

# Brisbane International

Tuesday, 2 January 2024

Brisbane, Queensland, Australia

## Rafael Nadal

### Press Conference

R. NADAL/D. Thiem

7-5, 6-1

THE MODERATOR: Rafa, just being back playing your first singles match after such a long time, I'm not going to ask you about your game, but just the atmosphere there and having the crowd behind you, what did that feel like?

RAFAEL NADAL: Always felt well, no, when you have the people supporting, and in this moment even more. Have been the longer period of time without being on a professional tournament since I started my tennis career.

So, yeah, it's an amazing feeling to come back and to feel the crowd supporting even more than before, no?

Have been a lot of effort from my side to try to come back in a professional match, and probably they get that point.

**Q. I know you've had a lot of time to focus on this one match, your comeback match. The level that you played at, did that surprise you, because it was extremely high?**

RAFAEL NADAL: Well, I mean, anything can happen in these kind of days after such a long time without being in a professional tennis match. You go on court, and you can't expect anything, no? You can expect amazing things, but you can expect disasters. It can happen. You can expect a bad day and normal and positive day.

I think I have been in that last thing, in a positive day even a little bit more. I have been playing solid without making a lot of mistakes in terms of unforced errors but in terms of making bad decisions. I think I didn't make a lot of bad decisions choosing the shots that I have to play, and that's something difficult after such a long time. Something that I'm happy with.

**Q. You said in the lead-up to this that you weren't putting big expectations on yourself. You spoke that there are some things that you were really pleased with. Did you tick off all the boxes that you wanted to tonight in your first game back? And what's next in your progression in the lead-up between now and the Australian Open that you want to see in your game?**



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RAFAEL NADAL: I have been honest, and for me nothing changed. It's only a positive start. I mean, it's just one match after a year that I played quite well, honestly. If we take all the circumstances that have been before that match, have been a very positive match.

I mean, it's just a match. First and most important thing today is stay healthy, honestly. I mean, my way to approach that didn't change at all after this match.

My way to approach is just try to enjoy every single day that I have the chance to be on court. If I am able to play more matches, will be more helpful in terms of recover things that, of course, you need to recover if you want to be competitive.

For me my goal is still medium term, in a couple of months to try to be, again, competitive. Now, if I am competitive, fantastic, but it's something that I, for me, is going to be a big surprise if I am competitive in a good level. Let's see. Day by day. Today is a positive day. Let's see after tomorrow.

**Q. You said it was an emotional time for you tonight. Can you take us into sort of just before the match? Did it feel familiar? Were there some different nerves than you're used to? How was it in the tunnel, et cetera, before the match?**

RAFAEL NADAL: I think it's something very easy to explain. When you are doing things that you are not used to do, you have more nerves than usual because when you are doing things almost every day, you know more or less what's going on. You can play a little bit better, a little bit worse, but you have a standard that you know that you're going to reach that level.

In that case it's a combination of things. First thing, the emotions to be back on court after a long time and after a very tough process. Second thing, the doubts about your physical performance. And third thing, it's about you go on court -- I know I have been practicing okay last week, practicing I think at a positive level. You go on court, and you have the doubts if you are going to go there and going to be a disaster, because it can happen, honestly.

It's not a thing that I am saying here to protect myself at all. I don't need it. I am not here to use any excuse at all. No, I know what's going on.

Myself, people who have been next to me knows how I felt one month and a half ago. I'm talking with the hand on the heart and being very honest with all of you. It's not all that you go on court and you have more nerves than usual because you really at the end hope that you're going to play at this level, but inside yourself you know that can be a disaster, and that, of course, worried me.

**Q. You have a lot of experience, unfortunately, missing a lot of time and coming back, and it's still very difficult for you. My question is about your opponent tonight, Dominic. He has been trying for two years to come back to his best level. Not your job as his competitor to help him, but do you have any advice or any encouragement that you can offer him to just hang in there and maybe things will turn around for him?**

RAFAEL NADAL: Well, I think for him it's been a tough beginning after the injury. That makes things very difficult for him at the beginning, no, because I don't know if when he came back he was healthy enough to play, to feel himself playing free. And that probably affected him a lot at the beginning losing a lot of matches in a row. Then it's tough to recover the confidence. Not only recover your level of tennis, it's about recovering the confidence.

I think the last year has been a positive year for him because after a tough time, he was able to come back to top 100. Something that is not easy.

I think he start the year again with the ambition to make a positive year and to finish the year with a much higher ranking, that I think is something that should happen if he is healthy.

I think the first set he had been playing at not a very good level of tennis. I think if he is able to win matches and to recover the confidence in himself, I don't see him being in a ranking close to 100, no, I see him in a much higher ranking, honestly.

**Q. Is the challenging thing for you now, Rafa, being able to play as well as that in the next round and the day after that given that you haven't played for a year? Just the cumulative effect of all of these matches on your body.**

RAFAEL NADAL: The first thing, and I repeat it, is to stay healthy. If I am able to stay healthy, I am able to practice at the level that I need to practice. If I'm able to play matches feeling myself ready to play the match, then the chances to be competitive in a not very long period of time are much higher.

If after tomorrow you go on court and you have problems, then the process is much tougher. For me the main thing is stay healthy. I really think that I don't forget how to

play tennis. The only thing that's going to be difficult to make it in a professional match and in a very high level of tennis. Because at the end, you need to recover movement, something that takes time.

You need to recover the confidence and the movements, that takes time. Because at the end after the surgery, you feel scared sometimes to do a kind of movement. And you need to recover the speed and reading the ball and making the things in automatic way. Something that you need matches to make it happen. To be on court and don't need to think now I need to do that, I need to do other things. Things comes automatic. You need hours on court, hours on a practice session, but at the same time hours on professional matches.

I don't know what can happen today. It's a day to be happy. A happy day for me. I have day off tomorrow to keep practicing. I am excited to have the chance to play another time. That's for me the most important thing.

**Q. How does your body feel after that? You probably are still not entirely cooled down, but were there any tweaks that bothered you, or did everything go as expected?**

RAFAEL NADAL: No, I am happy. I don't know how I wake up tomorrow, but I can say now I feel good. I felt more or less free on court that I can do the things that I need to do, and I don't finish the match with bad feeling at all in terms of physical performance.

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