

Australian Open

Friday, 12 January 2024

Melbourne, Victoria, Australia

Aryna Sabalenka

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Aryna, welcome back to the Australian Open. How does it feel to be returning as the defending champion?

ARYNA SABALENKA: No big difference, to be honest. It's the same. You still need to work hard (smiling).

I'm super happy to be back. Really, I just can't wait to play my first match here in Melbourne.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. Can you let us know, like, what are the perks of returning to Melbourne Park as the defending champion? What is some of the cool, special treatment that you've received?

ARYNA SABALENKA: Nothing actually. That's something to think about (smiling).

No, no, no, I mean, it's always special here. Doesn't matter if you're defending champion or you're seeded player or you're unseeded player. I mean, Australia always treat you special. That's why I'm really enjoying be here, enjoying playing here, just enjoying my time here.

Q. How do you see where your game is this year compared to 12 months ago here in Melbourne?

ARYNA SABALENKA: Well, I feel really great. I had an incredible season last year, improved a lot as a player and as a person. I did really a great pre-season. We worked a lot. I felt like we improved a lot.

I feel really great and feel like I'm ready to go.

Q. Obviously the final didn't go the way you wanted in Brisbane. Up until then it seemed like you hit the ground running with your game. Were you pretty pleased with the level that you were able to play in Brisbane? Did it give you confidence?

ARYNA SABALENKA: Yeah, I think those matches... I mean, the finals, Elena just played incredible tennis. She just crushed it. I tried to do my best, and I'm just thankful for those three games, as I said.

Before the finals, I think I played really great tennis. Everything worked on the pre-season. Everything worked on match. That's what we are happy with. Even though the finals didn't go well, we still have another week. Now it's two more days to go. After the finals, was another week to work on those mistakes and just, yeah, prepare myself as good as I can for Melbourne.

Q. You talked a lot last year with how hard you worked to make those improvements, get to No. 1. How difficult is that to sustain, discipline week after week? How have you found it through the off-season, as well?

ARYNA SABALENKA: I mean, that's tough. Honestly, that's what I've been doing my whole life. When I am not working, like, on the days off, I'm just sitting in the room or in the house doing nothing, for me, this is impossible. I mean, I need the schedule. I need to wake up, I need to go do my job, then just have my free time, then do another practice.

For me, staying at home, it's super boring. It's something impossible to do. I find working hard is actually a lot of fun. I enjoy it. For me, that's not really tough to keep working hard, keep improving myself. I've been doing it my whole life.

Q. Have you seen your Netflix episode?

ARYNA SABALENKA: Yeah, I watched.

Q. What was it like for you to especially open up about your father and stuff like that for the cameras? What do you think of your last year and a half being captured on TV? Quite a roller coaster of a two years for you.

ARYNA SABALENKA: But it was a great time for Netflix to join my team and film it and show people that we are also struggling a lot, that there is not only amazing moments, and we are not only having fun, there is something we are working on and we are struggling with. It's always up and downs.

I'm open person. For me, it's not that hard to speak about my life and just tell my story. For me, was important to share my story with the people. I hope that people feel closer to me right now and they understand



myself better.

I don't know. I think that's something really important. Yeah, when I was talking about my family and just my story, every time I was about to cry because it's not an easy topic for me. But I'm happy that everyone who watched it, they know my story.

I think that's important for me and my family. Just in general it's important for people to know the story.

Q. You did the highwire earlier today. What was the nerves for that compared to starting at the Australian Open?

ARYNA SABALENKA: What did I do?

Q. The harness when you're up high. How were the nerves for that?

ARYNA SABALENKA: I was a bit nervous because I wasn't sure that construction could handle my weight. That's the only thing I was worried about.

But it was fun. It was nice experience. Actually wondering why I didn't do this kind of stuff when I was a kid. Probably no time for that. I was practicing a lot.

But, yeah, it was fun experience. I think that's really amazing, amazing spot for kids to have fun at the Open. Yeah, I think that's amazing. I'm super happy to open up that space. That's always a pleasure.

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