

# Gippsland Trophy

Tuesday, 2 February 2021

Melbourne, Victoria, Australia

## Naomi Osaka

Press Conference



N. OSAKA/A. Cornet

6-2, 6-2

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

**Q. How does it feel to get the first win of the season under your belt?**

NAOMI OSAKA: Yeah, I mean, for me it feels really good. I think because I haven't played a match since the finals in New York, I was definitely really nervous going into it. But I'm really happy with how positive I was throughout the match.

**Q. Did you find it kind of easy to shrug off those nerves? How long was it into the first set that you kind of felt like you were hitting your stride and maybe not being affected by the nerves?**

NAOMI OSAKA: Actually I was nervous the entire match. There were moments where it was less and there were moments where it was more, but I felt like I was really, really nervous just going, like walking onto the court. Even until the very last point, I think I was just thinking -- I don't know, the first match you come back and especially in a Grand Slam environment, it's definitely very hard.

**Q. What's it like being back in Melbourne? Obviously you've had a lot of success here in the past. Is the excitement level pretty high at the moment?**

NAOMI OSAKA: Yeah, definitely for me it means a lot. I have a lot of really good memories here. The excitement level is very high.

I'm trying just to take it one day at a time because I know that we're not at the Grand Slam yet. I'm playing the event before that, and for me I think it's really important just to focus for every match.

**Q. It was interesting when you said I think a day or two ago that you wouldn't like to play Ash Barty in a Grand Slam final and I wondered why that might be and also if there was anyone that you would like to play in a Grand Slam final.**

NAOMI OSAKA: I mean, when I say I wouldn't like to play her, I just know it's going to be hard. It would be fun. I know there's people that I want to play that I know is going to be hard. Like I'd love to play Andreescu in a final.

I think regardless of what I feel, I feel like the audience would have a lot of fun with that. I would love to play Iga. It's just -- for me, it would be fun to play Barty, but it would stress me out. I think I would feel stressed out the day before.

**Q. Does the new year feel like a different version of you, or when you come into a new season are there things that you and Wim and the team have worked on in the off-season that you're trying to implement from last year or change from last year?**

NAOMI OSAKA: Yeah, definitely. I think the me from last year is very different from the me this year. There's a lot of things I think I learned last year, and even a lot of things that I do differently with my new team. I feel like for me, I just really trust them a lot, so I talk to them a lot about how I feel, and that's not something that I used to do before.

Also like I've had a three-month-long off season, so we definitely practiced a lot of things, and hopefully I'm able to do them well in my matches.

**Q. What are your thoughts going into the next match, Katie Boulter? I think she said she's played you a couple of times.**

NAOMI OSAKA: I remember playing her in Wimbledon one year. I don't remember what year it was, but I do remember thinking she was a really good player, and then I heard that she got injured and now she's back. I'm looking forward to playing her. It's really interesting to play players that are around the same age as me because I feel like we all have the same goals and stuff.

**Q. If I can ask you something away from the tennis and a bit more personal, over the last 12 months, you've become more outspoken in your thoughts, et cetera, and they've been well received. You also have come across as a way more mature person than maybe a few months before that. Was there any sort**

## of lightbulb moment that went off for you?

NAOMI OSAKA: Mature? Maybe I don't make as many jokes in the press conferences as I used to. But yeah, I feel like the last year changed me a lot. There was a lot of things I was struggling with, and I feel like during quarantine I really had to dig deep in myself and try to figure it out for myself. I feel like there's a lot of people that had to go through that, and I'm just a person that you happen to ask questions to a lot.

Yeah, it's not something I really thought about too much.

**Q. I'm curious, you were saying that you communicate with your team much more and maybe in a different way these days. How would you contrast how you and Wim interact now compared to 12 months ago?**

NAOMI OSAKA: I've got to be careful with my words because I know he'll read this. I would say last year this time we were kind of close, but I was still very nervous of him. Like I didn't know him that well, so I would actually keep my distance quite a lot. Say I was nervous before a match, I wouldn't tell him that, and we wouldn't really communicate that much.

But I think just getting to know him over time and for him to be with me during, like, the downs in earlier 2020, yeah, it just made me trust him a lot more, and we talked a lot. I actually found out he was pretty goofy. So don't be fooled by him constantly note-taking. He's actually kind of clumsy, so it's cool.

**Q. You had quite a vocal super fan on the court today. He was quite loud from what we could hear on the TV. What was it like to just have any semblance of crowd interaction in a tennis match?**

NAOMI OSAKA: I mean, for me I feel like those are the moments that when I was in quarantine training that I was looking forward to. I always really love coming here because I feel like I have the most vocal audience.

