

Yarra Valley Classic

Sunday, 31 January 2021

Melbourne, Victoria, Australia

Ashleigh Barty

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. Talk us through how important it is for you to get some good matches under your belt before the Australian Open starts next week.

ASHLEIGH BARTY: Yeah, obviously it's exciting for all of tennis to be back, I suppose. Obviously getting a few matches hopefully under my belt before the Australian Open starts will be good.

But I think overall all the players are very excited and very grateful that we've got tennis back and we have an Australian summer.

Q. Did it feel any different out there walking around the grounds? Does it feel like a different scenario?

ASHLEIGH BARTY: Yeah, I think it is different. I think there's been an adjustment from everyone. I think certainly underneath where we do all of our preparation and kind of all where the scorers are and where the players go feels quite normal. But obviously with the lesser crowds, less people around the courts, just generally moving around the site is a little bit easier.

But it's a definite adjustment. I know come deeper into the tournament, into the Australian Open, the crowds will be here to the capacity they're allowed without a doubt. So I think it's going to be a really nice vibe once people start rolling in.

Q. Similar thing on the difference. For yourself, how different has this break been compared to the other break that you had?

ASHLEIGH BARTY: No, they're exceptionally different. I think very different circumstances. Obviously this break was forced in a way. Obviously it was still the decision of myself and my team for us not to have played last year for an extended period. But obviously very different circumstances to my previous time when I had a lengthy delay.

Look, it's really nice to be back now. Like I said, I've been kind of a little bit impatient the last two or three months knowing that the summer was coming, the summer was coming, getting excited to start and play

again. Obviously I love playing in Australia. Personally I'm really grateful and excited for the opportunity again to play here.

Q. I know you haven't played an official match for 11 or 12 months. I know this country, Australia, really has a strict rule against coronavirus. As a foreigner, I don't know much about what kind of situation you have for one year. Could you explain a little bit about your situation.

ASHLEIGH BARTY: Yeah, obviously everyone has had a bit of a different situation, a unique situation. But the laws in Australia have been very strict. I think as a country, as a whole, it's why at the moment our cases are quite low, the levels are very low, which has been fantastic.

But there's the understanding that we have taken the strict lockdown. The government has been quite quick to act on any and all cases, which having not been around the rest of the world, I'm unsure of what it's like, so it's hard for me to comment on that.

I know as Australians, it's been quite a strict policy. I think everyone has respected it. Everyone has accepted it. As a country and as a whole, I think we've done exceptionally well with what we've been thrown at the last 12 months.

Q. I heard that you couldn't even see your coach because of border restrictions between Melbourne and Victoria and Queensland.

ASHLEIGH BARTY: Yeah, with Queensland. I didn't see Tyz for six months, from March until October. He came up to Brisbane and had to do two weeks in quarantine to get into Brisbane. At the time the borders were closed. For us, that was an adjustment, of course. For Tyz to have that commitment to do two weeks in quarantine, to then come and do a lengthy training block that we did up in Brisbane was fantastic.

Obviously it's challenging for everyone. But that was the rules we lived by. We respected them. We were abiding by them. Now we've got the opportunity to play and move quite freely down here in Melbourne, as all the other players have now that they've done their two-week quarantine.

Q. Because of how strict the rules were that you all abided by, do you feel like in this sports-mad state that as excited as people are to have this event, they're kind of conflicted, there's a bit of worry, like are we tempting the fates by bringing in all these people and risking another outbreak?

ASHLEIGH BARTY: Yeah, I think personally I can completely understand what maybe a little bit of the concern that a lot of the Melbournians had. Obviously they've had an extremely rough period over the last six or 12 months, probably the harshest of all the states around Australia. I can completely understand that, and I feel for them.

I lived down here for 18 months. I have a lot of friends down here, was chatting to them throughout the year. It was pretty heartbreaking to know what they were going through. I can completely understand that, which is why the rules were put in place, which is why the players coming from international arrivals and internationally across the world had to respect that.

I think they have, honestly. I know even for us from Queensland, we had to keep an eye on the borders. Obviously they can shut down quite quickly, so we had to adjust and be quite fluid, as well.

I can certainly understand from a Victorian and Melbournian perspective. Overall it's pretty amazing to think of where Victoria was five, six months ago to where we are now. It's quite remarkable. It's a testament to everyone down here, respecting the rules and living by the rules that were put in place by the government.

Q. You had a lot of time back in Brisbane to watch your beloved Tigers. Seeing them, does that keep the competitive juices flowing as a fan of that, then to get back into your own competition?

