

Australian Open

Sunday, 14 January 2024

Melbourne, Victoria, Australia

Dane Sweeny

Press Conference



F. CERUNDOLO/D. Sweeny

6-3, 3-6, 4-6, 6-2, 2-6

THE MODERATOR: How are you feeling coming off court after those five sets?

DANE SWEENEY: Usually I would be pretty disappointed after a thrill like that. It would have been nice to win, but just that experience was next level. Never had anything like that, to have the crowd... I think it was pretty packed at the end there.

Definitely things to improve on, but also a lot of positives to take out of that and a lot of confidence to take out of that, for sure.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. Dane, at the start you won the first set. Did you go into the match with the attitude that you have nothing to lose?

DANE SWEENEY: Yeah, a little bit, but I also knew I had the level to win. That was probably one of the hardest parts, not to think the job was done with just qualifying. I wanted to get far in the main draw, as well.

Yeah, I think I was a bit nervous, but really excited just to have the opportunity to play on such a big court in front of so many people and them screaming my name. I've never had anything like that.

But yeah, I think he helped me out a little bit. He didn't play a great first set. It was really good for me to capitalize on his slow start, and that kind of helped me ease into the match a little bit.

I was a bit worried this morning. I just wanted to make sure it was a good match for everyone that came down to watch me and all the people out there. I'm happy at least it was a good match.

Q. That fourth set and that turnaround, talk us through that. How did you make that claw-back?

DANE SWEENEY: I knew he was starting to play a lot better tennis, so I was kind of forced to pick up my game.

Maybe in the first set I was getting away with kind of balls through the middle and being a bit passive. He was missing a little bit. But I knew if I kind of kept that in the fourth, because in the second or third he was really dismantling those short balls and making less errors, executing a lot better, so it forced me to play a lot more aggressive. And I did that. I was thankful as ever to execute.

Definitely the crowd, the crowd was unreal. That really, really helped me turn that around. Yeah, I did definitely lift my level, and I was really happy to take it to a fifth and push him to the very end.

Q. In the fifth set did you feel it was probably his experience that got on top of you, given he has been top 20 during his career already?

DANE SWEENEY: Yeah. I think he did a really good job to stay calm, especially with the crowd going so bananas for me. He wasn't using his backhand line at all really in the match. I was able to use my forehand into his backhand a lot. I think he maybe hit four or five backhand line winners in the fifth set alone. I think that was a big improvement.

I wasn't able to hold I think for the 2-1 game, and from then on he really picked it up. Yeah, that probably comes down to experience. He has been at this level a lot before.

But definitely felt him pick up his level, and I felt a lot of pressure. In the end, yeah, that was too good.

Q. It looked like you grazed your hand a couple of times. You had a scab. Just take us through that and the pain that you suffered during the match.

DANE SWEENEY: Probably looks more painful than it is. When you are on the court, you have so much adrenaline, you're not really worried about how much stuff is hurting.

Yeah, this is pretty characteristic. I'm always coming off court, especially in long matches, with blood. I have scabs on my knees and my hand.

But, yeah, I just want to try to get to every single ball, and I'm willing to put my body in any positions necessary.



Especially with the crowd behind you and you are playing Australia Open, I'm wanting to get that ball back over the net whenever I can. My body is kind of in the back of my mind. I'm just trying to get the ball back.

Q. It looked like you had a big entourage there with you. Did they all come down from the Sunny Coast? Who were they?

DANE SWEENEY: A couple of family members from Sydney, brother, and uncle from Sydney. Yeah, my mom came down with my grandmother and my auntie from Sunshine Coast. And I had about six to eight friends come down, as well. And then people from Melbourne I knew I gave grand passes to.

I stayed at an AirBNB with all my mates last night. I was just so happy to have them come watch. It was an unbelievable experience, and I'm looking at them in the box, and they're getting up on their feet and so loud. Yeah, it was an absolutely unbelievable experience.

I had my cousin here earlier in the week, as well, and he had to leave. My dad actually had to go in the fifth set because he had to go do work back at home. He had to catch a flight and go do some cleaning jobs, unfortunately. He is my coach, as well.

I had so much support. Win or lose, I was looking at them every point. Just to have them in my corner, it was one of the best experiences of my life.

Q. Are you back to the AirBNB tonight, or do you upgrade?

DANE SWEENEY: I won't upgrade. I'll stay there, keep the money for myself. Tennis is a pretty expensive sport, so I have to try to make those dollars last as long as I can.

I have the mates staying with me and family. We'll go out to dinner tonight and celebrate what could have been a win, but still celebrate nonetheless. Might have a couple of beers as well.

Q. Just on the expense of playing on the tour, the paycheck you'll get from making first round and getting through qualifying. I think last year you played in 32 different cities, correct me if I'm wrong. How much has this helped to set yourself up for the season ahead?

DANE SWEENEY: Yeah, the money is great. Yeah, it will definitely pay for my whole year, and I can probably afford to bring my dad with me or maybe even another coach for most of the year now, which is unreal. It puts a lot less pressure on me.

But the money I think is secondary to the kind of

confidence I'll take out of it and the belief that it's kind of given me. I think that's probably more important.

But yeah, definitely the money helps. Tennis is so expensive. Going week to week and going to different cities. So yeah, it will help big-time.

Q. You practiced yesterday with Novak. Can you just talk us through that experience? How did he approach you? What does it mean for you?

DANE SWEENEY: I got approached by someone from Tennis Australia, Paul Kilderry. He said, Novak is looking for a hit, do you want to hit?

I said, I already had a hit with Omar organized, who also qualified. I thought it would be nice just to hit together. I had to answer yes or no on the spot because Novak wanted to know. Without even asking Omar, I said, Yep, I'll take it.

It was a really cool experience. A lot of my friends and family that come to watch me were already there to watch the Novak hit, so that was awesome to have them on court. Just his aura... And I was a little bit intimidated at the start, but he made me feel so comfortable. He is such a legend. He was joking around. I was hitting great, and he let me know I was hitting great. So he made me feel really comfortable.

Yeah, just to have the greatest of all time on the other side of the net, yeah, it was a surreal experience.

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