I think the Australian crowd is really cool, and they always really engage, so I really love coming here all the time. It definitely was something that I missed in New York, so I'm really glad that I was able to have this in my first match back.

**Q. Last time at the Australian Open was close to the last time maybe things felt normal in the world. I'm just wondering, does it feel like it's been a year since you were in Melbourne? And what for you about this tournament -- there were a lot of changes, obviously. I'm just wondering what to you sticks out as maybe the most challenging thing for players or for you personally to deal with heading into the Australian Open?**

NAOMI OSAKA: Yeah, I would say it definitely does feel like a year, maybe a little bit longer, just because I've trained a lot during that off time.

I don't know. For me, I don't really see anything as challenging. The only other Grand Slam that I played after Australia was New York, so I can only draw from that experience.

In New York we couldn't, like, walk around and get our own food and stuff, and here we can. So for me I feel like it's easier to do things.

Yeah, there's nothing really for me to complain about at all.

**Q. It's been nearly a year since you've lost a match, like an actual match. Does it feel like that at all to you? I was a little bit surprised to hear you say that you were nervous today because it didn't look like it from the outside. How differently do you manage those nerves in matches now?**

NAOMI OSAKA: Yeah, I would say I don't really look at my record or whatever. I go into each tournament just trying to do the best that I can. I know that I have a really weird, like, career in the way that I don't really do that great at small tournaments, so I'm hoping to like fix that. I want to do well at every tournament that I play.

In regards to what you said after that, I've completely forgot. I'm sorry.

**Q. Just about how differently you handle nerves in matches now compared to before.**

NAOMI OSAKA: I would say I embrace it more. Like I don't try to force myself out of that feeling. I'm aware that the reason that I feel nerves is because I care about what I'm doing and I want to win, and I think those are good things.

For me it's almost like a privilege to be able to be here right now because there's so many things that are going on. Yeah, I would say that I'm more experienced. Maybe a year gave me more experience.

**Q. I'm wondering if you can recall a time in a match where you lost track of the score or maybe the chair umpire did or your opponent did.**

NAOMI OSAKA: Lost track of the score? Hmm. I think in my US Open match I played against Giorgi. I was just really like focused because I knew that like she's a very power player, so I felt like I had to take control, and I wasn't counting the score at all. So I just kept my head down and I kept playing point by point. So probably then.

**Q. Did you find yourself looking at the scoreboard and saying, oh, it's 3-0 or whatever it was at the time?**

NAOMI OSAKA: Yeah, I remember -- in the first set I felt like I kept putting my foot on the pedal and then I looked up and it was like 5-something. I was kind of surprised.

**Q. (The following are answers to questions asked in Japanese.)**

NAOMI OSAKA: Yeah, I mean, for me I don't take like the exhibition match, or even today I don't take my serves that seriously. I feel like I'm just in the process of warming up right now, and maybe three matches in my serve will slowly start to find its range. Like right now I know that I'm practicing well and I know that my serves are going in the direction that it needs to. Of course the percentage is pretty low, but yeah, I'm not too worried about it, unless I get broken, but that didn't happen just yet.

So it's like a lucky cat charm that Nicki was really nice to put on my shoe, and I just thought it was really cute. For me, I'm not biased or anything, but I think it's the cutest tennis shoes ever. Yeah, if that is able to sort of answer...

Yeah, I would say my motivation is to do as well as I can for as long as I'm here. I don't think a tennis career is that long, and for me, I don't know, I want to win every tournament I play, of course. I feel like everyone is gearing towards the Grand Slams. For me, I just want to have a good time while I'm still here. I would say that's my motivation.

I would say when I'm nervous I, of course, focus on my serve a lot. I think my serve is one of my greatest weapons, and it's something that I can count on during really bad times. But in regards to like ground strokes and stuff, I think when the point first starts I tell myself not to go for anything crazy and try to play within the limits, especially when I'm super nervous and only go for something when I feel like I absolutely can. Yeah, just basically don't do anything too insane.

**Q. What kind of things do you feel like you can improve the most?**

NAOMI OSAKA: I would say the things that I can improve the most, like if I look back to today, there were times where I felt like I wasn't swinging through on my backhand. Like in the 3-0 game when I was returning her serve, I felt that I became a little bit passive and that's why I lost that game, and there were a lot of moments like that that Wim picks up quite quickly and we're able to talk about it right away. I know this is something that isn't that urgent, but I feel like if I were to go into a Grand Slam and play like the best players, of course I played a

really good player just right now, but if I were to play the best players, then that's something that I can't really afford to do.

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