do you say, knowing you have won, but you could be (indiscernible). My second question would be about I heard on TV (indiscernible).

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Sorry, can you repeat? The first question I tried to understand, I think I do. Can you repeat just a bit slower because I have some problems to understand because you're being interrupted.

Q. This is about the present you got in the hotel, the special skis.

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Yes, yes, of course.

Q. Also your passion that you have for skiing. Can you talk about that a little bit more.

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: So the first question was related to how does it feel to be playing Davis Cup again.

I feel that being part of the individual sport, we always miss - at least that's my feeling and my opinion - playing team competitions. We have next ATP Cup. Those are the two big ones we have at the moment. Davis Cup obviously being the most historic one, the most important one in terms of the history itself and tradition.

I'm always very inspired and motivated to be in the team and play for my country. If I can contribute in a positive way on and off the court, I'll make myself available always.

The captain and the teammates know that. The federation knows that. I'll try to make myself available. It has nothing to do with anything else than just loving my country and playing for Serbia, for these colors.

The second part was about the skis. Yes, I did receive a wonderful present that is coming right now (laughter). The director is bringing it to me right now. The skis are ready. Here they are.

I want to thank SPURart for delivering these custom-made skis with me with a logo. I'm really impressed. I did not expect that. I'm an avid skier and have been competing since a young age. My father, uncle, aunt, they were all professional racers.

I did spend quite a lot of time on the mountains in Serbia. Skiing is deep in my heart, still probably the number one sport next to tennis, of course. I love the feeling of being on the mountains.

I'm honored. There is obviously symbolism of tennis here with the tennis racquet. The design is fantastic. I'm very thankful.

I also got a wonderful present from Innsbruck touristic organization, the association that gave me the coupon to actually come back in Austria and ski with Benjamin Raich, Olympic champion. That is something I will not definitely miss. I can't wait for the opportunity. I had a little chat with Benjamin yesterday, and we agreed hopefully next time when I'm around, next opportunity when it's presented, we'll be on the skis. That will be an amazing experience for me because, as I said, I'm a big skiing fan.

THE MODERATOR: From skiing back to tennis.

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Let's stick to skiing, please (laughter).

Q. Unfortunately we are back to silence in Innsbruck, no fans at all. Did you think you were going to play without any spectators?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Unfortunately we received those sad news a week or 10 days ago that we'll not have any crowds. That's not the news we wanted to hear, not just us but anybody really. Crowds are integral and essential part of this sport.

We are, after all, in the entertainment business, as well.



We are athletes, professional athletes, that have the privilege to really be playing the sport and living life from this sport, but at the same time hopefully bringing some positive emotions to the crowds that are coming, buying tickets, coming to watch you play.

I'm trying to always be very mindful of that. I was very sad when I heard the news. But in the end of the day, did not come as unexpected knowing what we've been through globally. It's not the first, hopefully maybe the last, but I doubt it will be the last time we play in front of the empty stadiums.

It's something that unfortunately now has happened quite a few times in the last 15 months. Look, it is what it is. There are people in this world that are struggling much more than us or anybody really from the professional sports. My empathy and compassion goes to everybody.

There are far more important things than professional sports. Obviously it's about health and people's lives. I pray that everyone will be fine. Obviously it's difficult that that will be reached, but at least that we try to collectively go out from this situation as soon as possible.

That's it. As an athlete, I always like to see crowds because I love feeding off that energy and interacting with people.

Q. I'm from Canadian television. Speaking with Vasek the other day, he was talking about the relationship that you have forged over the last couple of years. From your standpoint, can you tell us a little bit about your interactions, what kind of bond you have formed? Also on the business side with the players association, how far down the road you think you've achieved so far and what's next on that front?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: I love Vasek. He's a fantastic guy, great person, someone that is very passionate about tennis on and off the court.

We always got along very well, but especially in the last couple years obviously founding together the Professional Tennis Players Association that obviously has been quite a journey for both of us, got us to get to know each other better and to be closer and to really see how, I guess, synchronized we are with a lot of things that are happening in the tennis world.

We share a lot of things in common when it comes to how we see the future of tennis, what are the issues. It was a bold move from us. The time will tell whether it's right or wrong. We feel that it's the right move forward because players for quite a few decades did not have and still don't

have a hundred percent players association, which I think is essential. Vasek, as I said, is someone that is very committed, devoted, and passionate about these issues that we are facing and the challenges we have presented in front of us.

I'm there with him all along. I have his back. I know he has my back. We try to do something that we feel is right and talking and raising the awareness about especially lower-ranked players, their livelihoods.

It's a very long way, but I feel like the relationship that we have, that we both treasure, is going to help us both steer, hopefully along with many other people in these organizations, steer this organization in the right direction.

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