

Adelaide International

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Adelaide, South Australia, Australia

Thanasi Kokkinakis

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Thanasi, welcome. Can you give us your thoughts heading into the Adelaide International.

THANASI KOKKINAKIS: Yeah, good. Yeah, I wouldn't want to start anywhere else. Yeah, it's been a pretty crazy 12 months... wait, has it been 12? Yeah, 12 months on, to be back here and give myself a chance after everything.

Doubles was a good step. I only wanted to play sort of one or two matches ideally and kind of get here and get ready to kind of try my singles luck, using this week as a test to see if I'm going to be a chance for Aussie Open.

I've been practicing well, not perfect yet, but I'm happy with how things are kind of progressing. Yeah, just excited to play again. It's been a long year, it's been a tough one, but yeah, happy to give myself another chance.

THE MODERATOR: We'll go to questions in the room.

Q. Sebastian Korda first up. That's a big match. Is that the sort of thing, a big-pressure match, a high-profile match, that you prefer as you come back?

THANASI KOKKINAKIS: I mean, there's no easy way to get back into it. It's crazy, because I was supposed to play him in the quarters 12 months ago, and I pulled out before. That's when I knew I was shot.

So, yeah, it's a real tough task. A guy that I know well. I played against him a few times. The last time we played I had a match point against him in Washington. A hell of a player. Also plays really well in Adelaide.

When I saw the acceptance list for the tournament it was amazing the caliber of players that we got here, so I knew it wasn't going to be an easy first round. I guess I'll find out for good or bad if I'm around the mark or not.

Q. Are you nervous, given your injury situation?

THANASI KOKKINAKIS: Oh, yeah, I'll be shitting myself, yeah. I haven't played in so long. I've been practicing all right, but it's so different going back out there. Not even just missing time with small injuries, but, yeah, with what

I've had to come back? Again, no guarantees. I thought I would be back in this situation, so at least take the court and give myself a chance.

I'm excited more than anything. I'm not expecting to set the world alight this week. But, yeah, I know when I get out there I'll expect a lot of myself. But, yeah, 12 months out of the game is a long time.

Q. How are you feeling physically after what's happened in the last 12 months, and mentally did it take a bit of a toll on you sort of going through that as well?

THANASI KOKKINAKIS: Yeah, definitely. I don't really know how I'll feel until I get back in sort of competitive aspect of playing. It's just so different. You can train as much as you want, but to be back on a match court and playing a high-pressure match, it's something you can't really train. It's the tension in the body that just kind of hits a little bit different.

I feel okay. The last couple of days of practice have been very encouraging. But again, it's being able to back up matches and play sets on sets, that's something I haven't been able to do.

I know my level when I'm playing at the top right now is okay. But, yeah, the shoulder's been a tricky thing to try and come back from. So it's not perfect, but I think every week it's been better. It's been about two steps forward, one step back sort of the whole last few months, so we'll see how we go.

Q. Mentally too, that journey over the past 12 months, what has that been like for yourself? Did you ever find yourself down on things, or what was it like persevering through that?

THANASI KOKKINAKIS: Yeah, it was tricky. Coming back from an injury that no tennis player has had didn't fill me with the most confidence. I was kind of at a crossroads in my career where I was like if I don't do anything I'm not going to be able to see what I can do, for good or bad. I didn't want to keep doing what I was doing.

Mentally it's been very tough, but fortunately and unfortunately I've missed a lot of time in my career, so I kind of know what it's like to be out of the game awhile.



This one has been tricky because I felt like the last couple years I was playing some really good tennis and was a little bit hindered by this.

We'll see. I'm excited to get out there and play in front of friends and family. It's always tricky, everyone has high expectations of me here, and it's a place that I played really well. But I think I'm coming back in some slightly different circumstances this year.

As I said, I'm excited. I've worked my ass off to try and get back to this position. Yeah, there were many doubts this year. I couldn't really lift my arm over my head for a long period of time. I had to get my mate to help me dry my underarm pits for a while because I couldn't, my arm was just stuck to my body. So, yeah, come a long way since then.

