

China Open

Sunday, September 29, 2024

Beijing, China

Zhang Shuai

Press Conference



ZHANG SHUAI/G. Minnen

6-2, 6-3

THE MODERATOR: Congratulations. Into the round of 16 here at the China Open. Talk about your emotions about reaching this stage in one of your favorite tournaments.

ZHANG SHUAI: Yeah, I mean, we play great match today. I play, yeah, very, very, I mean, great tennis today. I have long, long, long time not get this feeling.

When I play my best, I can win a lot of matches. I know that. But sometimes still I have not feeling well, like this tournament.

Yeah, I just want keep simple and keep going, keep winning, yeah.

THE MODERATOR: Questions in English, please.

Q. What is the difference between playing well and losing a lot of matches, like you said you had played well before but came up losing, and now you're playing well and winning...

ZHANG SHUAI: Yeah.

Q. What's the difference?

ZHANG SHUAI: I think the big difference for me is the court, the surface, very different. At China Open, this court I think like Philippe Chatrier for Rafa. When I'm on this court, I have everything.

I mean, this court, because I grew up from Tianjin, Beijing, I play this hard court more than 20 years every day. I think my tennis is so natural on this court, I can play my best tennis on this court.

When some court is similar this one, I can have good results. We always say, Oh, that's little similar like China, like Beijing or Tianjin, the court, the surface. That's why I play also very well in Tokyo and Seoul.

Yeah, I think that's the big difference.

Q. You face Magdalena Frech next, who you've beaten once before on hard courts. How are you going to prepare for that matchup?

ZHANG SHUAI: Couple years ago we had some match before, but it's couple years ago. Nothing can, yeah, think about that. Even last week, I couldn't win match. Everybody thought I think, Oh, Shuai in the draw. Maybe everybody want to play against me. Now, actually no one want to play against me. Just one week, after one match, totally different.

I don't think too much about before. I don't think too much about future. I just enjoy every moment and think about today, now, yeah.

Q. You mentioned on the court that you know Greet Minnen very well, that she hosted you.

ZHANG SHUAI: Yeah.

Q. Can you tell us more details about that, like when did that happen and...

ZHANG SHUAI: You know, three years ago in France, Angers, and Limoges, between these tournaments, not easy to go there because we are not speak any French. She's very, very nice to us.

The first day we say, Okay, let's practice together and play some points. She 6-Love kill me (smiling).

But the tournament is funny. I reach to the final singles. She reached to the final, won the tournament doubles. She play first match, I play next her.

She has car. Because she from Belgium, she driving to there, Angers and to Limoges.

We say, We have no idea how to go there.

She said, Okay, I waiting for you.



Me and my coach, when we finish the singles match, she is driving all the way down to there.

We say, like, Oh, you can go, because if you waiting for us, that's too late.

She said, It's okay, I waiting for you.

Already she called, she wait for me at the hotel lobby.

I say, Okay, thanks.

After the match, she said, No rush, take your time.

Oh, my God, she give me so much warm, you know? Finish the match, she driving I think three, four hour to there. Already midnight.

Also during the time, I have three years traveling everywhere. She always so nice, say, You can come into Belgium, you can stay with us, we can training together.

I feel like, Oh...

She's super nice girl. Even I beat her today, she say, Oh, you deserve the win. I'm so happy for you.

Yeah, I mean, I have no words how to say how good she are, yeah.

Q. I didn't quite understand the Rafael Nadal reference. I think you were joking about something. Can you explain it again, please? If it's a good joke, just tell us again.

ZHANG SHUAI: I said when I'm on this court, like Rafa on Philippe Chatrier, feeling so good (smiling). I have no idea. I don't know why, but every time when I play China Open, I play so good, so well. Maybe because this court and my tennis is so working, like Rafa on French Open (smiling).

THE MODERATOR: Questions in Chinese.

Q. I think your career is like a spring: you have losing streaks, then you're back in the deeper run in the China Open. Physically, mentally, are you ready to bounce back? Do you have a goal for this tournament?

ZHANG SHUAI: My career is very long. I went through different generations. With such a long career, with different generations, the styles are quite different. We have to know that. You can tell that, if you have been following me for so many years, you will understand that

my style has been evolving.

In this process of changing and evolving, it takes time to adapt, to learn new things. You change from the initial stage, then you go into a better stage, then you master something. Sometimes you get it, sometimes you don't.

When you finally can really master it, it will take a long time. But I think I'm really quick in this process. Some people might retire in this process.

In my generation, it wasn't like that, like Zheng Qinwen, had great advantage. I wasn't like that. I was trying to follow the trend of tennis in each generation. You have to know that. To be me here, standing here, it's a miracle.

When I was a teenager, I couldn't really hold my balance very well. Being able to play aggressive tennis like what I do today, in the three matches, I'm really, really happy with what I did in the previous three matches. This is the best.

In the past 30 years, I've been changing my holding position, how I hold my racquet. Sometimes, a lot of times, I'm really puzzled, how do I play tennis well? When I changed to a style, that style was outdated already...

I was never able to get the best power I want. I want to make some breakthroughs. I want to make big changes. To be able to do like what I did today, I'm really, really happy.

