

# Guadalajara Open

Friday, 21 October 2022

Guadalajara, Jalisco, Mexico

## Maria Sakkari

Press Conference



M. SAKKARI/V. Kudermetova

6-1, 5-7, 6-4

THE MODERATOR: An emotional night for you, winning and qualifying for the WTA Finals. How are you feeling?

MARIA SAKKARI: I mean, feels good, of course. It was a very tough match. It was always going to be. Even the first set, it was 6-1, but it wasn't the real score because she had chances. Had to really play good, really had to stay solid.

Yeah, two birds, one stone (smiling).

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

**Q. In the stadium I heard fans saying we are seeing the best version of Maria. What do you think about it? How would you define your best version?**

MARIA SAKKARI: Well, I wouldn't say it's my best version tennis-wise. Maybe mentally, fighting-wise I've been very, very good the last four or five days. I believe that this is who I really am.

The last few months maybe they haven't seen a good Maria. Maybe now it's myself again. Probably also they like my fighting spirit and everything.

So, yeah, I would say that's what it shows.

**Q. I noticed you have a strong temper when something doesn't go well in the match. How have you been working on your self-control during your career?**

MARIA SAKKARI: We're not robots. We have emotions. We're going to snap and have moments where I get angry. The thing and the trick is how quick you just distract yourself from that moment. That's the thing I've been working the most lately. Actually, one of the things. It's just telling things to myself that can distract me from being angry, I would say.

**Q. I think today was the first day of the tournament that there really was a crowd. They were so loud. Is it hard for you to focus with all that noise? Do you like it?**

MARIA SAKKARI: No, it's great. It's very motivating and inspiring. You just want to stay on the court for as long as it takes in order for you to win.

I would say it only works in a good way. I mean, it works for me so far. Yeah, I love it.

**Q. We were in the stands. Beside us was a little girl with the same dress you used in the WTA Finals. She told me that you gave her that dress.**

MARIA SAKKARI: Last year.

**Q. I wanted to ask you, how is it for you to be a role model for all these girls, not just Greek girls, but Mexican girls, all over the world girls?**

MARIA SAKKARI: I mean, it's a very nice feeling. Especially these little girls. That little girl has lost her voice probably a hundred times since last year for me.

For me as a person, it just makes me feel so nice and good about what I'm doing, what I'm showing to everyone outside the tennis court.

I'm just being myself. I believe that if I can inspire girls and boys that far in the world, I've done something good in my life.

I have to say the support of the kids here is very special. They're very well-educated. It helps me just to get better.

**Q. How is it to keep your feet on the ground reaching the top of the rankings?**

MARIA SAKKARI: My secret I would say is just my parents educated me in a good way. Both of my parents started from zero and they built something very good and very special back home. They always had me and my siblings very grounded about how hard we have to work



and everything.

We never missed a thing. They were very giving to us. I think that made us to appreciate everything because it's nice to be grounded, just being yourself. I hate when people just change.

**Q. Tomorrow you're going to play Bouzkova. Both of you are very loved by the crowd. How will it be to have the crowd shared?**

MARIA SAKKARI: I mean, it's only fair in a semifinal to have a crowd that is half-half, supporting both. We both deserve it. It's going to be nice. It's not going to be hard for anyone. I think it's going to be a very nice atmosphere. I'm really looking forward to it.

**Q. Are you having a romance with the Mexican fans? You're wearing the Mexican national team shirt. Do you believe you have some sort of advantage, or Marie has the advantage because she just played a couple of games?**

MARIA SAKKARI: I'll answer your first question.

I think - I've said it so many times in press, I'm sure all of are probably bored to hear that - there is something special about this tournament, about the people, about how I feel about this place.

I told my friends here, my Mexican friends, that I'll be supporting Mexico in the World Cup because Greece did not qualify. I'll support my second favorite country.

About my recovery, that's why I work out so much, just to be ready for these kind of matches, after playing for so long. I need to sleep well because I slept very bad last night. I just need to get a good night's sleep. I'm going to give it all tomorrow.

**Q. On tonight's match, you're playing a big match, high-pressure match, you saved 14 of 15 break points, very tight match. That has to be something that feels very good in terms of being able to stand up to that pressure?**

MARIA SAKKARI: I know I had to come up with something very good every time I had a break point. It was always going to be tough. You know how good Veronika plays.

I had to just play with my heart and just be brave. Especially in the end, I had to force myself not to push the ball because when you get nervous and tight, some people overhit, some people like they push.

I had to tell myself to just go for it. 5-4 serving for the match, just hit the ball. That was my mentality from the first point.

I have to say there was a moment where I got a little bit nervous. But overall in the match I was pretty relaxed because I just made up my mind a few days ago that I might not make it to the Finals. I said, I'm just going to go for it and let's see what happens.

**Q. You've had this experience before, Indian Wells, win the semifinal, emotional, you got to come back and do it again. What experience do you take from those matches into tomorrow's match and potentially the rest of the weekend?**

MARIA SAKKARI: I haven't left all my emotions out. That was a lesson that I've learned. Yeah, Indian Wells, I was just empty I feel. I just had nothing to give in that final.

For now I'm just holding myself. I'm just going to enjoy after the tournament. There are a lot of things to enjoy. It was a very weird season. I think finishing the year like that, it's the best thing that could happen to me.

I think I'm proud of myself. My team is very proud of myself. My family, everyone around me.

**Q. On qualifying for the Finals, what does it mean for you? How different does it feel to do it this year compared to how you did it last year?**

MARIA SAKKARI: Correct me if I'm wrong, but I think it's a lot tougher to do it twice in a row than just do it once. That's what I'm mostly proud about.

Yeah, as bad as my season, like, after Indian Wells was, I still just gave myself this chance to finish the year strong. I think that's the best gift I can give to myself, just making it to Fort Worth. I'm really looking forward for that two-week period there.

**Q. Does it feel like now doing that, that you're going to Fort Worth, that you are going to finish top 10, does it change how things look in the rearview mirror?**

MARIA SAKKARI: I think I've learned a lot of things this year. It was a learning process. Not putting so much pressure on myself. Just being a little bit more kind when I had to.

What else did you ask me? Sorry.

**Q. Whether or not it puts your season in a different light now having done what you did.**

MARIA SAKKARI: I think I'm giving myself a chance to see things differently next season because I'm not going to be freaking out from the beginning of January. I'm just going to give myself a little bit more space to breathe.

I can have my bad moments. I'll be okay with that.

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