

Great Ocean Road Open

Tuesday, 2 February 2021

Melbourne, Victoria, Australia

Matthew Ebden

Press Conference



M. EBDEN/F. Delbonis

6-3, 7-6

Q. How does it feel to get your first win?

MATTHEW EBDEN: Yeah, good. First win of the year and I suppose first in nine months since February last year really. Had a couple club matches back in Perth over the summer just to keep match play I suppose but obviously lost in the qualifying, lost in a tight one. Similar sort of match, probably had lots of chances and break points, didn't quite convert those break points and match points. Today I was much more, I suppose, calm and made the most of those break points and set points in the end won most of the big moments. That was the key.

Delbonis is quality opposition, so I think he's still around 70, and like me he's been in the top 40. We both know each other pretty well, and yeah, I would hope on the hard court I would be a favorite to beat him, and obviously my ranking at the moment, it's not really there, but yeah, I was just happy it played out the way I thought it should or expected.

Obviously without too many matches behind me, you never really know what's going to happen. Yeah, just happy to be back in the mix of things. Almost everything is there. Still can brush up on a couple things and get a bit better, but yeah, it's comforting knowing that the game is there and it's pretty comfortable.

Q. When did you know you would be playing this match?

MATTHEW EBDEN: Yeah, only about midday. I got a text from ATP. Obviously I knew I was the next person in, so I knew there was a chance, so I warmed up this morning and yesterday, in fact, I warmed up before 10:00 just to be ready for a match call-up and it came, obviously.

It was unfortunate or surprising, a bit of a shock to not get in the draw obviously. Craig obviously told us a couple of times, all of us, that we would all get a playing opportunity and we would all get in, and I didn't. It was a hurry, we were in quarantine, but we didn't get in the draw until now. I guess he promised it and we did get in,

so I can't complain.

But no, I was in the doubles anyway, but yeah, I was looking forward to it for sure, at least getting another match, getting in the tournament, getting going, obviously tour event, tour level, so to win tour event matches gives me good confidence. I know my game and abilities there. I feel fit and healthy, but obviously not having so many wins because I haven't played any matches really the last nine months, there's always that slight unknown, hmm, what's going on here.

So yeah, I don't think I got broken all match. I don't think I faced a break point, maybe one in the first set. But relatively smooth sailing. A little bit tricky in the end. He had some set points. But yeah, very happy.

Q. Is that a reflection of the times, you just sort of have to be ready for anything to happen?

MATTHEW EBDEN: That's a great analogy, metaphor. Yes, even last year I was fresh, fit and healthy. I played the first couple months of the year. Dubai was my last big tournament. Flew back end of February and then meant to leave after a few weeks and then never left all year.

Obviously my ranking was low. I missed from the year before, had some injury and took a few months off, so I was fresh. Didn't need the break or the time off like some guys probably needed.

But yeah, I did lots of training probably out of the nine months I trained nearly all of it, a couple weeks lighter and off here and there, but nothing makes up for matches, and that's all it takes is that one or two matches just to get the confidence, get the wins, and yeah, everything is all good and then you feel good again.

No, happy with my game. It's almost a bit where I left off a year ago, two years ago. I feel almost the same. Body is good, fit and healthy, strong, moving well, so yeah, I feel good.

Q. Good to get back to Melbourne?

MATTHEW EBDEN: Yeah, I love Melbourne. My wife and I, my wife travels with me a lot, often a coach or physio or something. But yeah, we were missing



traveling, which was a bit rare. We often want to be at home. You know how good Perth is.

Q. You don't want to be in Perth right now.

MATTHEW EBDEN: Not now. We chose the best time not to be in the Perth in last 12 months. But Melbourne is like a second home, last 15 years always a few times a year. It was not great to be stuck in my room in quarantine, though. But I was luckily allowed to be here at Melbourne Park and practice each day.

So yeah, it's a strange world and times out there, but I love Melbourne, love being around. The first day we got out of quarantine and we're released free into the wild, went straight to the beach after practice. It was a horrendous weather, we wouldn't get such bad weather in Perth, would we?

Q. No.

MATTHEW EBDEN: But it was a beach nonetheless. No, it was fun to go to St. Kilda and get the fresh air and even the wind and the ocean makes us feel whole again.

Q. Anything that you've learned about yourself in the past year, whether that's when you haven't been competing or in quarantine? Any big lessons?

