

Yarra Valley Classic

Tuesday, 2 February 2021

Melbourne, Victoria, Australia

Sofia Kenin

Press Conference



S. KENIN/C. Giorgi

7-5 (ret.)

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. Talk to us about your win today.

SOFIA KENIN: Yeah, I'm happy with the win, the way I played. I started off pretty good obviously, just made a little bit too many unforced errors. But, of course, she started playing better.

Overall I'm happy with the way I played.

Q. When you're trying to get back into match shape, is it almost like a double disappointment that you don't get to play the full match, that there's a retirement, or are you happy to get the rest?

SOFIA KENIN: I mean, no. This obviously is not the way I wanted to win. I obviously hope she's going to feel better. It was a good match. I hope she's going to feel better for the Aussie Open.

Yeah, I mean, it's unfortunate, but I feel like I played well. It's a win. I'm going to take it, of course. But, yeah, I felt like I felt my game really good today, even though I was making a lot of unforced errors with my forehand. It was weird, I just felt really good, so yeah.

Q. What is it like to return to Melbourne after the memories last year?

SOFIA KENIN: Yeah, obviously it's really special. Super glad to be here. Trying to somehow handle the emotions on court. I feel like it's going to be a little bit of a rollercoaster next Monday or Tuesday, whenever I play. I feel like you guys, the fans, will see a little bit more emotions. Now it's a little bit quiet, trying to get into the rhythm.

Yeah, I'll somehow have to figure out a way to handle nerves of course for next week.

Q. Is it any easier handling those emotions these days after you went through last year, the success you had whatever you played really? Does it make it

any easier to handle those emotions when you come to defending a major?

SOFIA KENIN: Yeah, definitely. I feel like with the matches I've had, the success I had last year, helps me. But it's the first time I'm experiencing coming back to a Grand Slam where I have to -- not have to, where I want to try to defend my title. Of course, there's nerves.

Obviously very nervous, but I'm going to do my best and we're going to see how it goes.

Q. I guess more specifically, there is a unique pressure of coming back to defend your title. Any time a player wins a major for the first time, everyone is interested to see what they do at majors after that. You made the French Open final. Does that kind of take the pressure off a little bit, that you did back it up at a Grand Slam?

SOFIA KENIN: Yeah, definitely. I feel like that was good, for sure, from my end. US Open fourth round. Obviously did better than a few years, so quite happy about that even though I lost.

Yeah, I'm happy I was able to get to the finals at the French. Obviously it's so special. I love playing in Paris, love red clay. I love everything about Paris.

Yeah, I think it's good. It gives me some air to breathe. Like you said, after who wins a Grand Slam, of course people are going to be looking at them. That's why I'm a little bit nervous for next week.

Yeah, we just have to hope everything will be fine.

Q. Interesting to hear you talk about the nerves of coming back here. On your practice Saturday, your first time back here, you looked so happy. Were you playing with Anastasia?

SOFIA KENIN: No, no. I actually don't remember. I think it was actually Tuesday, my first practice. We got here, then like we had to wait a few days. It was interesting to wait.

Q. You were smiling.

SOFIA KENIN: No, no, I was hitting with Ostapenko.



We had our first practice on Rod Laver. Great. Yeah, I was smiling. I was super excited.

Q. You did not look nervous at all. You looked the most relaxed.

SOFIA KENIN: That's good because I'm a little bit nervous (laughter). Trying to handle it, trying to show like, yeah, I'm all good, when I'm shaking (laughter).

Q. There's obviously a lot of questions coming at you at the moment about those nerves, trying to achieve what you achieved last year. How do you handle that, not just with the Australian Open, but to see where your ranking has moved to, to be defending so many points? Is it something you've thought about and you've had to work out in your mind? How do you handle that?

SOFIA KENIN: Well, to be honest, Australia gives me a little bit to come down, since I'm not losing points. I cannot complain I'm happy that this is the case.

I've got Paris coming up, and I will lose points there. Hopefully not a lot or any, we'll see. But, yeah, I mean, I just got to figure out a way how to handle everything.

