

Australian Open

Tuesday, 16 January 2024

Melbourne, Victoria, Australia

Sumit Nagal

Press Conference



S. NAGAL/A. Publik

6-4, 6-2, 7-6

THE MODERATOR: First off, congratulations, Sumit. You are the first Indian men's player to win a singles match here after 11 years after Somdev. How do you feel about your big win today?

SUMIT NAGAL: Emotional. Tired at the same time. It's been strong I would say the past few months where a lot of things has happened in tennis. Starting the year not getting into challenger quallies, to playing second out of a slam on Thursday. Like I said, it's been emotional.

I've worked very hard with my team, and I'm very proud of myself to be able to handle the things that I'm going through and be able to perform the way I want to perform.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. Can you talk about what it means, I guess, I read that you gave up cricket, and you pursued tennis, and you try to do what others, obviously what Sania has done. Can you talk about what you're trying to do for Indian tennis?

SUMIT NAGAL: If you look at it, there was a time where we had a lot of singles players playing in the slams. I feel like we are missing quite a bit in the last few years, and my goal is to change that in the next years, when I stop tennis, whenever I stop tennis, I hope I can put an impact on the country where we can change the system and have people playing in the singles draw as well.

Q. What do you think needs to change in the system to have more singles players perform?

SUMIT NAGAL: A lot of things. First to have more tournaments in the country, bring coaches in, better facilities. Just a better system, I would say.

Why are all tennis players - singles I'm talking about - going outside India and living outside India to give themselves a chance? We should ask why.

Like I said, of course, we can sit here all day and talk

about it, but in a simple word I will just say it's change the system. That's it.

Q. Two things. Are you still based in Germany? And as a follow-up, what are your goals for 2024? I know you said second-round match on Thursday. Do you have a ranking goal, anything specific?

SUMIT NAGAL: My two goals... Yes, I'm in Germany. And my two goals would be to play the Olympics this year and to stay healthy throughout the whole year.

Q. So just with regards to the match today, obviously did you go in feeling any pressure? Yes, no? And now everyone at home is watching. How are you going to prep for your next match?

SUMIT NAGAL: I would say I didn't have too much pressure. He's the seed. I'm the underdog. Just qualified playing my first -- second Australian Open in main draw. I didn't feel any pressure, yeah.

What was the other question?

Q. For your next match now, the entire country is watching.

SUMIT NAGAL: I've not thought too much about it. I want to go through this moment, take my time, enjoy being with my coach, have conversation, maybe eat a burger or something, and call it a night, yeah.

Q. You've talked about having 900 Euros in your account in September. You have a lot more after today.

SUMIT NAGAL: Thanks (laughing).

Q. How does it feel, really?

SUMIT NAGAL: Like I said, in the beginning very emotional. Obviously, I'm not crying right now, but of course, at the same time it hasn't completely sunk in yet.

You know, these moments you will go through as an athlete. Sometimes you'll have a good year, sometimes you'll have a bad year.

Last year was probably one of the best year in a term



where, like I said, you know, 900 Euros, not getting into tournaments for first few months, relying on wild cards in February to finishing 130 again. It's not an incredible, or like, you know, record broken thing.

From where I started, I was pretty proud of myself to be able to give myself another chance to be here, to qualify, to like I said, play second round on Thursday. It's a good feeling.

Q. Have you received any messages from Mahesh?

SUMIT NAGAL: Of course. He's like my second father. I should not read the message, but it was a good message at the end, yeah.

Q. And I think I saw you played at his academy as a youngster.

SUMIT NAGAL: Yeah.

Q. Do you have goals to create academy for yourself one day?

SUMIT NAGAL: I always give credit to him. I had quit tennis in 2010 actually. So there was a program in 2008 in Bangalore, which was run by Mahesh. I went there for two years. I was picked in that program, or selected, whatever.

In 2010 the program got shut. I went back to Delhi in Jan. Feb to April I quit. I said it's impossible. I cannot afford. My dad is a teacher, so I said it's impossible to afford this.

End of March and April I get a call from Mahesh saying, Listen, I'll take care of you. Do you still want to play tennis?

I said, Sure, I would love to play. That's how the journey started again.

Q. Are you in touch with cricketers? I saw on social media you congratulated Virat Kohli when he hit a certain number of 50s. Do those guys reach out to you?

SUMIT NAGAL: I speak to him once in a while. I was also a part of his foundation. Thanks to him for those years. You know, which Indian doesn't like cricket? I follow it and watch it whenever I get a chance, yeah.

Q. How do you reassess your goals for this Australian Open now, and how much of a factor has the crowd been in pushing you?

SUMIT NAGAL: It's been nice. Nobody is going to complain about having crowd behind you. And I'm very thankful to the people who are coming and watching me

and supporting me. It's been a pleasure.

You don't get to do this on a very regular basis unless you are playing the bigger tournaments. And as of now, I've never played a whole year on the ATP Tour yet. I'm looking forward to.

And I think it's a good feeling. Having people behind you, it's nice. It pumps you up, and I feel like it also can bring out your best tennis.

Q. Your goals for --

SUMIT NAGAL: For this tournament? Just be there, enjoy, man. That's what I like to do from my first quallies match. That's what I told myself.

Q. Can you talk about your next round either McDonald or Shang, and how you are going to approach it?

SUMIT NAGAL: I don't know what the score is right now, what's going on. I have not heard anything about the next round yet.

Q. We were just talking. You're the first Indian player since Ramesh Krishnan in 1989 to beat a seeded player in a major. Congratulations.

SUMIT NAGAL: Thank you.

Q. Has that sunk in?

SUMIT NAGAL: I didn't know until ten minutes ago, but not yet. Not yet.

Q. But enjoying the moment?

SUMIT NAGAL: Yeah, enjoying the moment, of course, because you have to kind of enjoy this. It doesn't stay forever. You never know in tennis what happens next where you can go to a tournament and not even be able to put two balls in, and thank you very much. The tournament gets over. So it changes very quickly.

That's what my coach says: You have to enjoy the moment, live in the present.

Q. Did you do something different today with the serve, or did you just go out there and play your game? How are you dealing with that?

SUMIT NAGAL: With my serve, of course, the plan was to keep the first-serve percentage very high and not give Sascha too many chances, too many look-arounds where he can pressure in the second return, and I think I did that pretty well.

Talking about the game style, it was just not give him too

much free points or any type of errors, and I felt like I did that pretty well from the baseline.

Q. I just meant dealing with his serve as well.

SUMIT NAGAL: I don't think there was -- he likes to serve pretty quick, and I'm a very slow walker. For me to get from one place to another place takes ten seconds. So I don't think I was doing anything purposely, but he is a quick server.

Q. After hip surgery in 2021, did you ever think you would be sitting here reaching the second round of Grand Slam, or did you always have belief?

SUMIT NAGAL: Of course, that was the reason I was playing. That's the reason I was going through what I had to go through. Of course, everyone dreams. Everyone dreams to be at a certain place, and I never lost that belief.

Q. Ons Jabeur put the Wimbledon trophies on her phone background. Have you done anything to visualize?

SUMIT NAGAL: If I get a trophy, then we'll talk about it.

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