

Brisbane International

Thursday, 4 January 2024

Brisbane, Queensland, Australia

Rinky Hijikata

Press Conference

R. HIJIKATA/T. Machac

5-7, 6-2, 7-6

THE MODERATOR: Rinky, congratulations on today's win. Very intense. Take us through the match the way you viewed your performance today.

RINKY HIJIKATA: Yeah, obviously it was a very difficult match today. I felt like Tomas played some really good tennis in patches. I felt like I played some really good tennis in patches. Yeah, definitely a bit of a roller coaster.

But, yeah, I felt like I kind of executed well when I had to, managed to kind of keep my head well, really try to play my game in the big moments. I felt like that was probably, yeah, maybe the difference in the end.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. What do you learn from a match like that? Fluctuations in every set.

RINKY HIJIKATA: I think the biggest one, it's kind of nice to be back in match pressure and match situations again. It's been a little while since my last tournament. You can kind of try to simulate it as much as you want in training and all throughout pre-season, you're working hard, but it's very different doing it on the practice court, then going out in a proper match with that real pressure and trying to execute there. Nothing really beats the reps in an environment like that.

Just, yeah, having another match under my belt before Aussie Open and being able to execute under pressure there was, yeah, good for my confidence and good moving forward.

Q. On the Love-40, you held twice, how big is that for the confidence?

RINKY HIJIKATA: Yeah, really big. I mean, ideally I'm not in that situation and I'm not giving away free points early in my service games.

Yeah, the way it panned out, I was in trouble a few times there and managed to kind of serve my way out of



trouble, yeah, string a few good points together. I guess I was happy with that.

I'd like it if I wasn't in so much pressure in the future. Yeah, you learn from every match. I'll, yeah, try to learn from that moving forward.

Q. Jason Kubler said yesterday the bigger the stage the better you play. Do you agree with that? How much are you enjoying yourself out here this week?

RINKY HIJIKATA: Yeah, for sure. I think I've always been like that. I feel like the bigger the crowd, the more people are watching, the bigger the moment, I feel like I really enjoy that. That's kind of what I really get up for.

I'm never going to shy away from a big moment. That's why I picked up a racquet in the first place. I dreamed of playing in home tournaments, big crowds, matches like that. That's what you look forward to. That's what you look forward to throughout all of pre-season when you're getting put through the gauntlet, you're in the hurt locker. That's what you're doing it for.

That's what motivates me. I feel like, yeah, I want to keep improving and I want to keep playing on bigger stages and bigger courts. That's always been my goal. That still is to this day.

Q. Three Aussies into the quarters, maybe four if Jason... Could be Dimitrov as well next round. Your thoughts on a quarter against him or in general?

RINKY HIJIKATA: I think whoever it is, it's going to be a very tough match. Yeah, the field this week is nails. Everyone in the draw is tough. There's no easy matches here. I'm sure the next one's going to be the same regardless of who it is.

I think Grigor had a very good end to the season last year. He's in some great form. If it were to be him, yeah, I'll be looking forward to it. I'll see what I can do. Hopefully I'll be able to put together a good match and, yeah, the crowd can kind of get behind me again.

Q. We have some of the best Australian juniors in the room here. If you could think back to when you were 15, anything you would have done differently?

RINKY HIJIKATA: Yeah, I'm not too sure. I think just try



and not to, yeah, take the losses as hard as I did probably. When I was younger, yeah, losing hurt a lot. When I look back on the matches when I was 15, 16 now, yeah, they were very important at the time, but looking back on it, it really wasn't that big of a deal. It was probably more about developing and learning and trying to get better as a player and as a person more than anything.

There's a lot of matches, even 12 months ago now, that really stung at the time. I look back on it now, I don't really even sweat about it. It's still something that I'm trying to do a bit better, is get over the losses quicker.

Especially in a sport like tennis, you're going to lose every week or most weeks unless you're Novak, Rafa or Roger, someone like that. You're going to lose most weeks.

To get over the losses, learn from them, not take them too hard, spiral from that, that's probably the biggest thing I would have liked to have done when I was a junior.

Q. The rolled up sleeves as opposed to a singlet. Roll your sleeves up and ready to go?

RINKY HIJIKATA: If Fila made singlets for me, I'd happily wear them. It's something I've always done since I was like 12. Probably looks stupid. I'd wear a sleeveless shirt if they had one. They don't have any for me at the moment. Yeah, if they were to roll 'em out, have a line of sleeveless shirts, I'd happily wear them (smiling).

