

Australian Open

Wednesday, 17 January 2024

Melbourne, Victoria, Australia

Ajla Tomljanovic

Press Conference



A. TOMLJANOVIC/P. Martic

7-6, 4-6, 6-4

THE MODERATOR: Ajla, what are some of the emotions you're feeling right now?

AJLA TOMLJANOVIC: Just super happy. I mean, I really didn't think at 1-4 in the third, two breaks down, it was going to happen.

I felt like the match the whole time, I would lose two games quickly because she just played great. Then I was straight back in. It felt so up and down. I knew if I just kept snagging games, I might find myself in a position of not being so far off. I mean, when it's tight in the third, it can go either way.

Yeah, the crowd really pulled me through, I mean, staying so late. There was a few kids behind me, every change of ends, saying things that were just so cute. I was like, Okay, I got to give it a go.

THE MODERATOR: Go to questions.

Q. It seemed like you had a nice embrace with her at the end of the match. You may have played here many years ago. Do you remember what your career was like then and how you have got to where you are now?

AJLA TOMLJANOVIC: I played her in AO?

Q. Maybe not.

AJLA TOMLJANOVIC: We played a long time ago. Her and I, we grew up kind of together because she was the same birth year as my sister, and they played in Croatia every time, same tournaments. I was the little one that would look up to them.

She's just one of the girls that you go way back. When we're at the same tournaments, we always speak. I don't know, I feel like when you have shared memories from a young age, there's a different bond.

It's kind of the type of player that I don't like playing her just 'cause I like to see her win. On the court you give it

your all. We both wanted it. When everything's done, you're like, Yeah...

I don't know. I wouldn't say I'm sad. Obviously I'm happy I won, but I kind of wish it wasn't her in a way.

Q. She would have had an idea of how much the win meant to you. Having to pull out last year, can you share what it meant?

AJLA TOMLJANOVIC: Yeah, I actually spoke to her before the draw came out. She was asking me how everything was going. Yeah, it's kind of surreal because I came off of Sydney and felt like I had a few regrets against that match with Kerber, just really wanted the time back, play those match points differently.

I promised myself if I get another chance in AO with a close match, I really want to just come out with not feeling that regret, which is the worst thing you can carry.

Then getting the win, I don't know, I really believe that it kind of comes back to you at some point as long as you just keep going at it. I know even rehabbing, I wrote down in my journal that I can't wait for that moment when you are like, oh, I was over with it because it will come. Hopefully you get lucky enough to rehab well and be pain-free. If you really want it, you're going to get it at some point. Maybe not tonight. But it was my night tonight, so I'll take it.

Q. Can you build on that confidence now having to work so hard in the match for the rest of the tournament?

AJLA TOMLJANOVIC: I don't know. This I think gives me a lot of confidence going into the next one, but at the same time I just really want to enjoy this moment because it's a big one. I tend to move on to the next really quickly. I probably should because it coming quick.

I don't know. I really feel like this is a big one for me. I don't know why. I probably do know why. I feel like sometimes you guys and everyone, you don't see me for a year, and no one really knows how it was. I just mean that because it's normal. You're not with me every day.

Tonight was just a huge kind of reward that feels amazing. You don't know every time when you're



coming back from surgery if you'll come back. It's a gamble in a way going under the knife. Yeah, I'm just very, very, very happy that I'm here.

Q. Can you elaborate on some of those darker moments? Is there one that stands out?

AJLA TOMLJANOVIC: Just the one where it felt like there was no light at the end of the tunnel mostly because there's just constant pain that's not going away.

But I felt very safe in L.A. I was working with John Mayer and his guys. There were quite a few athletes rehabbing with the same injury, that were at the later stages of it. Talking to them every day gave me some comfort.

Yeah, I mean, you just never know. The knee never feels the same. You got to almost find a new way to approach your career. I knew it would be way more challenging, especially like compared to my shoulder, being 30 years of age. Your body is different. You don't know how it's going to react.

There were some dark moments, yeah. It wasn't nice. But I was always surrounded with my family, which in the moment you don't think it's a big deal, but looking back, it's huge.

Q. You already mentioned the third set. Your first set, it was the 11th game, so many deuces. How was your mindset at that moment?

AJLA TOMLJANOVIC: In the first set?

Q. Five games all. Then you got too many chances for break, and you finally break.

AJLA TOMLJANOVIC: Yeah, I mean, look, I felt like breaks were so important today. I felt like she was serving a lot better than me. She was neutralizing my serve great. I felt like after the first set, my serve stopped being a weapon.

I didn't feel like it was scaled in a good way for me. I knew if I got a second serve and I kept attacking, she might think about it a bit more. That was my game plan from the beginning. I know I just can't hesitate on the second serve. The first one, just do my best to get it back.

Q. How happy were you with your game tonight? You got Jelena up next.

AJLA TOMLJANOVIC: Ostapenko?

Q. Yes.

AJLA TOMLJANOVIC: Just wanted to clarify.

I don't want to be too picky about my game because I think the win was just the best thing that could happen tonight. I felt like at certain stages the level was high, but it was a bit up and down. So yeah, I think I'm very happy with my mentality, let's say. I think there's a lot to improve on. Just one of those nights where the coin flipped on my side, and I'm very happy.

Looking on the next match with Jelena, I mean, she's probably full of confidence coming off of a title, or no...

Q. Yeah.

AJLA TOMLJANOVIC: She's a great player. I'm definitely the underdog. I love that. But I feel like playing her in the second round, I'm probably going to hopefully play even better than I did today.

So, yeah, I'm excited.

Q. Any bad blood between you two after what happened a few years ago?

AJLA TOMLJANOVIC: No. I mean, no. I really don't think so. What happened happened. It's been a while. I think we played each other after once more, and she beat me.

Look, I have respect for her as a player. What happened, that was just in that moment. I just reacted. We never spoke about it.

Yeah, we're both going to be competitive. That's for sure. I do think at least from my side I respect her as a tennis player, yeah. In that moment, I wasn't happy.

Oh, this answer's going way too long (laughter). It's fine. It will be a good match.

Q. The second round has been a stumbling block for you here. Do you think about that at all going into a match like that?

AJLA TOMLJANOVIC: Well, now I do.

No, I mean. Every time I come back here, I feel like it's a new story. I can't come in here and be like, Yeah, I'm making the second week for sure. I'm definitely in a different position coming into this AO.

I do think that special things can happen at slams. Every time I had a good run, it was never thinking further than the first obstacle. That can't change now.

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