Q. You are a representative of your generation of Chinese players with good performances on the tour. We saw great breakthroughs from the men's players. We have three in the top 100. We see Bu in the quarterfinals. Did you say congratulations to them? What are your views regarding the men's tennis of China?

ZHANG SHUAI: To me it was never my generation. I was a person in the transition. Those other players are really good. They are the ceiling of our industry. I wasn't able to do that, be at the top. Those people, in my generation or before me, now they are retired.

Well, I feel like I am representing my generation when I'm on court. They say I am the pride of my generation, even though I wasn't doing as well as I expected. I couldn't compete against those previous top players or the young players in this generation. I don't want to give up.

Every person has her dream, and dreams can be very different. You can fight for it, fight for your own dreams. I also have my own dreams. I am fighting for it. I am working toward it. That's why you see that I won a

championship in a Grand Slam. I used to train in singles. I did not do doubles or mixed doubles. But then I felt I want to be a Grand Slam champion. If I had a bigger gap in the singles, then I make the transition into doubles and the mixed doubles. That was one way for me to win a championship in a Grand Slam. That is one way for me to reach my dream in a different way.

That is why I want to tell everyone, every tennis player, do not give up on your dreams. Even if you can't do it, you can change your way. You will feel that it's worthwhile.

In my own career, there were so many failures. I still have this sense of achievement. In the Paris Olympics, I was really proud that I can represent China three times. The number alone makes me proud.

Being into the US Open final, I was also proud. Even though I was seeing a losing streak in the singles, I was closing the gap against the top players. I'm getting closer and closer to a win.

So when I eventually had a win, I wasn't surprised. My friends, my colleagues, were not surprised. They congratulated me. Even though they were not in Beijing, they sent a video, they tried to video call me.

When I was having a losing streak, they were telling me that, Eventually your win will come. We have full confidence in you. With so much effort in your career, you will need just a little bit more patience for your win.

Q. The Australian Open 2016 as well as the China Open 2024 are both meaningful to you. Mentality-wise, do you feel any difference? You are a good girl on the WTA Tour. Why are you so popular?

ZHANG SHUAI: To answer your second question, not only me is a good girl on the WTA Tour. There are so many good girls. Minnen is a good girl. Coco is a good girl. They are good girls on the tour because we are very similar. We are considerate. We are heartwarming people. That's who we are.

If you're a cold person, you ignore people, how can you have good friendships? There's no communication, right? There's no friendship. This person doesn't need your comfort either.

On court we can be aggressive, but off court we are girls. It's unlike what you see on court. We are not enemies, like what you assume, like soldiers, warriors. We're warriors on court. Off court we are not that aggressive.

We also need comfort when we lose. We also need

encouragement. When we are injured, sick, we also need help. So don't assume that we are all warriors. We are just ordinary girls. Because of this job, we have to be aggressive on court.

The failures were meaningful to me. I always reflect on my failures. Why did I lose? What was the critical point? Like what I did in the US Open, if I did one point well, I could probably turn it around. But that doesn't matter because I have been learning, I have been improving.

We start from elementary school. Everybody is the same. You don't get a 100 score in each exam. It doesn't mean you fail if you get 99 or 98. The most important thing is what you learn from this, then you graduate from first grade, grade two, grade three. We are improving.

It's like our phone, be it iPhone or Huawei, you get different generations. The generations evolve because we can fix the loopholes and the problems in each phone. It's like what we do in matches. We see a problem, we resolve it.

I fix the problem of what I did in the 24-match losing streak. If I can resolve the 24 to 28 issues, that make a stronger Zhang Shuai today. Each breakthrough, each failure might be a result. I have upgraded from many versions. That is why you see me winning three matches.

You need to be smart to resolve these issues, to see a newer version of yourself.

Q. (No microphone.)

ZHANG SHUAI: The 24-match losing streak, that was one year. The previous record was a 14-match losing streak over eight years. The emotional outburst was much bigger than this round. I am more mature now.

Q. In your match a few days ago, someone was shouting to you, Don't worry, Zhang Shuai. That might have affected you. We heard someone shouting that you should serve more wide, and you listened to her. Regarding public etiquette, what are your suggestions?

ZHANG SHUAI: I was talking to my coach, If you want me to do something, just talk to me directly. Do not say to me do not do something, avoid something. If you just say it this way, you might just do something wrong. Just tell me directly. Be more powerful, be direct to do something like this.

So I think this is a strategy, how you say things, being positive or negative. It can be a kid. That would be extremely helpful serving wide. Serving wide, that was

correct. Even a kid knows that. Listen to the kid. That was correct.

Being correct or wrong has nothing to do with age, has nothing to do with experience. So listen to a kid. You should reflect on yourself, whether we are making things more complicated.

When somebody says, Don't worry, don't hurry, I think it's that person being worried, it's not me. That person keeps repeating, Don't worry, don't hurry. I think that was a senior lady who said that.

I was talking to myself, I should stop this person, otherwise I would be worried hearing that. Hearing her repeating that phrase multiple times, that would make me impatient.

It's nothing personal against that person. I appreciate her support. But I stopped her. I stopped my coach. I stopped my parents on the same ground.

I don't want these kind of negative comments. I might stop this person in an aggressive way, but I'm encouraging other people to give me suggestions in a more positive way. So next time if you want to suggest something to me, do it in a direct way.

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