

Australian Open

Sunday, 14 January 2024

Melbourne, Victoria, Australia

Maria Sakkari

Press Conference



M. SAKKARI/N. Hibino

6-4, 6-1

THE MODERATOR: Maria, just to get things going, how does it feel to get that first-round win under your belt?

MARIA SAKKARI: Super good because after losing three first rounds in the last three Grand Slams, that was very important for me. I was quite nervous before going into the match, but now I feel relieved.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. You must be feeling, I presume, pretty good about the way that you started your season, just the energy and how you're playing at your tennis. Is that accurate? What are you most pleased about through your early matches this year?

MARIA SAKKARI: I would say the first three matches at the United Cup were a lot better than the one today, but you know, I don't want to be hard on myself because you all know how it feels when you play a first-round match.

But overall despite the nerves and the anxiety and the stress, I think that I was able to -- especially in that second set -- play a little bit of the tennis that I've been playing the last couple of months. I'm just feeling very good with my game because I really did some changes. I really worked hard. Believe it or not, I put more hours than usually.

I had a very good preseason. I don't know if I told you. I think maybe I did. I think things will start clicking sometime soon.

Q. I understand that you're working with Ben Crowe, is that right, the sports psychologist who was with Ash?

MARIA SAKKARI: Yes. I just don't really want to talk about it. I like to keep those things secretly. Thank you.

Q. You mentioned making changes in the preseason, working hard on making certain changes. Can you tell us or give us a little bit more insight into what you think are the things that you worked on

to change that you're seeing slowly make a difference so far?

MARIA SAKKARI: I don't know if you noticed. I changed racquet. It's a completely new frame. After ten years using the same racquet, that was a big change for me.

I changed a little bit of my forehand, worked a lot on that because I felt like I had a very good forehand, but it could be a lot better. So now I'm feeling that it's my best shot, very powerful, and for sure the racquet has helped.

I just spent more than four hours on the court and more than two hours in the gym, so it was more than six hours every day of training for three weeks. Obviously I did some double sessions of fitness the week before, and the closer it came to the tournament, my time on the court went down.

But, yeah, it's been I think the best preseason I've ever had in my career.

Q. Changing racquets, big decision. Can you talk about what went into it and maybe the process of deciding on settling on the frame that you did?

MARIA SAKKARI: It's been a while since I wanted to change racquets. I spoke to Wilson, and I think we came up with a great plan and great racquet for myself and for my game. It's been the perfect racquet for my game. I still get the spin, but I get a lot of power and control at the same time.

It was a big step. People around me were a little bit hesitant, but they could see that I was telling them that I know there's a racquet out there that is better for my game. It feels the right thing.

Q. Does that include string changes, tension changes at all, or is it just in the racquet?

MARIA SAKKARI: No, it's just the racquet. I kept the same strings and same tension and everything.

Q. What racquet is it?

MARIA SAKKARI: The Wilson Shift. It's a new racquet and a creation that I think it's perfect for my game.



Q. For those of us who don't know much about racquets and matching up with games, what was it you were looking for in a racquet that could help your game that you weren't getting out of the racquet that you were using? If that makes sense.

MARIA SAKKARI: It does make sense. I think I had a very powerful racquet. I think that I'm a very different player to the one that I was when I first started using my previous racquet. That was, like, ten years ago, as I said.

I needed that power before. Now I need more control. It felt like after speaking to Ron, who Ron is the master of Wilson racquets and the guy who is behind a lot of creations, he said, You know what, I think I have the right thing for you.

He actually came to Greece. We had a two-day testing session. After one session I narrowed down from 12 racquets. I narrowed down two, and then the next day I have already decided, so that was pretty quick.

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