

# Yarra Valley Classic

Sunday, 31 January 2021

Melbourne, Victoria, Australia

## Venus Williams

Press Conference



V. WILLIAMS/A. Rus

6-1, 6-3

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Tell us your thoughts on the match today.

VENUS WILLIAMS: It was great to get back on the court. It's been quite a few months. Definitely not easy to play the first one. Still finding your footing. As you know, it's a sprint out here on the WTA. Everyone is super talented. I was really happy to play pretty well.

**Q. You looked super energized out there. Blistering groundstrokes, fist pumping. It did not look like the first round of a lead-up event to the Australian Open. Why do you think that was? Do you think you were just so glad to be back playing in front of a crowd, or what fed that?**

VENUS WILLIAMS: Yeah, it was nice to have a crowd (smiling). I think it's just going to continue, I imagine. But, yeah, you spend a lot of time training so it feels good to execute your shots in the match, so... Yeah.

**Q. What does it mean to be back at Melbourne Park after playing here so many years and particularly after the last year with the pandemic?**

VENUS WILLIAMS: It's amazing. Really, the whole process of making this happen was really huge, to say the least. Like I said on the court, I was really grateful for Tennis Australia, I'm grateful to be here, and I want to try to enjoy the moment while I compete well and I'm happy so far that it's been done in a way that everyone is healthy. So far, so good.

Yeah, just excited.

**Q. What is it about this tournament, the Australian Open, that means a lot to you?**

VENUS WILLIAMS: I just love Australia. So first of all, I just like being here. I never leave early. I usually always hang around after, you know, if it's not the result I wanted. So I just enjoy myself.

But of course it's a major and the big challenge of playing the Australian is you just have to start at a sprint. I just don't know that many sports where the first and second tournament you play you have to play a major event. Tennis is probably the most challenging sport on the planet in that sense. Yeah, that definitely makes it very special to be able to start out on the right foot right at the beginning.

**Q. What are you looking forward to most about being back in Melbourne?**

VENUS WILLIAMS: Trying to win a match. I was happy today (smiling).

You know, there's got to be a winner and there's got to be a loser. Of course my aspiration is to be the one winning and try to still learn when I win, and if I don't, learn from that, too.

**Q. You can live a life fairly open in Florida, it seems, there are fewer restrictions maybe than elsewhere. What does your life look like in Florida? Do you venture far afield, or are you pretty much just self-isolating as much as you're able to?**

VENUS WILLIAMS: I just wear my mask wherever I go, so wherever that may be, the mask is on.

I keep the social distance six feet. Florida, like you said, does have less restrictions so you may be able to go a place or two more than other places, but as long as, you know, there is distance, well ventilated, mask on, those are kind of my standards.

So far it's worked out for me.

**Q. People may not know, but you would be considered at risk with the autoimmune disease, so it's not like you can really be frivolous.**

VENUS WILLIAMS: Yeah.

**Q. You have to be more...**

VENUS WILLIAMS: And my mom reminds me of that all the time, that I have to be, that I need to take precautions. There are times when I think, Oh, my gosh, this could be bad if I ever got COVID.

So I have not gotten it. I hope I don't, but... Yeah.

**Q. Is there any way, if there is a silver lining to this, your body, as a tennis player between the travel and the really nonstop seasons, the seasons bleeding into one another, your body has probably gotten more rest than when you were eight years old, you know. Do you think in some ways that might, it's revived you or maybe it might prolong your career a couple of years because your body has had a chance to maybe heal a bit?**

VENUS WILLIAMS: Yeah. It gets boring at home practicing, so honestly, training is much harder than playing a tournament. Tournament of course is physically challenging, mentally challenging, and emotionally more draining, but training at home is just wildly hard (smiling). I was ready for a match.

I don't want to do no more of that training, no more of that combine, is what we call it in the USA, for the NFL, that's what I felt like I was in. I was done. I was just so glad I have to stay in the tournament so I don't have to train too much anymore.

**Q. Since you mentioned NFL, I have to ask you about your Coach Venus workouts. How did you get Rob Gronkowski on?**

VENUS WILLIAMS: Oh, we became friends because we did a show together.

**Q. What show?**

VENUS WILLIAMS: It was called "Game On!" We did the show. We became friends. I'm beyond elated for him. Of course I love the NFL, love sports. Our Dolphins did pretty well this year, we came really close. Of course, it's so exciting to see this next, this NFL final coming up. I think I'll be happy for whoever wins.

**Q. You're a spring chicken next to Tom Brady. What do you make of what he's doing? Does it give you added, you know...**

VENUS WILLIAMS: No, because he's good at what he does. No one can take that away from him. Doesn't matter what the stats are. He's amazing at what he does. He doesn't limit himself.

**Q. Talk about the past 12 months with what the world has been through.**

VENUS WILLIAMS: I have experienced a lot of gratitude, then I forgot to be, to have gratitude, so -- it's up, it's down. But I'm grateful not to have been ill, and in that sense also hopefully no one getting ill around me.

I have spent a lot of time with my teams at my businesses, and we have been just experiencing growth in a time of, you know, uncertainty. So that's been great, because I have a lot of responsibility to the people that I employ. So to be able to be keep them employed is huge, and to grow, as well. That's been great.

So I have a lot going on personally that I can attend to, so trust me, I wasn't just idle.

**Q. A lot of people were nesting during the...**

VENUS WILLIAMS: What does that mean?

**Q. Redoing their homes and making them, you know -- I was thinking an interior design company might be super busy in a pandemic.**

VENUS WILLIAMS: Yeah. We actually do commercial design, so we don't do -- we have the capability but it's not our focus. Of course that could have been a huge risk that people are not building and not doing commercial work.

We like to think that we had a strategy going into this long before that bad times would hit, so how do you prepare for that. And also both my organizations are culturally driven. Our culture and our values I believe also helped us during this time.

**Q. Having come to the Australian Open for so many years, what are the moments that stick out in your mind?**

VENUS WILLIAMS: One of my biggest moments that sticks out in my mind is, I don't know, we were playing doubles one year, I don't know what year this was, and I was returning the serve. We got the break. I thought it was a break but it was the game, set, and match championship. I had no idea that it was championship point. (Laughter.)

I go, Yes, come on. I was going back to serve and Serena was like, It's over. I thought we just got the break.

There are times in tennis, at least for me, I lose the score, you know, so it was a nice way to win, I guess. I didn't realize it happened. So, yeah, of course that kind of sticks out.

**Q. How have you spent the last two days in Melbourne?**

VENUS WILLIAMS: Honestly just resting a lot. Of course freedom felt -- I don't know. My opinion, I understood that this was what I was here for was to quarantine for the safety of the community, and I understood that also at any point had I contracted the

virus I need to be mentally prepared to spend some extra time in quarantine. So I have no complaints there, because I knew what the drill was.

When I came out actually it was a little anticlimactic, like, Isn't there going to be a band playing or something? And there was not (smiling).

**Q. A parade?**

VENUS WILLIAMS: Nothing. I was, like, Where are you people? (Smiling).

No, it was still all business at that point, because, you know, we had to get here to Melbourne, I was in Adelaide, and just rest and then play one day and then get ready to play. So there was no time for, you know, pubs and drinks.

**Q. No champagne on the rooftop?**

VENUS WILLIAMS: You know I like that. There was no time for that. I remind my coach every day that I wish I was drinking. He's, like, No. (Laughter.)

So, yeah. But, no, of course I'm super grateful and we never know when that result might come back positive. So stay positive and test negative.

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