

Australian Open

Tuesday, 16 January 2024

Melbourne, Victoria, Australia

Victoria Azarenka

Press Conference



V. AZARENKA/C. Giorgi

6-1, 4-6, 6-3

THE MODERATOR: Vika, congratulations on a great win today. Can you give us your thoughts on your opponent and the match today.

VICTORIA AZARENKA: Well, not an easy first round, for sure. She's a very dangerous opponent, especially in those early rounds where you're trying to get into the rhythm of things. Definitely some nerves present in the first match of a Grand Slam.

I felt like I started really strong. In the second set, I felt like she started to play better. I felt like I focused a bit too much on what she was doing instead of focusing on what I have to do. Kind of got away with my focus a bit.

I'm glad that I was able to regroup for the third set. It wasn't a perfect match, for sure. There are definitely things that I need to improve. But first matches are never easy, so I'm happy that I fought the way I did, that I took chances in the important moments.

I felt like I actually played better when my back was a bit against the wall than other way around. Yeah, it's a good, solid win.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. When you're serving against someone like Camila who tees off on returns, at times do you almost feel like you don't know where to put it, what to do against that?

VICTORIA AZARENKA: Well, I mean, I actually just looked at my stat of serving, and I won 87% I think of the first serves. And 40%, which I thought maybe was about 13 when I was on the court, on the second serve.

I don't think that actually was maybe sometimes as dangerous as I thought it was, especially on my second serve. At times I just went for too much when I didn't need to. I think that was in the second set.

In the third set, especially the last game, the double-faults were very unnecessary. Besides that I

think that I did quite okay.

She's the type of player that is going to go for it all the time, doesn't matter what. Some days it goes in; some days it goes out. How can I find ways to make her hit outside of her comfort zone? I think that's where I would try to focus more.

I thought I mixed up pretty well. I definitely could have avoided those three double-faults in the end.

Q. Can I ask you about the fans moving around this year. They're allowed to move down below. Did you know about that before the tournament?

VICTORIA AZARENKA: No, I didn't know that. Honestly, I feel like we keep making some rules that make no sense at times. Like we're trying to shorten the changeovers, then we are waiting for people to sit down. Like, of course we can try to play with people moving, but it is distracting. You are tracking the ball. It's hard, somebody's moving, it's the sun, et cetera.

Just the back part. The side, I don't care that much. But especially on the back when somebody's serving, it can be quite distracting.

There are some rules that I don't understand why we just won't make it one and a half minute so people actually have time to get in.

Same with the water bottles. Like, we have water bottles that are recyclable, but then we have plastic everywhere around. What are we actually doing?

It's like one step we're trying to take to absolutely sustainability and et cetera, but you're selling plastic all over the stadium. And those big bottles, I don't know how much I have to drink. So to me it's confusing.

I want to make sure that we do something that is important. But like this, it looks like - what's that sentence - smoke and mirrors? You can say that?

I don't like that. If we going to do something important as try to be sustainable, okay, let's actually do that. But if you look at all the things around, we have chocolate individual wrappers all over the stadium. What are we doing?

Q. With the fans moving around, it seems like the players weren't told or it wasn't communicated from the tournament to the players beforehand.

VICTORIA AZARENKA: It might have been. It might have been. We get emails sometimes. You don't necessarily read all the things.

I could look back and see, okay, was it communicated or not. I can't answer to be very precise on that. I'm not sure.

Q. A question about your opponent, Clara Tauson. I know you faced her in Roland Garros a couple years ago.

VICTORIA AZARENKA: Well, she's a very talented player, I would say. She's been on the tour. She's still quite young, but she's been on the tour for a while. She's definitely a very talented player.

I think the consistency has been probably one of the things that are a challenge for her, to be able to produce her level over and over again. When you play a Grand Slam, I feel like she can be a very dangerous player.

This is what I think with some of the younger talent, you see that they can play unbelievable tennis, and they are so dangerous, and they're so, so good, but the consistency and development of them as a player sometimes I feel like can be a bit better.

For sure I'm going to rewatch a little bit the match before and some of her recent matches, to be prepared.

Q. Is it possible to put a question about Caroline Wozniacki. How do you see her coming back?

VICTORIA AZARENKA: Well, I actually answered this question about Caroline I think it was US Open. I'm not surprised that she came back. I think it was quite a surprise for everybody else. To me, I was like, She's going to come back for sure at some point. Especially with commentating, playing the Legends, she will try for sure.

I think it's great. Very happy to see her back. I think she's done an incredible run at the US Open. So, yeah, I'm very happy to see her. I'm happy to see her with her little daughter, like, off court and behind the scenes. It's very sweet.