ASHLEIGH BARTY: Yeah, overall I'm a competitive person. I bring competition into my training, into my hobbies. Certainly watching the Tigers from a fan's perspective was incredible.

I never thought I'd see the day where there would be a grand final at the Gabba, that I'd be home to watch it and the Tigers were in it, as well. The stars aligned for me in a fan's perspective with football.

It was nice to be home. I felt like I got to do a lot of things last year that I don't get to do while I'm traveling, so I certainly had to enjoy that and take the silver lining for the cards that were dealt.

Q. Do you think having to do the 14-day quarantine is an advantage for you as has been suggested?

ASHLEIGH BARTY: Yeah, I think it's a different preparation for everyone. I know the WTA have done a fantastic job bringing in that additional tournament for those that were stuck in quarantine, giving them a few extra days to prepare, which is incredible I think. That's probably been really well-received from all of the girls, both those that were in the hard lockdown, those that were moving freely around, and also those that were in the quarantine where they had the four or five hours out a day where they could practice.

I think overall it's as fair an outcome as you can possibly expect. I think just having to understand the rules that the government have put in place in Australia, they've been the same rules for the whole year. I think whether we're tennis players or -- doesn't matter what profession you're in; I think you have to live by the rules, abide by the rules that have been put in by the government.

I think for me it's not an advantage, it's not a disadvantage. It just is what it is. It's a situation that we're dealing with now. I think in a week's time when everyone is preparing for the Australian Open, everyone will be ready to go regardless of their preparation.

Q. Extra expectations or expectations on you heading into the Australian Open?

ASHLEIGH BARTY: Not my own. Maybe from you guys. But that's on you, that's not on me (smiling).

Q. Was Jen in hard lockdown?

ASHLEIGH BARTY: Yeah, she was.

Q. And so for her, she's obviously played a competitive match probably before a lot of the other people that were in the hard lockdown. How is she going and how did she find it, out there going to a tiebreaker?

ASHLEIGH BARTY: I mean, it was great for Jen to get out. I think she enjoyed it, first and foremost. She struck a few balls yesterday. When we warmed up this morning, she was flushing them. I think for her it was nice to get out there. Obviously for us as a new doubles partnership, it was nice to keep things really simple today and just try to do the basics well.

Yeah, Jen is the ultimate professional. She was ready to go. We certainly enjoyed it.

Q. What was the worst and the best things about the last year for you? When you got down here, what was the first thing you did? Go to the favorite coffee shop or what?

ASHLEIGH BARTY: Oh, the best things, I think, was that I got to spend time with my family. I got to see my nieces

and my nephew grow. I got to spend time with them. Obviously it's always a really important part of my life.

As for the worst thing, well, there was nothing. I think I was extremely grateful for the position, the situation that I was in at home. I absolutely took advantage of all the opportunities that I had at home. There was simply for me no worst thing. It was a great year. Of course, I would have loved to have played tennis. I would have loved to have played professionally. But that was a personal decision for me.

I took the opportunity to stay at home and spend time with my family. I think there was nothing bad that came out of 2020 from a personal sense for me.

Q. When you got here, what was the first thing you did?

ASHLEIGH BARTY: I can't remember. Yeah, I mean, probably just went to the hotel and unpacked. Nothing fancy for me. We just do what we do. Went and got a coffee, practiced. That's all.

Q. A question about playing at home in Australia. It's been 11 months. Last year you came in, a lot of hoopla, a lot of attention, good success in Adelaide and Melbourne. This year jumping back into things, right back in the middle of the Aussie circus. Does it feel the same? Does it feel different? Do you still feel the same chatter that surrounds you when you play on home soil?

ASHLEIGH BARTY: Yeah, I think it's excitement more than anything. I feel excited. I feel excited as I've ever been, as eager as I've ever been to get out here and play.

Drawing on the memories from last Australian summer, they're great memories. It was a hugely successful summer. So I think we just draw from those memories. We stick to our processes and enjoy it. This is a time of year that I love. Like I said, I'm so grateful that we have the opportunity to do it all again.

So from our perspective, we come out here and do what we do. We do it with a smile on our face. But we're certainly eager and driven and excited this year to get underway again.

Q. You are the world No. 1, but you haven't played for almost a year. Do you feel favorite for the Australian Open?

ASHLEIGH BARTY: Yes and no. I feel like I've done all the work. I feel like I'm well-prepared. I certainly don't feel like I'm more of a favorite than anyone else. We had a fantastic 2019. I feel like we deserved to be world No. 1.

I think we've done the work, and obviously not playing last year could have affected that, but for me I feel like we're here, we're ready to play, we're well-prepared and excited to play.

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