

# Gippsland Trophy

Sunday, 31 January 2021

Melbourne, Victoria, Australia

## Naomi Osaka

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

**Q. Just talk about how important it is for you to get some good matches and preparation this week ahead of the Australian Open.**

NAOMI OSAKA: Yeah, I mean, it's really good for me to get some practice and preparation. I don't know, I'm actually really happy. For me, I like it's being held at the same spot. I know normally we don't get that sort of luxury. So, yeah, making the most out of the situation.

**Q. We saw you for the first time in Adelaide. Exhibitions are supposed to be relaxed and fun, but you don't have much time to prepare. It looked like at the start of your second set against Serena, you made a decision that you really needed to go for it, change up the match. How did you approach the exhibition/preparation?**

NAOMI OSAKA: Yeah, I mean, for me, I felt like, I don't know, my mind doesn't really stress too much on exhibitions. It was just fun for me to share the court with Serena and just see fans in the audience.

I wasn't really taking it too seriously as a match match. But it was fun to be able to hit with her and stuff.

**Q. Are you a player that thrives off the energy of fans? Is that something you've missed, are looking forward to embracing here?**

NAOMI OSAKA: Yeah, I would say honestly before New York I would say definitely. But then I realized, like, during New York, I think I get distracted by the crowd sometimes because I want to, like, show off a little bit, so I do some crazy shots. Most of the time I miss, so...

I would say I definitely love having a crowd watching. I feel like you sort of interact with them. Sometimes they shout things and it makes you laugh.

Yeah, I would say I definitely have to focus more, though (smiling).

**Q. You obviously took off going to Paris. Have you thought about the rest of the year, the rest of the calendar? How do you sense tennis is going to**

**operate after it leaves Australia?**

NAOMI OSAKA: I mean, for me personally, I'm not going to the Middle East. My next tournament would be Miami. But I'm not really thinking about the next tournament right now.

But, yeah, I would say it's definitely really special in the way that I feel you have to plan your tournaments more because you're not sure what's going to happen, like, in the next week, in the next month. You never know, like, the different countries have different rules.

Yeah, that's sort of I guess the thought process that everyone has now.

**Q. The tournament is very wide open, perhaps more so than other Grand Slams in the past. You don't know how people have dealt with the quarantine situations. Is it still very much sort of the maybe top 10 likely to take the title?**

NAOMI OSAKA: I mean, in my mind I think there's always people you don't want to play or people that you want to watch their matches to see how they've been doing. There's those people that are very dangerous.

But I feel like I've never thought that it was open. Even in New York, for me, I felt like I played some of my best tennis. I think it showed. My semis against Brady was probably like top two matches I've played in my life.

For me, I wouldn't say it's open if people are playing like that, if that makes sense. I would say it's open if you play a semis and you win 6-1, 6-1. If it's a three-set match, super hard, you can see that people are playing really good tennis, then...

**Q. How do you assess or can you discuss the versatility and variety that some of your rivals who have won Grand Slams in the last couple years offer, the differences in style of play?**

NAOMI OSAKA: I would say for me, I feel tennis is very interesting because it's like a video game where you can select a character and everyone's different. We all have our different strengths and weaknesses. I think that's what's really unique about it.

For me, I find it really fun to watch everyone else play because I personally watch them. I'm like, Oh, I would have gone for this shot, but they do something different. For me, it's something that I learned from. So, yeah.

**Q. Japan in a few months is going to try to pull off an event like this times 10. When you see what you've gone through and the other athletes have done, does it make you feel less or more optimistic about Japan being able to hold an Olympics in this climate?**

NAOMI OSAKA: Honestly, my concern isn't the athletes. The way that I feel is, like, I will stay in my room for two weeks to play the Olympics. I missed out on the last one. Playing in Tokyo would be very special to me.

My concern would be the general safety of everyone else because you're opening the country. Everyone is flying in from different places. I would just want, like, the public to feel safe. I feel like the athletes definitely would want to play, but I would want the public to feel safe.

**Q. How are you grappling with being seen as the face of women's tennis these days?**

NAOMI OSAKA: Honestly I don't feel that way. I don't know, there's so many interesting new people. I think I'm one of the new people. I don't know. As long as Serena's here, I think she's the face of women's tennis.

**Q. Obviously players are getting a little bit more used to the situation, dealing with what has to be dealt with. Does it make it any easier? If so, how?**

NAOMI OSAKA: When you say 'situation', do you mean quarantining and stuff?

**Q. The whole COVID aspect, masks, social distancing, all the things that go with what has to be done in society these days.**

NAOMI OSAKA: Yeah, I think definitely it's very strange. I think it's strange for everyone. Even if I wasn't a tennis player, I would be kind of confused.