I feel like I'm playing well, I obviously got to where I am and hopefully continue playing well, yeah.

Q. Do you try to think about that sort of thing just within yourself, with your father? Do you seek outside help on the mental side of it?

SOFIA KENIN: Yeah, definitely my dad is going to for sure help me. I used to be very, very, very emotional on court, crying and stuff, whatever. Now it's obviously better. Obviously mentally I've improved.

Like I said in my other press conferences, I might ask Novak for advice, that would be good. We'll see. I'm not going to, like, look for him and say, Hey. I'll stick to my dad, for sure. If he happens to be there, if I'm able to ask him that, then I'll ask him and we'll see.

Q. Given the crazy nature of the buildup to the tournament, do you feel that might take a little bit of pressure off you, considering there's so much other news around? In some way does that sort of relieve you of pressure?

SOFIA KENIN: I mean, not really. It's obviously tough on the players who had, like, the really hard lockdown. I'm not sorry that I wasn't part of it. I'm obviously happy that I wasn't. But I'm obviously not trying to rub it in their faces or anything.

Obviously things are tough. But I'm really thankful and grateful to Tennis Australia, they did such a great job with

this whole quarantine, now we're free, walking around and everything, everything they arranged, all the food, equipment, gym equipment, everything. They really did a great job. I'm not complaining at all.

I knew the situation. I knew when I was coming in. It was going to be two weeks hard lockdown. Luckily I was able to get out for five hours. I took advantage of it, had great two weeks' practice with Jelena Ostapenko. I feel like next Monday or Tuesday, we'll see the Aussie crowd and everyone. It's going to be quite heated and I'm super excited for that.

Q. Could you take yourself back to little more than a year ago, put yourself back in the shoes of maybe a young player who made it to the fourth round or quarterfinal of a Grand Slam tournament, thinks they can and wants to take that next step. Could you point to one sort of key factor, one important element going from being on the verge of that sort of thing to actually accomplishing it, what would you say that might be?

SOFIA KENIN: Well, it's a lot. I can make a list. But I guess your confidence is definitely a major one, for sure. You have to believe in yourself. Mentally you have to be fully prepared and ready to compete, grind every match after match. I feel like I mentally prepared myself really well. The confidence, of course, builds me up.

Did not get to the quarterfinals. I only got to the fourth round before Australia and France. Obviously I felt that I obviously can be there. It was obviously the second week of a major that I did not get that far ever, it was always third round. I obviously got a lot of confidence after that.

Luckily I obviously proved to people that, yeah, I am where I am today.

Q. What is your opinion about Nadia Podoroska from Argentina?

SOFIA KENIN: I played her a while ago. I mean, she's a great girl. I don't really know her so well, but she has a really good game, a tough game. She had a great run at the French. It's obviously great for the Fila family. We're all part of Fila.

I think it's really good. She plays big. She's tough. She's nice, even though I don't talk much to her, just say hi. But she seems nice (smiling).

Q. I wanted to ask you about practicing with Jelena Ostapenko. What was it like warming up with her over the past couple weeks? What was the thought process behind picking her, what was it like?

SOFIA KENIN: She messaged me, asked me if I wanted

to practice. I obviously wanted to practice because I didn't have anyone. I obviously wanted to practice. With her, we've practiced a few times in the past.

I have really good rhythm with her. Yeah, I mean, I'm happy with the way it went. We got along. Obviously I can see we both have the same characters. We're both quite stubborn, get quite mad on the littlest things, start not blaming ourselves if we are missing. I don't know, we get mad and say, Yeah, the court, the net, whatever. We have the same character.

It was fun. We got along really well. Actually, it's weird, after the two weeks, I had to practice with another player, Svitolina, which was a great practice, but obviously was different. I mean, I'm so used to Jelena's pace, her rhythm. I told her that day, I did not play that well because I didn't have any rhythm. I'm used to her rhythm. She obviously had the same thing.

Yeah, we got along real good, so...

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