Q. Did you watch Alex last night in Perth? Thoughts on how he's going, how it's influencing you.

RINKY HIJIKATA: Yeah, I watched Demon's match yesterday. Pretty incredible what he's been able to do. I feel like he's made a lot of strides over the last 12 months. I think it's been pretty inspirational for all the other Aussie guys. I feel like he's such a great leader of the pack at the moment. Everyone's really trying to strive to get to where he is.

You see a result like that, and it really kind of motivates you to be better and do more and try to get there. I feel like he's a big reason why we have so many Aussies in the top hundred at the moment.

Yeah, I think kind of what he said after the match, how he's been written off his whole career, people have put a ceiling on him, kind of always had doubts about his game, how far he could get. I feel like that kind of resonates with a lot of the Aussies.

I feel like we like being the underdog. A lot of us have always kind of had a ceiling put on us. To see him and

see what he's been able to do, how he's been able to kind of stick it to all the people that have said that about him is really cool. I feel like a lot of that resonated with me and I'm sure a lot of the other guys.

Yeah, pretty special for him. I'm stoked for him. I'm sure he's going to have an even bigger year. Hopefully it will be the same for a lot of the other Aussies.

(Questions from junior Australian players.)

Q. I wanted to ask, how have you navigated playing from bigger stages like the Australian Open final in doubles, fourth round of US Open, to playing challengers overseas? How does it feel to be back home?

RINKY HIJIKATA: Yeah, it's really cool. As an Aussie, I think it's the best time of the year. I'm sure you guys will be able to see that and experience it for yourselves over the next couple years.

But, yeah, something special about being an Aussie and playing in front of the home crowd. There's only a few weeks of the year where you get to play in front of your family and friends, kind of the Australian public. Any chance you get at that is really cool. You should, yeah, try to soak it up as much as you can 'cause you don't get the chance often as an Aussie. A lot of the time you're kind of far from home.

Yeah, definitely the most fun time of the year.

Q. A long match today. What would be your routine after a long match, such a physical match? What do you do to best recover for your next match?

RINKY HIJIKATA: Yeah, I mean, I just hopped in the ice bath, had a cool-down. That's why I've got the hoodie on. Pretty cold at the moment.

I think tonight I'll try to get a good meal in, replenish as much as I can, hydrate for the next one. Whatever it is, stretch. I think a good night's sleep is probably the biggest one. Try to sleep as well as you can. Yeah, just get ready for the next day.

Q. I think it was 4-3 in the third, you were down Love-40. What were you telling yourself in that moment? The match was close to being gone. Brilliant to see you come back and fight your way out of the match.

RINKY HIJIKATA: To be fair, at the time I was probably pretty pissed about the three points earlier. I'm sure most people would be. You got to try to snap out of it as quick as you can. I'm sure I was blowing up a little bit about the points earlier to my box (smiling).

As much as I could, I just wanted to focus on landing a good serve, getting ahead in the point, playing the point that I wanted. You don't know what the outcome's going to be. You might not execute. Just try to get in a clear head space and play your point, whatever gives you the highest chance of success. Yeah, I guess try to get rid of the negative thoughts, which I'm sure there were plenty at the time (smiling).

Q. Did you do anything specifically in that moment? Breathing? What do you do specifically?

RINKY HIJIKATA: I think I was trying to probably take my time a little bit. Go to my towel, maybe just calm down a little bit. I felt like sometimes I rush a little bit when I play a few loose points. It spirals a little bit.

Yeah, I can't remember the points beforehand. I'm sure I had maybe one or two loose errors. Yeah, I guess try to reset and still tell myself to back myself. It's easy to get passive when you miss a couple. I think I did in the first set when I was 5-4, 5-6 serving, I felt like maybe I missed a couple early in the game. I got passive. He started lacing the ball, yeah.

Q. You mentioned you love playing in front of the big crowds. This young group is ready to go to courts out in the middle of nowhere training. How do you go from big courts, big events, back to the challengers? How do you get yourself up in those moments when it's not as sexy?

RINKY HIJIKATA: That's a good question because that's something I probably struggled with a little bit I went to college. Playing college tennis, it's easy to get up for, pretty rowdy there. There's a lot of heckling, whatever it is. There's a lot of external factors that are probably driving you to play well and lock in.

Then I went from that to playing futures where there were maybe one or two people watching. It was my coach, their coach, that's pretty much it.

I feel like it's important to have kind of an inner drive to be able to motivate yourself internally as well as externally. It's easy when there's stuff and people around to kind of get you to do things, encourage you to lock in.

Yeah, that's something I had to learn, was to kind of hold myself accountable, not kind of slip through the cracks and have a rough day mentally, to be able to kind of, yeah, just have a high standard of what I expected out of myself.

I feel like if you can do that day in, day out, it becomes a habit, and it becomes a little bit easier to do it no matter what the moment or what the context is, yeah.