Q. Your son Leo, is he into sports?

VICTORIA AZARENKA: Oh, yeah.

Q. What is your attitude with him? Are you a pushy mum?

VICTORIA AZARENKA: He loves sports. He's very active kid. He plays ice hockey, is his number one. He plays football, soccer in U.S. He plays a bit of golf. I was trying to get him into tennis. He was like, When are we going home? When are we going home?

I was like, Okay, I'm not going to push you. If you don't want to play, it's fine.

For me, what's important is for him to be able to do sports because I think it helps them to develop, it helps the brain to develop, it teaches discipline, et cetera.

He recently just asked to play again tennis in school. He plays two or three times a week now, which I don't see it, but he apparently is working on his slice.

I said, Well, I can give you some tips. Well, he didn't ask for them (laughter). I don't know.

He plays golf. He does jiu-jitsu. For me, what's important is to give him opportunities and to try things in life. My only rule with him is the effort is non-negotiable. If you decide to try to come here, if you try to do something, you give 100% your effort. Result is something that he's as competitive as I am. He'll want to have result. But the effort is non-negotiable. If he commits to something, he's there 100%.

He wakes up 6 in the morning, goes to practice at 6:45, to ice rink. I hate that because I'm freezing in the ice rinks. But I'm glad to see his dedication. I hope that showing by my example of what it takes to be a professional athlete, I don't know if he will be one, but I want him to understand what it takes.

I'm not a pushy mom for, You got to go and you got to do it. I give him a choice. But if he makes the choice, I will take that accountability from him.

Q. Andy Murray was asked about whether he wanted to play tennis long enough for his kids to watch him. It turned out they just didn't care. What about Leo watching you?

VICTORIA AZARENKA: He loves watching me. He wants to sit in the box. I'm the one that is I'm going to look too much. I'm mom number one. It's hard for me. He calls himself an assistant fitness coach. I actually love that idea of giving him responsibility to come up with some exercises in the gym for me, and we do them together.

I want to involve him in the process and I want him to learn and I want him to be educated as much as possible. I actually cherish those things a lot because it's a quality time where we can spend and what we can learn together. I love that process.

I'm very happy that he's the kid who wants to learn. He's stubborn. Oh, God, he's stubborn. But, yeah, I'm very excited to see him grow because it's really for me exciting to see the development and continue to be part of that.

I don't see myself as much of I'm on the sidelines, but I feel like I have a front row to him. I'm a huge fan. Like, you should see me at his hockey games. I'm nuts. I will bring signs and I will support. I feel like everything that I've learned from around tennis, that I've seen parents who are pushy, who are negative and stuff, I feel like I'm being self-aware to try to do the opposite for my son.

I want him to be supported, but effort for me is non-negotiable. I talk to him a lot. I want him to ask questions. I want him to be curious and to understand if something went wrong, why did it go wrong.

I love that whole concept, and I'm having a lot of fun to see him growing to be a little man now.

Q. It seems like you are staying in the Docklands again? Do you have other favorite spots in Melbourne to go to?

VICTORIA AZARENKA: It's very quiet. It's much more, yeah, chill. Even though I go quite a bit to Southbank and around the Crown, it's just too many people. Not a fan of too many people. I love to see the water. The view is great.

I think the chill aspect of it, to try to get away the craziness of being in the Grand Slam is my probably favorite part of that.

Q. Are you still cycling everywhere?

VICTORIA AZARENKA: I do more scooter. I love it. I already on my third pass, I think.

Q. You wear a helmet, I hope.

VICTORIA AZARENKA: Yes, yes (smiling).

Q. John McEnroe commented about in the first game of Djokovic against the first round.

VICTORIA AZARENKA: Prizmic.

Q. He mentioned about the fans, that they can move. He mentioned the players need to adapt to the fans, not the other way around because the players are there because of the fans. I would like to know what you think about that.

VICTORIA AZARENKA: Well, I actually already answered this question.

I will say there's not one answer to this. I think the fans are already allowed at the top. It's been like this for a while. I think the sides are no problem. I think right behind the players when they're serving, it can be quite distracting.

It's not like other sports. To me, football or basketball, you don't have to track the ball coming at you from there so much. I think we can probably compromise to make it much, much easier for fans. There are innovations for that.

But I think the bigger question is, why do we have one minute where people don't have time to come in? We're trying to save time, but people are still kind of waiting. I mean, you have to be maybe a little bit conscious that we do have to track the ball when the speed is high. You have to be able to track the ball when people are moving. It is quite distracting. Sides, no problem.

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