Yeah, for me, I didn't fly internationally since Australia last year, so that was kind of an experience. I think just coming here and seeing how, I don't know, different it was from America, like I guess every country is different with their rules. I think it tells a lot.

For me, it makes me excited to travel again if it's possible and if we kind of go on this path in the next couple months.

**Q. I don't know if you speak to many family or friends back home in Japan too much. If you do, you have spoken to them about the Olympics, how do**

**they feel about potentially hosting the Olympic Games?**

NAOMI OSAKA: Yeah, for me the people that I've spoken to, they're really excited about it, but they're concerned because, I don't know, there's just like so many different people entering.

I don't know. For the people I've talked to, they said as long as everyone is safe, as long as Japan is getting better and not, like, worse, then it should be okay.

But for me, hmm, don't quote me on that (smiling).

**Q. Just talk a little bit about the decision to invest in the Courage. What inspired the decision generally? Specifically, why North Carolina?**

NAOMI OSAKA: Okay, well, for me, I've been feeling -- not feeling, I've been seeing this sort of ongoing thing where other athletes are investing in other sports. I always thought it was really cool.

Billie Jean King texts me sometimes, so I was getting inspired from her. I remember reading in an article that Serena's daughter invested in a soccer team, too. I thought that maybe that's a really good direction to go.

As for choosing North Carolina, it's because I visited there quite a couple times because my boyfriend's family, and he was born there.

**Q. Between investing in this, also you've done a lot of fashion collabs, brandings, what have you learnt about being a businesswoman over the past few months?**

NAOMI OSAKA: What have I done about being a businesswoman?

**Q. What have you learnt?**

NAOMI OSAKA: Learned, oh, sorry. What have I learned?

I would say what I've learned is that you sort of have -- for me, I feel like I always do things with brands or collabs with things that I actually use or things I actually believe in. I feel like once you start signing with every brand that just throws you the first check, it's ingenuine.

I think for me - where is my train of thought going? Oh, basically what I've learned is that people can tell if you're fake or not. For me, I think that sort of stems from also being patient because you don't really want to leap at every first opportunity, so...

Yeah, this is why I'm a tennis player, not a business person. I can't even explain it (laughter).

I hope that's an answer you're good with.

**Q. Back to the Courage. Have you spoken with Serena at all about the fact that if North Carolina plays L.A., it's both you guys on opposite ends there with Olympia's investment? Do you think you'll be able to make it out to a game?**

NAOMI OSAKA: I didn't speak to Serena about it. For me, the biggest thing I'm excited about, I really want to try to train with them. I think it's always really fun to train with different athletes and see what they're better than me at. I'm sure there's a lot of things that they're better than me at.

Yeah, I feel like definitely I'll be able to go down there and watch a couple games.

**Q. Ash Barty hasn't played a competitive game for a year. What are you expecting from her?**

NAOMI OSAKA: I mean, what are you expecting from her? What am I expecting? I don't know. What am I expecting?

I mean, she's a great player. I've been able to play her a couple of times. All the matches we played were really tough on me, the most recent one being in the finals of Beijing I guess two years ago.

But, yeah, I would say what I'm expecting from her, I know she has the ability to win Grand Slams. She won the French. I think that's something that's going to continue to happen.

I actually don't want to play her in the finals. But hopefully we'll play maybe not in a Grand Slam. I don't want to play her in a Grand Slam final, but maybe in another tournament.

(Naomi's answers to questions in Japanese.)

NAOMI OSAKA: Yeah, I would say during the exhibition I just tried to have fun and experiment a little. Like, I feel like there's a lot of shots that I'm missing. I would love to be able to do them properly, be confident with how I feel about it. Dropshots is one of those shots. I feel like I'm getting better at slicing. That's something that I practiced during the off-season.

Yeah, as for everything else, hopefully you'll see it during my matches.

No, we actually weren't allowed and able to see anybody. We would, like, leave the hotel, and it would sort of be closed off, our section. Then we would go at separate times from everyone else. So we each had, like, this allotted time, like five hours. We wouldn't see anybody at

all, so... I didn't practice with anyone else.

Yeah, definitely I would say I was really inspired by Iga. I thought it was really amazing how she was able to, like, be super focused in all her matches. I was watching the finals. I thought it was really nice to watch because I ate dinner with her last year here. She was talking about how she might go to college. I was telling her, like, she's really good, and I think she's going to do really well. So maybe don't try to divert your energy to college just yet. I'm glad she was able to win a Grand Slam so fast. Hopefully she'll, like, continue to grow, which I know she will.

No, I don't think so. I don't think it's that deep. But, yeah, it's really nice to see because she's so nice.

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