

# China Open

Friday, September 27, 2024

Beijing, China

## Zhang Shuai

Press Conference



ZHANG SHUAI/E. Navarro

6-4, 6-2

THE MODERATOR: Congratulations on your win today. How special is it to win here today in Beijing?

ZHANG SHUAI: Yeah, another great win for me career because everybody know I have long time not winning the singles match. Since last year after Australian Open, after Lyon, I didn't win any matches for singles.

When I'm back to the China Open, when I'm standing on these two beautiful courts, a lot of good memory come. When I'm 20 years old, 15 years ago, I could beat No. 1 on these courts, why I cannot do one more?

When I'm 20 years old, I have no any experience. On this court, against the best women's tennis player, I have no idea how to beat her. I don't know the feeling. Only nervous. Then I can be great job.

So after 15 years, I have a lot of experience. Also I play a lot the match. Like when we on court, they say I beat eight time top-10 player. I want one more, even more and more. I focus myself. We training hard every day. I know what's my weapons. I just keep going every point by point, be patient. Yeah, good result coming.

THE MODERATOR: Questions in English.

**Q. You've had these situations where you win your first match here 15 years ago, you beat the No. 1, you lose 14 Grand Slams, beat No. 2, you make the quarterfinals of the Australian Open. Now 24 matches you lose, you beat the No. 6 seed here. What is the secret doing that, going from cold to hot kind of overnight?**

ZHANG SHUAI: I think maybe that's my life (smiling). Yeah, I like to give to everybody surprise. If I keep winning, everybody feel like nothing surprise.

I mean, I really want to win every week, for sure.

Sometimes when you get injury, when you getting older, you can't control many things. But if nothing change, is training hard, working hard, that's the key.

I think nothing secure. Only the keys of working hard day by day. You can see no one without working hard comes feeling easy on this court. I try my best. Still waiting for the one winning for singles like almost two years, one and a half years.

Also I think the special things is I have five years not back to the Chinese season for any tournament. I always play really good in China, in Japan, in Korea, the whole Asian season. Also I grew up from the Tianjin, Beijing, this area. The court, the weather, the air, everything I feel so comfortable. I play very natural. I can play Zhang Shuai tennis. That's totally different than when I'm on clay, on grass, States, the hard court. That's totally different. I can play best my tennis. That's I think little different.

When you go clay, you have to learn how to play clay. Even sometimes I can win some match, sometimes I can play well on grass, but when I go there, I have to start beginning, start from the easy, like the kids learn tennis.

When I'm back to Beijing, play China Open, I feel I don't need to go back. I start from here. So that's easy to show you best.

**Q. You said you like to surprise people. You definitely did that today. I would like to know if this was a surprise to you or this was a result you expected? If you could expand on your mentality going into the match...**

ZHANG SHUAI: You on court today, right? I see you (smiling).

Yeah, I mean, I don't know. I always try to respect to anybody. When we on court, we are opponents. When we outside court, we are like be the friend.

The big things is I have a lot of friends. They always supporting me. Not only friends, but when I'm back to the locker room, everybody jumping, C'mon, Shuai, I'm so



happy for you. They hug me. Even though go to shower, nothing, they coming to, like, yeah (smiling).

I feel like they say couple days ago, three days ago, everybody when I'm missing the match point, they feel like, C'mon, she really need this point, give her this win.

I feel so warm from the other player, coach.

When I lost to Ash Krueger at US Open, her coach tell me, You must continue play singles, you can play really good. You level still top. You can't quit. You must be continue play.

Yeah, he gave me a lot, lot motivation. He tell me how good I am, yeah.

Also when I play Dasha at the Miami, when I lost, almost three hours the match, finish, she say, You still top, top player, so you will be back very soon.

I don't know. I waiting for one win another six months. But still I feel very, very, very happy. My first win in China Open, yeah, that's the best result (smiling).

THE MODERATOR: Questions in Chinese.

