

Brisbane International

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Naomi Osaka

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Naomi, your first match in over a year. Talk about your preparations and thoughts going into it.

NAOMI OSAKA: Oh, preparations? I mean, obviously I did a lot. I feel like I'm kind of at the point where I'm nervous but I'm very happy with all the work that I put in. So yeah...

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. How does it feel being here talking to us not only as an athlete but also as a mum for the first time? Do you feel quite different now?

NAOMI OSAKA: Yeah, I think definitely becoming a mom changed my mindset a lot. I think I'm a lot more open-minded, a lot more patient. But, also, I feel a lot stronger, I don't know, physically, but I think Shai definitely helped me with the way I view things.

I'm excited to be back. I haven't worn headphones around the site since I've been back, so I think that's character development (smiling). It's just really nice to see everyone again, so...

Q. Can you maybe elaborate on that. Is that taking the surroundings in a little bit more or being peaceful in a different way?

NAOMI OSAKA: Yeah, no problem. I think it is peaceful. I also feel like I'm more confident with who I am as a person. I never tried have conversations with other players before, and I think I definitely put a large wall up. Now I find myself interacting with people. It's just really cool, like, if I take myself out of being a tennis player, just seeing everyone working hard, being in the gym, like seeing people change over the years, too, coming back and appreciating that is cool.

Q. Was there anything specific that you missed in your time away from tennis?

NAOMI OSAKA: I think just the competition part. I remember when Australian Open first started, that was the first time that I missed the AO, just feeling really sad, just wanting to get back out there. Even if I lost, I would just want the opportunity to play a match.



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I've always been a really competitive person. The competition part is something that I've definitely missed the last year.

Q. Did you watch that AO from afar?

NAOMI OSAKA: No, because I would have had to stay up at weird hours. Also, I don't know, it was like I felt like I would be too sad if I watched it. I've skipped AO and French. I started watching Wimbledon. Wimbledon was the first slam that I watched.

Q. Was there ever a time when you thought about not coming back to tennis? Given the previous answer, I'd say you missed it a lot and really wanted to come back.

NAOMI OSAKA: Yeah, I would say right after Tokyo for, like, a month maybe I was thinking about it because I felt like all my joy went away for the sport. I felt like it kind of wasn't fair, both for the people watching and myself.

But then I thought, like, I've played tennis since I was 3, and there's so many more things that I want to do. Especially with Shai, I want her to see, like, someone that has big goals and dreams. I think that's really important to have really good role models.

Also, just learning how to appreciate the sport. I think in the time I had away, I appreciated the sport a lot more. After giving birth, I understood how physical and how much work it takes to get there.

I'm very curious to see what happens in my match.

Q. Ahead of your first match, do you feel you've got that love back for it, in a sense? You spoke before that you're kind of nervous ahead of the first match. What kind of nerves is that? Just the anticipation of you're so eager to get out there and play against someone competitively again or genuinely I don't know how I'm going to sleep ahead of this first match?

NAOMI OSAKA: I mean, it's a little bit of both. I feel definitely I'm nervous, I haven't played a match in a long time, but I'm competitive so I'm thinking I'm nervous and I want to win. There's a lot of things that are going on in my head.

I think the biggest thing is just walking onto the court and sort of absorbing all the energy and experiencing the atmosphere for me is something that I'm definitely going to treasure a lot.

I'm sorry, the first part of your question I forgot.

Q. Do you feel like you've found that love for the game?

NAOMI OSAKA: Oh, yeah.

Q. Do you feel having the time away you've allowed yourself to fall back in love with it or find the love for it you may have never had?

NAOMI OSAKA: I think definitely. Of course, I'm not going to sit here and say that I've never loved tennis. Of course I loved it. I think after a certain point, I just felt more relieved to win, if that makes sense. It was a little hard dealing with that. Instead of being happy to win, I felt more relief.

Yeah, I think for me just having this time away watching other players, appreciating them a lot. I remember watching Wimbledon, watching Alcaraz going to the court and practicing dropshots because I'm going to play like dropshots like he does (smiling).

I guess in a way being a kid again, being inspired by other players, wanting to play on the big courts.

Q. You had an interesting Instagram post a few months ago where you thanked the people around you for look you to grow. Is that partly inspired by Shai and becoming a mother? Kids and babies have no regard for your needs. They need what they need. You have to adapt to that. Has that been part of that growing experience?

NAOMI OSAKA: Yeah, I think definitely. Sometimes when I'm changing Shai's diaper, I think, Wow, my mom did this to me? Then I feel bad. I'm like, Wow, I should treat my mom a lot nicer (smiling).

Yeah, it's definitely a very new feeling, and it opened my eyes to a lot of new things. It kind of just made me realize, like, everyone was a baby and everyone kind of absorbed energy, and we all learned different things, we all kind of appreciate people in the same way.

Yeah, the first thing I did after I changed Shai's diaper was text my mom, Hey, mom, thanks for everything that you did.

But, yeah, definitely I feel like I'm a different person with a different mindset.

Q. You mentioned Tokyo. Daria Saville is playing here. She did her ACL there playing you. Showed great concern and compassion for her. Is it nice to see her back playing here again?

NAOMI OSAKA: Yeah, no, definitely. Actually she's one of the first players to talk to me. I kind of put her in the Ons box of someone that's very extroverted, was able to talk to me even though I had headphones on and stuff.

I have a lot of love and respect for her. I think she's a great player. She always has a smile on her face. I really respect that.

It's really good, really good to see her.

(Naomi's answers to questions in Japanese.)

NAOMI OSAKA: No, I feel like for me, with Wim, like during the break I was thinking of who would I want to go on the second chapter with me. I was able to find different people. I think, like, we all meshed completely well.

I think for me, with a coach, trust is very important. It took me a very long time for me to open up to Wim. He'll tell you that. We had, like, an incident in Spain (smiling). I think Wim is the best coach that I've ever had. We get along great. I just really respect him, and I trust him a lot. That's why I guess we're together again.

I don't really think I can, like, rate myself. I feel like I'm putting myself in the best position that I can right now. I think I'm playing pretty good, but I can't compare myself to anything because I haven't played a match. I've played practice sets against guys and I've won them, so I'm pretty happy with that.

Yeah, I think a match is a completely different story. There's nerves involved. There's break points. There's all kinds of different things. Yeah, I don't know. I also find myself being a victim of, like, comparing myself to how I was a couple years ago. I've done really well to break out of that. I guess you're just going to have to watch my match and tell me (smiling).

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