

Rolex Shanghai Masters

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Shanghai, China

Novak Djokovic

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. Talk about your success here in Shanghai. In 2008 you win your first Masters Davis Cup, it goes on to be ATP Finals, you won seven of them overall, now winning four titles here at this tournament. Talk about the great success you've had here over the years.

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Yeah, over the years it has been amazing tournament for me to be playing in Shanghai. As you referred, back in 2008 I won my first Masters Cup or World Tour Finals, at the time it was called Masters Cup. Other than the slam that I won that year, it was my biggest trophy. I felt, obviously, over the moon with that triumph.

The amount of support I've been getting since that year has been incredible in China, both Beijing and Shanghai. I just love coming back and performing in front of the crowd that always gives me great energy, great vibes. Every practice session it feels like playing a match, honestly, with the amount of people that is there screaming and really willing to show their support and show their love and passion for what I do.

So I feel very welcome, and that's probably the biggest reason why I decided to come here, to be honest with you, because I just feel good playing here, and feel like I'm at home. Probably, outside of my country, the biggest support that I've been getting anywhere in the world.

Q. As you know, fans love this intergenerational rivalry that you have going with Jannik and Carlos. You said after the US Open semi-final that it was a very, very difficult thing to compete with them over five sets. Do you like your chances against them over three sets, and other than the physicality, are there any other elements that are different between three and five sets in trying to beat them?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Well, I mean, the physicality is logically the biggest factor in best-of-three, rather than best-of-five. But it's all connected, obviously, with the mental part and the game-wise. If you're physically not at your hundred percent against these guys, you know, you

feel like you're half a step slower, and that affects the whole game. It affects the whole play, the rallies, and, you know, different aspects of the encounter.

So, yeah, that's what I said after US Open, because I really felt that playing best-of-five against these guys at the latter stages of the tournament makes it really challenging for me. I feel like I don't come in as fresh as they do in the semis. And that's okay. I mean, that's just a biological fact that eventually I have to accept.

I'm still working, you know, my hardest that I possibly can in the circumstances to challenge the guys or to challenge myself primarily, and really see how I can do on all the tournaments that I take part in. Of course, best-of-three, duration of the tournament of, you know, ideally seven days, but then you have most of the Masters events are played over almost two weeks. That's where I feel I have a better chance, you know, to make, to win a trophy or to make a significant result.

Other than those matches that I lost to these best two players in the world, I think I played really good tennis in Grand Slams, and reached semifinals in each one of them.

So it speaks about the level and the consistency, and so I'm pleased with that, of course. But at the same time there's a part of me that always is a winner, that, you know, wants to be the best. I've been fortunate to experience the greatest things in this sport across, you know, 20 years of my career.

So it does feel, you know, not ideal, I guess, when you really are playing big matches and you're losing against currently the best players in the world. But nevertheless, that's not discouraging me to keep going. I don't play tennis only for the sake of making results and winning trophies, there's, you know, several other reasons why I keep going.

One of them is obviously experiencing the love and support worldwide and still hoping to contribute by participating in the big events to the growth of the tennis overall as a sport.

That's what gives me motivation. It gives me also goose bumps every time I walk on the court and people call my name and cheer for me, so that's a beautiful feeling.

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Q. You made clear your goal at this point of your career. I'm wondering, at your home, your kids now that are grown enough, what they think? Do they tell you that, Dad, let's try another one, or it's okay like that? And then, I mean, Turin is one week, it's the best-of-three sets.

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Yeah, well my son, he plays tennis more and so he follows what's going on. He was really insisting on traveling with me to China. He wants to travel with me everywhere, but he has to do school, and it's not that simple. But he's really in love with tennis and the sport.

Yeah, my kids and my wife are, you know, my biggest supporters, and obviously when they are in the stadium you've seen them how they support, how passionately they care about and play with me every single point. So, of course, me seeing them on the stands, you know, it's even more inspirational. I love to have them. But at the same time, you know, the kids cannot live daddy's life, they have to live their own life. I try to support them and be there for them. Whether they feel like I have, yeah, they believe in me. They feel like, you know, they look at me as the best always. And so they, when I'm kind of down on myself, they remind me of the things that I have accomplished and why they still believe that I can do it. So their support is very meaningful to me.

You asked me about Turin. Yeah, it is a tournament where I had quite a bit of success in the last years, I won it two times, and, you know, hopefully I can be back, let's see. I don't make plans long-term anymore. I've said that, I said that in New York. So after Shanghai the only tournament I know I'm going to play is the one in Athens, and then let's see if I play Turin or not, I'm not sure yet.