Q. You touched on it briefly there, but what were the darkest moments in the last 12 months?

THANASI KOKKINAKIS: Oh, just, there's a lot. There's a lot. Just not knowing I can even get back to serving. Serving hard, serving with pace. I thought everything else I would be able to.

It's kind of a decision I came at peace with a little bit after the Aussie summer. I just found myself the last few years being able to play a good match here or there, but never being able to back it up. It was just pissing me and everyone probably around me off, because I knew I could play one good match and then I was just done for the tournament.

That's why I was able to play some Davis Cups, because I would have days off in between, and it would be a shorter format. But every time it came to some big slams and stuff like that, I maybe have a good first round win, and then my body would shut down on me.

So it's been, yeah, it's been a mental roller coaster. But I think, given the circumstances, I probably handled it as well as I can. I'm fairly optimistic now, because I haven't really found out an answer, if I can play well for a long period of time or not. Trying to go into it with an open mind and see how we go.

Q. What does success look like in the short-term in Adelaide here for you, and also long-term for the rest of your career, have you reassessed your goals?

THANASI KOKKINAKIS: Yeah, definitely. I mean, success looks like being healthy and able to play a full week of tennis without pain. That's success for me.

I think my tennis level will come if I can reach my power on serve that I used to have, or close to it, which I'm probably not quite there yet. If I can reach that and back up from matches and matches and weeks, that would be

successful for me.

I don't know, ranking-wise, but being able to play a full week and not feel like I got to pull out the next week, or play a couple matches and not feel like I need to pull out, that's a big success, and I think that will help my ranking.

Q. Obviously in Brisbane you played with Nick, everyone in Australia loves Nick and is always fascinated by him. You probably know him better than anyone else. How is he going mentally, and do you think this year we could see him back out there playing a lot of singles matches?

THANASI KOKKINAKIS: Yeah, I think he wants to. I think he probably felt like he wasn't quite ready yet in Brisbane after playing his singles. Obviously he's played a couple exhibition events. I don't think there's anything too physically wrong with him right now. It's just getting that match practice. He's played the exhibitions, but you can't compare it to playing those competitive matches.

So I think he does want to get out there, and I know he's trying, but I think, yeah, he didn't think he was ready for five sets of tennis, which is a different beast. To beat these guys and to be able to back up and not just play one match and pull out is, it's really tough. I think it's one of the toughest things in sports, Grand Slam tennis.

So I think he thought he wasn't quite ready, and, yeah, I think he'll try and play a bit more singles kind of this year.

Q. The draw dealt you a pretty rough hand to start with. You got Korda, who almost won this tournament twice, probably should have beat Djokovic, so that's a really tough one to get first up after the long time off.

THANASI KOKKINAKIS: Yeah. As I said, I saw the list, and I know a few guys have pulled out, but I was surprised at how strong it was, especially the week before a Grand Slam. A lot of guys try to play that first week, and then sometimes the second week they will kind of go to prepare.

I think it speaks volumes about the tournament and how well they have done here. It's such a great event. It's easy, the crowds come in, it's packed.

Yeah, it's going to be a tough match. I had a match point on him the last time we played in Washington. It was a sauna out there, it was so hot. I remember it.

He mis-hit a ball over my head on the line for a lob on my match point, so I've still got nightmares about that. But we'll see how we go. It's a tough task. But, yeah, again, I think for me if I can get through this match healthy and feel good about myself physically, I think that will be a big tick.

Q. The upside to the injury, did you get to watch Port Adelaide just down the road?

THANASI KOKKINAKIS: I haven't watched much. I watched Connor play the 1 Point Slam thing, which was pretty funny. But no, I haven't watched much. I was overseas a little bit.

Yeah, I don't know. It's felt like awhile, but it's also gone really quick. It feels like just yesterday I was here. So, yeah, it's crazy.

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