

Australian Open

Thursday, 18 January 2024

Melbourne, Victoria, Australia

Novak Djokovic

Press Conference



N. DJOKOVIC/A. Popyrin

6-3, 4-6, 7-6, 6-3

THE MODERATOR: We'll go straight into questions.

Q. If you need to compare the sensations in the court between the first match and this one, those sensations are better or worse?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Look, I haven't been playing or feeling at my best the last, whatever, week or so. Yeah, it's frustrating at times with kind of the level of tennis that I'm playing on the court and some uncharacteristic mistakes that I make. At the same time, that's sport.

You can't always feel your best or play your best, and you have to find a way to win, which I did against the two players that possess great quality, who came out on the court knowing that they can win. They were both confident. They were both hitting the ball very well. Tactically a lot of clarity with what they need to do against me. It was working well.

Again, another very close match that was decided in that third set, like the first round. He had the three set points. He had a sitting forehand that he missed in 30-40. Then I played a solid tiebreak. He dropped his level a bit. I felt it. Momentum shifted to my side. I broke his serve and held my serve until the end of the match.

Can I be satisfied? I can be satisfied with the win. With my tennis, not so much. But, as I said, it's normal to go through these kind of periods or circumstances. You just have to embrace it, try to accept what it is, and build from there.

As the tournament progresses, hopefully things will go in a positive direction in terms of how I feel and play.

Q. What did the person in the crowd say to you that made you respond?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: I mean, you don't want to know (smiling). There was a lot of things that were being told to me on the court, particularly from that corner, and the same side the other corner. I was tolerating it for most of the match. At one point I had enough, and I asked him

whether he wants to come down and tell it to my face.

When you confront somebody, unfortunately for him, he didn't have the courage to come down. That's what I was asking him. If you have courage, if you're such a tough man, tough guy, come down and tell it to my face, and let's have a discussion about it.

He was apologizing from far away. That's all it is.

Q. Did that spark you? Looked like you were fired up after that moment.

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Yeah, maybe that was needed. I don't know (smiling).

Look, I don't want to be in those types of situations. Yeah, I was flat I guess emotionally. Game-wise I was quite flat for some part of the match, end of second set, most of the third set. Maybe that was needed for me to be shaken up a bit and start to find the kind of intensity on the court that I needed to have all match.

Q. You will next face Etcheverry. Have you seen him playing here? Can you give us some words?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: No, I didn't see him playing, but he beat Monfils and Murray, quite comfortably both matches. I will have to do my homework and see how he played those matches.

Yeah, results are really impressive. He's obviously playing maybe tennis of his life on the hard court. Tomas is a great guy. I get along very well with him and his team. Obviously on the court we're going to be opponents. We both want to win.

I'm going to try to, yeah, learn from the previous matches we had. But I think his level of tennis on the hard court particularly has improved a lot. Results are a testament to that. I have to be very, very prepared and ready for that.

Q. I don't want to dwell on it, but you've won so many of your matches, played so many times on Rod Laver, had epic moments there, won 10 Grand Slam titles. Does it upset you when there's idiots in the crowd who go too far?



NOVAK DJOKOVIC: It does. I'm not going to sit and say it's all good. It's not good. Of course, it upsets me. I'm frustrated. I don't want to be experiencing that, but I have to accept it as it is.

Sometimes I don't tolerate when somebody crosses the line. That's it. That's what happened. People have a few drinks... I guess late at night as well, that probably also has an effect on how they feel and behave.

That's okay. People pay tickets to come and watch us. They want to see the show. They want to have fun. They're allowed to do that. There's no issue in terms of I never asked anyone to leave the stadium. I never asked the chair umpire to take somebody out. I wouldn't do that because he paid his ticket, and he has the right to be there and say what he wants to say and behave how he wants to behave.

But if somebody crosses the line, I'm going to take it to him, as I did to this guy, ask him if he wants to come closer and tell me what he wants to tell me. Offend me, insult me as he did.

That's all it is. He was not really keen on coming down. That's what it was.

Q. Before the tournament you talked about going to the botanical gardens between matches. We heard from locals they think there's a particular tree near the gardens that you like to visit to meditate. Is that true?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: It is true. It is true. There's one particular tree that I've been having special relationship with, so to say, in the last 15 years. I love every corner of botanical gardens. I think it's incredible treasure for Melbourne to have such a park and nature in the middle of the city.

That particular tree, I cannot reveal which one, I'll try to keep it discreet for myself when I'm there to have my own time. I like to ground myself and connect with that old friend.

Q. What is it about that tree?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: I got connected with that tree. I just liked it. I liked its roots and the trunks and branches and everything. So I started climbing it years ago. That's it. I just have a connection.

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