**Q. You posted a picture of a match with Safina. When you were searching for this picture last night, what were you feeling? Any words you want to say to yourself 15 years ago, to that little girl?**

ZHANG SHUAI: Well, this time in Seoul I was going through pictures 15 years ago because I saw people I played together 15 years ago as a teenager: the Korean players, the tournament director, the coaches. We worked together as junior players. They said, We could not believe that, Zhang Shuai, you are still here on court, and those players who were together 15 years ago already retired.

They are really proud of me. They feel that. We are one generation. They gave me great memories and recollections. So starting from Seoul, I was thinking about what happened 15 years ago. I was staying at Lotte Hotel because 15 years my first tournament in Seoul was staying at that hotel. So those scenes came back to me very vividly. I found great memories, great momentum. I met good friends. We went to amusement park, with great Korean food.

They said to my regret, We do not have any pictures. On my computer, I searched for these old pictures and shared those pictures with them.

Also, when I was doing that, I saw pictures in the China

Open 15 years ago. That is how I found that picture. All those great pictures came back to me.

At the time I was saying I couldn't believe back then I could beat the world No. 1. Back then I couldn't get any wins in matches in the international arena. But in the China Open I got my first victory on the WTA Tour. The next one, my first win over the world No. 1.

I don't know how many opportunities I would have to play a match in the China Open, but 15 years later I'm still here. It's already very good. I can't believe that after all these years, all of these coming back to me again in the Lotus Court, another great moment came back to me.

I would say to me 15 years ago that it has been a great journey. Those 15 years in my life would be very difficult for a general person because it would be very difficult for anyone to insist you could have enjoyed other aspects of life because it has been very, very difficult and challenging.

**Q. Everything started to improve seems like since the US Open. Your level came back. What improved? What actually clicked for you?**

ZHANG SHUAI: During the Olympics I was feeling better. I was in hot form. Including in the grass season, I was playing very well. Since the French Open, the mixed doubles, we were on Court 3. We were transferred to another court. Do you remember that? We were showing really good form in that match. It was in the mixed doubles, in the doubles. At the time I was trying to prepare for the Olympics.

My goal was that in the first half of the year I would focus on the doubles. My partner, these athletes, these players have been encouraging me. They were saying, These girls are playing really well, I want to play mixed doubles with her. Ever since, I was receiving encouragement as well as positive messages from these really good men's singles player, that they want to partner with me in the mixed doubles next year. These are great, encouraging messages.

They would ask me who are you partnering with in the US Open, in the clay season, in the grass season next year. I would say that I will play with who and who. They would say, Oh, you two would make a really good partnership.

These messages are really positive to me because I understand that they appreciate what I can do in a mixed doubles or doubles match.

In the US Open I partnered with a really good player, with a great performance. Our goal was to be Grand Slam

champions. Of course, that was our goal. Back then, we made promises to each other. We were really committed.

When we were playing, it was a very long battle. When we shook hands after a match, it was all respect to each other. We would say to each other, I wouldn't want to play against you anymore. I would love to stand on the same side as you so we could play together.

Since 2019, we've been waiting for five years. But luckily we can still keep playing together, even though we were not as good as we were in our prime or five years ago. We were at a high point in our career.

But it doesn't stop us from being determined in winning the matches. So when we are on court, we understand we are back.

Getting a victory brings you confidence. But beating a good player, a Grand Slam champion, this kind of confidence boost is something you cannot imagine.

We were in the final of the US Open. In my mind, we were champions because on our way, we beat many players. I need to change my mentality, my mindset. Before I would be really sad if we lost in a final because you lost, without the title. But now I've changed. I've changed my mindset.

I would say that we are the champions in our minds. In the future we can still be champions. Today is a new chapter. We are putting the final of a Grand Slam as a starting point.

She was a little bit disappointed, but I think this kind of partnership can bring comfort to each other. Coming from Seoul to Beijing, every day she would send me messages to encourage me. So these are really good messages to keep me up. I think a great friendship can bring me positive energy that can bring me up from a low point in my career.

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