

Australian Open

Monday, 15 January 2024

Melbourne, Victoria, Australia

Alexei Popyrin

Press Conference



A. POPYRIN/M. Polmans

6-3, 7-6, 6-2

THE MODERATOR: Alexei, congratulations, through to the next round of the Australian Open. Tell us about the experience on JCA with a good friend in Marc Polmans.

ALEXEI POPYRIN: Yeah, as always it's a good experience to play on JCA. It's a great time to play on JCA also with the crowd and everything. It's never easy playing a fellow Aussie, a friend. I was happy I managed to get through in straight sets. The second set was a little bit tight here and there. I just focused on my serve and focused on the way I had to play, the tactics that we implemented and got through.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. You took a medical timeout for that blister during the second set. Is there any pain with that or...

ALEXEI POPYRIN: No, it's not a blister. It's just my tape slipped off so I just needed to retape it.

Q. Wondered if I could quickly ask you about the Olympic Games this year, because there's a lot of competition between you and the man you beat today and the other two guys who are on court now to make up the last couple of spots for the Paris Olympics to play for Australia. How does playing for Australia at the Olympics rate on your calendar for this year and how do you think the competition is going between what seem to be a bunch of good mates?

ALEXEI POPYRIN: Yeah, it's definitely a goal of mine to qualify for the Olympics. It's probably the biggest goal this year for me. It's a huge event. It's an event that I think is the most prestigious in the world.

For me to be able to represent my country in the Olympics is a dream come true. I never thought growing up that I would be able to do that. If I'm able to do that this year, then I'll be really, really happy, and my family will be really happy too.

Q. It is pretty close for those last few spots.

ALEXEI POPYRIN: Yeah, I'm not focusing on that. I'm just more focusing on the way that I train and the way I perform on court, and then the results will come. I keep saying that all the time that if I practice well, if I focus on court, if I play the game that I'm supposed to play, then the ranking will speak for itself.

Q. Big one next against Novak. How do you feel about the scheduling that gives him an extra day off given the first round is now over three days?

ALEXEI POPYRIN: It is what it is. Yeah, I think Sunday starts are, it's a 50/50 in the locker room for those who like it, for those who don't. He has an extra day, he requested a Sunday start, I'm sure, and then that's why he's playing on Sunday.

It is what it is. But, you know, I was happy I managed to get through in straight sets. I have the most amount of time to recover now and prepare for that match.

Q. Do you see any chinks in Novak's armor either last night or when Alex beat him a couple weeks ago?

ALEXEI POPYRIN: No, I didn't watch either match.

Q. Will you do any homework?

ALEXEI POPYRIN: Yeah, I definitely will, like I always do before matches. Going to play against Novak is nothing different than going to play against anybody else on tour. For me it's the same preparation. For me it's the same mentality.

I'm going in there with full confidence. If I don't go in there with that confidence, there's no point going in there. So for me it's no other match. It's just me playing the World No. 1. It's just another match for me.

Q. Your big serve. Obviously you served well again today.

ALEXEI POPYRIN: I think in any match my big serve is important. So against a guy like Novak, he's probably the best returner in the world right now, it's also going to be very important. But tennis, my game is just not about my serve either. So it is a goal of mine to serve well in



that match and I have been serving well all year, so...

Q. Saying it's just another match, just playing the World No. 1, it's hard for me to believe that that is the case. How do you get into that mind frame that it is just another match when we all know it's Novak, he's won 10 times here, potentially the best player ever?

ALEXEI POPYRIN: For me just experience, being in the locker room around these guys and practicing with them and just, you know, comparing myself to them over the years.

You know, I don't want to go in there with, you know, just thinking, oh, he's probably the greatest of all time and all that. You know, I admire what he's done. He probably is the greatest of all time.

But for me I need to have that confidence going in and the belief going in that I can win the match and that he is just the World No. 1, and he is just another player for me on the opposite side of the net. I need to focus what I have to do on the court.

Q. You do believe you can beat him?

ALEXEI POPYRIN: I think there is no point going into the court if I don't believe that I can.

Q. You played against Novak a couple years ago. You are more experienced right now. What's different for this time for you? Are you feeling more confident for this match? And can you take some advice from Alex de Minaur who beat Novak a couple days ago?

ALEXEI POPYRIN: Yeah, I'll definitely ask him (smiling). I have to. I have to do my homework. I played him when I was 19 years old. I just broke the top 100 when I played him, qualified for that tournament. I remember that I was physically just not up to par to him.

Now I'm 24 years old, five years later, a bit more experienced, bit more mature. A bit physically stronger. I would say much more physically stronger.

I think for me it's just playing, like I said, playing the way that I have to play and focusing more on myself than who is on the opposite side of the net.

Q. You said a couple of times you're focusing on yourself obviously, but what do you think is the hardest part about playing Djokovic?

ALEXEI POPYRIN: Just, you know, I don't think he's got any weaknesses. He's physically strong, got really good forehand, really good backhand, solid from the back, amazing serve. Like he is the greatest of all time in our sport, so to get there, you have to have no weaknesses.

But I have big weapons in my game that I believe can do some damage.

Q. Can you talk about your evolution as a player since Xavier came on board 18 months ago or whatever it was now?

ALEXEI POPYRIN: Yeah, I always say I give what happened last year to the team that surround me. You know, without them I wouldn't have been able to go up 80 spots in the ranking. Especially X'ie came in when I was probably at my lowest in my career. I wasn't winning matches. I won three matches on tour, and he came in and instilled the belief in me that I can really perform with these guys.

Now I'm going in there with full-on confidence, and he's really instilled that in me. Also he instilled just we have been improving my game step by step. You know, just the consistency, just working on the weapons as well as the weaknesses. And honestly, I don't think I'd be here if it wasn't for him also.

Q. What's the next step for you to go from 40-odd in the world to potentially being seeded, top 20, those sorts of things? What's that last piece of the puzzle for you?

ALEXEI POPYRIN: I think it's just improving everything that's improved already. Improving the serve, improving the returns, improving the forehand, the backhand. Just everything has to be improved.

Like I said, Novak has no weaknesses. For me it's a goal to get to that level. It's a dream to get to that level. But there is a lot of work to be done, and there is a lot of improvement to be done. Even Novak, I know him personally, he doesn't stop looking for ways to improve.

I think that's what has made him the greatest of all time. I think, yeah, just having that kind of mentality is the way to go forward, and hopefully I can get there.

Q. Is that something you didn't have before Xavier came onboard?

ALEXEI POPYRIN: I think it's more maturity, more maturity and experience that I had throughout my short career, just seeing the people around me, seeing the players around me, and seeing how they work, how certain people work and other people, also, how they work.

You know, it's just recognizing what they do and recognizing what I have to do also. Now that I know what I have to do, I want to just do it.

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