MATTHEW EBDEN: A hundred percent. I think now having more experience on my side, in my 30s now, it's strange, time goes by and you don't feel much different, but you are. It's kind of weird.

Yeah, I definitely think -- I suppose in the last couple years there was times when lots of months away dragged on and I was tired and fatigued and losing motivation and end up not tanking matches but not really being there a lot of the time, often competing and being there but sometimes sort of wavering and wondering what's your motivation.

Last year it gave me actually time to do a lot of stuff off court outside of tennis, business-wise, investment-wise other things in my life I always wanted to do and set up and get going. So it gave me time to do that, which is great, and I enjoy that even now. But then also made me realize, yeah, that's all good and everything, but I'm a tennis player. I want to be playing.

Yeah, my body is good. I'm fit and healthy. I suppose I have a young body for in my 30s. I guess always been lean and athletic, so still got the speed and the strength and everything. So I've got no excuses, I suppose, is what I'm probably trying to say, and yeah, just made me realize, no, I love that, I want that. So for the coming five years, ten years, singles, doubles, one day when I'm 40 maybe -- I don't know. But I know you can't take anything for granted. I've always said that.

But yeah, I have every intention to play for a long, long time. One thing at a time; we'll see how it goes.

Q. Have you had a chance to think about what the season might look like for you?

MATTHEW EBDEN: I have. All those days in quarantine in my room, 19 hours a day, allowed out to practice but still lots of time to think. Yeah, the schedule, it's really, really tricky it's not a good time to have no ranking or a bad ranking I suppose. Even in 2019 when I missed quite a few months there was a period where I could have waited eight more weeks and taken a protected ranking of around 55 in the world or something thereabouts. And I didn't do it. I went and played at French and Wimbledon and got going and whatever and then ended stopping my season early, thinking I'll start up in the new year. Started up and then COVID stopped us all.

It's very tricky, unless you have a high ranking and you can pick and choose the few events that are on. There's obviously lots of tour events canceled, there's hardly any challengers, so the ones that are on, the cuts are very high and hard to get into. I think my doubles ranking is still around 100, so I might be able to get in after qualifying in singles, get in doubles and just get the matches in and hopefully get points.

Maybe even this week if I can get a bunch of points and get my ranking up a bit so I can at least get in the challengers, tour events, quallies and make my way back in there, singles and doubles. I've always played singles and doubles.

But yeah, just enjoying it. I suppose I'm taking the pressure off myself in a way, but probably understanding it better. Of course I want to win. Of course I expect a lot from myself. Of course I get a bit of nerves. That's a good thing. It means I care. It means I want to be doing it. But take the positive side of that rather than negative side of nerves. So yeah, understanding all that stuff a bit better as you get older, I think.

Q. For now I think you're the sixth Australian man to win in this tournament. What does that mean?

MATTHEW EBDEN: Yeah, I saw yesterday. A bunch of the Aussie guys just kept winning, winning, winning. Winning after winning, everybody, just about. I'm not surprised really. Early in the year it's pretty usual, us Aussies. Even the younger guys come up, always play well the first week or two of the year. For us it's just a continuation of training, matches, it's our home conditions, everything. Whereas everyone else comes here and they haven't played for two, three months and not in these conditions. The last time they play indoor hard. Before that was -- it's probably been six months

since they've played outdoor hard. So it's natural that it's a big advantage.

I was actually saying to Nathan Healey before, all the guys winning is great, and then it's about -- obviously for myself, but all the other guys being able to sustain that for the next 10 months, 11 months of the year. That's the real trick. Anyone now as you see can play well on the day, even the young guys coming up, even the guys with low rankings. The game of tennis itself, it's become, I suppose, easier in a way. The racquets, the balls are slower, courts are slower, balls are slower, racquets are good, strings are good. Everyone can hit a good ball. From college, a lot of guys, everyone can play. Yeah, it comes down to those extra little things here and there that make the difference, and obviously Aussie boys are doing well at home.

Yeah, I'm one of them now, so it's great. I feel very comfortable out there, courts, conditions playing well, balls -- I'm not sure they've changed the ball, but it's holding itself much better. Last year I think I played Rafa in a night match and the ball was like a Hacky Sack ball after five or ten minutes. But now the ball seems to be holding its shape a lot better. I noticed even in this couple weeks of practice and everyone was saying, Oh, the ball is playing a bit faster because it keeps its shape, which a good ball should keep its shape. Props to them if they have fixed that. It'll make for some great quality tennis.

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