

Australian Open

Sunday, 14 January 2024

Melbourne, Victoria, Australia

Christopher O'Connell

Press Conference



C. O'CONNELL/C. Garin

3-6, 7-5, 4-6, 6-1, 7-5

THE MODERATOR: Chris, congratulations. Four hours, 21 minutes on court. How are you feeling after that nail-biter?

CHRISTOPHER O'CONNELL: Feeling unreal. Amazing feeling. Yeah, I've had so many good memories on that court, but I've just added another one.

THE MODERATOR: Questions in the room.

Q. Take us through the moment where you serve for the match, he breaks you back. What's happening after that many hours and you feel like you've had an opportunity sort of slip through your fingers?

CHRISTOPHER O'CONNELL: I was super confident I was just going to serve it out. I started finding my rhythm, my serve. The wind died down. That mucked me up earlier. I felt like I had good rhythm on my serve. Yeah, he jagged back a break, so I had to go again.

I played a really good game to break back, and then I caught a second opportunity to serve it out. I somehow did it, even though I faced a break point.

Q. How important is it, Chris, to play a Sunday match and now you have a couple more days to recover for that second match?

CHRISTOPHER O'CONNELL: Yeah, if I went down today, it's not the best feeling going down on a Sunday. But now that I got through, yeah, it's huge to get a couple of days. Yeah, I'm good to go second round.

Q. It doesn't get any easier, does it? Seen the draw?

CHRISTOPHER O'CONNELL: Yeah, I got told. Usually I don't look at the draw, but I got told before who I potentially have to play. Yeah, it's tough. But, I mean, I'm playing well.

Q. What does it mean for the confidence you're able to absorb those pressure moments and fight back?

CHRISTOPHER O'CONNELL: Yeah, huge. I was talking to my coach after the match, and towards the end of last year I had a lot of tight matches that I lost. Then I lost a tight one up in Brisbane against Popyrin.

Yeah, to get through that tight one in a bigger tournament and with that kind of atmosphere, yeah, it's huge.

Q. Obviously it's your first five-set win in an ATP match. How does it feel to be able to go the distance and get the win in the end?

CHRISTOPHER O'CONNELL: Yeah, I think I've lost a couple maybe. Yeah, it feels incredible being down two sets to one. Yeah, fighting back and, yeah, I felt great all match. I had a hard preseason. I felt fit. I was feeling quite good towards the end of the match physically.

Q. Cristian was obviously serving really well and receiving really well in the first set. What did you feel you needed to tweak in the upcoming set? You obviously went down in the second, but what did you feel you sort of needed from there?

CHRISTOPHER O'CONNELL: A couple things happened. I think it was quite windy early on, and he's got such amazing footwork, and I think he played a little bit better in the wind than I did, and I was struggling just to get set and hit quality shots. It's quite swirly in that court. It didn't come from one direction.

Then, also, I dropped back as the match went on and played more claycourt-y type tennis, and I think that helped me a little bit.

Q. Obviously, did you feel you needed to reinforce that same mindset, that same plan of attack when you dropped the third set going into the fourth?

CHRISTOPHER O'CONNELL: Yeah. It was sort of weird how I dropped the third set. I had all the momentum, and then coming out at the start of the third and get broken, it was strange. I just couldn't jag anything back. Yeah, then I really started to get on a roll at that point after the third set.

Q. How does this stack up to the Diego Schwartzman win a couple of years back? Obviously that was a big result for you. You made it to the third

round. I haven't seen you that animated after a match before. You seemed really...

CHRISTOPHER O'CONNELL: Yeah, that one felt a lot better. Cristian has been an unbelievable player. I think he has may even have been in the top 20 at one point. But doing it over five sets, yeah, just feels a little bit better even though it's tougher.

It was more straightforward against Diego a couple of years ago. But yeah, that felt awesome out there.

Q. Do you ever give yourself a moment to think about how far you've come in your career? Like, you've been sitting in the top 100 now since 2022. You've really established yourself. Do you ever think back to those times when you're grinding away on the futures tour and trying to make ends meet?

CHRISTOPHER O'CONNELL: I literally think about it every day, to be honest. Yeah, it's a pretty amazing feeling, like, yeah, playing all those tournaments or being injured or being back home. And now I'm having moments like this. It's crazy.

Q. You probably just expect it of yourself now, don't you? You feel like you've got that belief and confidence that you can compete with these guys?

CHRISTOPHER O'CONNELL: Yeah, because I've had a lot of time off and I've kicked on a bit later in my career, I feel like I'm actually young, even though I'm turning 30 this year. There are so many guys that are doing well in their 30s, hitting career highs.

So, yeah, I've got plenty more years to come, I think.

Q. What is the recovery process look like for you? Obviously a tough battle with Cristian. What's the process look like the next couple of days to prepare for your second round match?

CHRISTOPHER O'CONNELL: I've already had an ice bath. I'm going to have some treatment after this. Probably won't practice tomorrow. I'll get more treatment. Just, yeah, do everything I can. Massage. Probably hit a little bit on Tuesday. Maybe I play doubles. I don't know.

Q. Can we get you to comment on both of the potential opponents, Shelton and Bautista-Agut. Just individually what your thoughts are on those two?

CHRISTOPHER O'CONNELL: Yeah, well, Ben is unbelievable. He's playing some scary tennis at times. Yeah, just a real live-wire type of arm. It's crazy. I haven't seen anything like it. So that would be pretty cool to play him.

And, yeah, Bautista-Agut, he is just a veteran. He has been around plugging away for years. He's super professional. Had an amazing career. Had some amazing results. I have had a win over him last year in Doha, so if I happen to play him, then I know what to expect.

But, yeah, it's a pretty nasty first round, those guys.

Q. What's it like having an energetic Show Court 3 crowd back out there willing you on and getting you over the line?

CHRISTOPHER O'CONNELL: It was so crazy. When I was warming up, the chants were just going back and forth. The Chilean chant was crazy. It was pretty catchy, actually.

But, yeah, it was just a nuts crowd. Super loud.

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