

Brisbane International

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Aryna Sabalenka

Press Conference

A. SABALENKA/S. Cirstea

6-3, 6-3

THE MODERATOR: Congrats on the win. Sorana is really a quality opponent, lots of experience. What did you have to do today to overcome her?

ARYNA SABALENKA: Yeah, that was a great match. She played really well, and she always push me really hard. I'm happy that I was focused from the beginning until the end.

I think with her, she can come back any time, so you've got to stay really focused, and I did it pretty well today.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. Congratulations on the victory. Early on, you looked a little bit frustrated as opposed to your match the other day where everything looked really comfortable for you and you kind of breezed past her. Can you just maybe talk us through early on how you were playing? Yeah, you looked a bit angry early on.

ARYNA SABALENKA: That's just my face. You know, guys, I was just born with this face (smiling).

No, no, at the beginning I struggled a little bit with the rhythm, and I was just trying to find the rhythm and the focus, like, the right focus. And that's it.

Yeah, I think after a couple of games, I found my game a little better and the level was increasing every game I would play, so it wasn't really frustration or something else. I was just trying to figure my game.

Q. It's almost good to have a game like that where you have to try a few things differently -- the other day you seemed to cruise through, this one maybe a little bit trickier -- to get yourself into tournament mode?

ARYNA SABALENKA: Yeah, for sure. Of course I prefer to win every match 6-Love, 6-Love, like everyone probably prefer, but at the end of the day, you only get better when someone push you and you have to deal



with the moments under pressure.

Today I practiced that well in a few moments. Definitely better for my tennis to have matches where you have to overcome things.

Q. I think you've got either Diana or Madison Keys in the quarterfinal. Can you talk about those two opponents? I know the other day you came to get some revenge on Nick. I suppose Madison is in that category as well?

ARYNA SABALENKA: No, actually, I mean, if we're talking particularly about our matches in Australia, because after Australian Open we played in Indian Wells, and I got my win back.

But here, specifically in Australia, of course I'd like to get the revenge. If it's going to be Keys, it's going to be, as always, a great battle, really aggressive tennis. I'm excited to face her.

If it's going to be Diana, I think I never played her. It's a young player. Maybe not that experienced but showing great tennis. So I'm going to be really excited to play her for the first time.

Q. Your level in Australia, obviously AO win, win, finalist, No. 1 in the world, what's the mindset coming into any new season when you're already at the peak of your powers really? Do you feel like you've got another gear? Do you feel like you've got room to improve and get better? Or do you just want to come down to Australia and kind of repeat the pattern you have been in the last couple of years?

ARYNA SABALENKA: I think there is always room to improve, and I'm definitely not at my peak. I think, honestly talking, I think only one Australia play where I played really incredible tennis and I was on my highest level.

The rest I think I was dealing with different things that wouldn't work on court, and I was just really overcoming a lot of things during those matches.

The focus is always the same, is to get better, improve your game, and go out there and try new things and be a better player than you have been last time.

Q. There has been so much talk too about how long the season is by a lot of players.

ARYNA SABALENKA: Yep.

Q. When you play such a long season and you're already No. 1 in the world, is there any thought about doing something like Serena did at the top of her power, stepping away from a few tournaments? You know you're going to get into those slams directly, that kind of thing? Or do you play out the long year?

ARYNA SABALENKA: Well, the season is definitely insane, and that's not good for all of us, as you see so many players getting injured and also the balls are quite heavy, so it's a lot, yeah, a lot of struggle for all of us.

But what Serena did, the rules were different. Right now, like last season, by the end of the season, because I didn't play enough of 500 events, they fine us with points, me and Iga. So then it's, like, okay if you play seven events, even if you win -- okay, if you win all of them, then maybe it's not a big deal. But you cannot predict that I'm going to play seven events, I'm going to win them all, and that's it.

The rules are quite tricky with mandatory events, but I'm still doing that, like, I'm skipping couple events in order to protect my body, because I struggled a lot last season. Even though the results were really consistent, but some of the tournaments I had been playing completely sick or I've been really exhausted from overplaying.

So this season we will try to manage it a little bit better, even though they are going to fine me by the end of the season. But it's tricky to do that. You cannot skip like 1000 event. It's really tricky, and I think that's insane what they do. I think they just follow their interests, but they're not focusing on protecting all of us.

Q. You keep coming back to Brisbane. You obviously love it here. It's worked well for you. But just out of curiosity, heading into the Oz Open, how beneficial is the quality of the players that they bring into this week? We know they've got 7 of the world's top 10. It's a WTA 500, but you're going to potentially play Maddie in the next round, your opponent from the final last year. If you think back on the last couple of years you have been here, can you actually pinpoint just how much the kind of matches that you have perhaps played even against Rybakina a couple years ago in a final here, your final last year, against the quality of opponent, does that genuinely serve you well heading into Oz Open toward a title or a final there?

ARYNA SABALENKA: Well, I think by bringing and having, like, seven or whatever how many top players you have in the draw, it definitely helps to prepare better

for the Aussie, for Australian Open, or Aussie, I don't know -- both works, I believe, right -- it's definitely helps.

I think it's important to have quality matches before heading to the big event, just so you're preparing yourself mentally for fights, for battles. And playing against top players is definitely a huge help heading into the Grand Slam tournament.

So I'm really happy to see most of the top players here in Brisbane. It's a tough draw, right, but I'm not looking for easy matches. I like to challenge myself. I like to have great battles, especially heading to the Grand Slam.

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