Q. I want to ask you about, the Shanghai Masters has gone through many editions, with big upgrades every year and with more top players playing here every year. What are your thoughts on the role this tournament has played in developing and promoting tennis worldwide, or more specifically in China, and also promoting the city of Shanghai?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Yeah, well, look, we talked about the beginning, the fact that Shanghai hosted, I don't know, not sure exactly how many years, I think it was four or five years they hosted a Masters Cup, which is called World Tour Finals now. Then it became the Shanghai Rolex Masters 1000 event from 2009 onwards. Other than COVID years when it wasn't played, it was played every year.

I think it's a very important tournament for promotion of our sport globally, but particularly in Asia, in China and Asia and this part of the world, you know, that maybe doesn't necessarily follow certain tournaments that are played in some other continents. So it's important that there are big tournaments like this that promote tennis, and attract more attention to the sport for young people in China. China is, I mean, it's the biggest country in the world in terms of population, with India. Chinese people love racquet sports, we know that. So there's a long history and tradition and culture of tennis and ping pong and the other racquet sports. We know that.

So it's great, it's fantastic. You can see that there's a lot of excitement for the tennis in Shanghai, but also in Beijing. I mean, I haven't played Beijing since a long time, but I had a great time in Beijing, great success in my career. Yeah, I just think it's a fantastic tournament that should keep on going.

And we'll see. You know, there's also quite a bit of interest to organize a WTA tournament. I mean, China, I mean, schedule-wise, has many more women's tournaments. The men's tournaments, obviously, historically the biggest ones have been Beijing and Shanghai, which are amazing. You can see, as you said, all the best players in the world have been playing traditionally in both of these tournaments.

Q. Do you agree with the criticism of the schedule that's been made this week by Alcaraz, Swiatek, and Coco Gauff? And sort of linked to that, do you sort of fancy your chances in a rematch against Jannik Sinner, given he's just finished playing?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: I'll answer your second question first. I would love to have a chance to play Jannik. That means that I'll reach the semifinals (laughing), which will be great. We'll see. Obviously, I mean, he's been winning most of the matches that we played against each other lately. We played finals last year here, it was a good match, so hopefully I get my chance again.

Can you just tell me exactly what they were complaining about when it comes to schedule? What exactly about the schedule?

Q. I mean, just sort of that there's not enough time to rest. Alcaraz has spoken that something has to be done about the schedule. Basically that it's too packed, there's too many tournaments, the season's too long, and it doesn't give players enough time to properly recover.

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Okay. Well, I was personally against



the extension of the days of duration of the Masters 1000 events, right? I felt from the very beginning I was against it. Actually, even when I was in the council, I think I was at the time president of the council, so I was not supportive of that. I think for the players it's not good.

From one perspective you could say, I mean, for me at my age right now, to have the days between the tournaments is good. But I think overall for most of the players it just takes away the days in the schedule, in the calendar. Personally, I'm not supportive of that.

I understand that there is upside to the tournaments and so forth, but as a player I never liked that. So I do empathize or sympathize with players who are against that, because now they are realizing, I guess, that it's not really great.

But at the same time, look, you know, you always have, it's an individual sport, so there are choices to be made. In the end of the day you can still make choices. I see some players maybe say there are rules imposed and etcetera. But there are rules imposed for bonus. So you can miss the bonus, but it's the choice that you are willing to make if you want to play less. But then there are exhibitions as well that players are signing up for, so it's a little bit contradictory.

Yeah, I guess I've been talking about this topic for so many years, you know, this is not first time. And people who know me and know my press conferences and my time in the council, they know that more than 15 years ago I was talking about us needing to come together and reorganize the schedule and the calendar. Even way before the 30-year deal plan came to realization with Masters events.

But, you know, it's a very long topic, so I don't know where to start, where to finish, to be honest. It's very complex, it's not that simple, you know. I don't want to sound like I'm supportive or not supportive, because there's different elements that you have to take in consideration. The monopoly that has been created in this sport has been very strong for the last, you know, three, four decades. And there are people who just don't want to change things in our sport, you know, for the better, in terms of when it comes to the players' welfare. You know, because everybody works in their own interest. And that's logical, I guess, business sense.

In the end, as a player and someone that has been playing on the highest level for more than 20 years, I can say that the players are not united enough. Players are not participating enough when they should be. So they make the comments and they complain, and then they go away. And then if something is wrong, after a certain amount of time they come back again. But you have to invest the

time, you have to invest energy yourself, not your agent, not your team, not your parents, not anybody, yourself, to dedicate yourself to understand how the system works, to understand what are the things that can be done to be reversed, to be improved in terms of the players' interest.

For that to happen you need the top players particularly, you know, to sit down, roll up their sleeves, and really care a bit more about participating in understanding all of the hot topic, I would say. Because going out in the media and talking about this and that, okay, it might stir up some energy or some attention. But in the end of the day it's not going to change, nothing is going to change, you know? I know it from my personal experience, trust me. So, yeah, it's quite a complex topic.

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