

# Australian Open

Sunday, 21 January 2024

Melbourne, Victoria, Australia

## Novak Djokovic

Press Conference



N. DJOKOVIC/A. Mannarino

6-0, 6-0, 6-3

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

**Q. When you're in a situation like you were today, do you ever feel sorry for the opponent? When you're at 6-Love, 6-Love, 1-Love, do you think, Let's go for a triple bagel?**

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: I don't think I've been too many times in the situations like this one today where I won 6-Love, 6-Love. I think one of my first Roland Garros main draw appearances, maybe the first one where I qualified, and played Robby Ginepri, I remember I was 6-Love, 6-Love, 3-Love.

The tension in the third set, it was so big, whether he's going to win a game or not. Crowd wanted him to win a game and be in the match. I almost felt like it's good to give away the game, just to be able to reset and refocus because the tension is growing as more the match progresses without him winning a game.

I think, of course, it's tough for him, but also for me to be able to kind of not think about that, not think about the triple bagel.

So, yeah, I was happy that got that out of the way, 1-All third set, then kind of focused on what I need to do to close out the match.

But, yeah, I mean, I think I've played really well overall, especially the first two sets. Didn't really want to give him anything, any presents, from the baseline. Just made him work for his service games. On my service games, I think I got at least one or two free points every service game with my serve that served me very well. I think I have 15-plus aces. Whenever I needed to come up with a big serve, I did. Also quite high first-serve percentage.

Very clean overall performance against always a tricky opponent who plays a kind of a cat-and-mouse type of tennis. Has a very flat backhand, uses his talent and his touch very well, puts you in a very uncomfortable position on the court, makes you work for your shots. Very unorthodox player.

I prepared myself very well and executed perfectly.

**Q. You started the tournament pretty slowly. You're seemingly getting closer and closer to the form that fetched you 10 titles over here. Can you give us a status update on that?**

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Well, I mean, the last two matches have been much better than the first two. It's not the first time that I have this kind of particular circumstances where I start off slower and then I build as the tournament goes on.

Today was the best day in terms of tennis, the way I felt on the court. I'm really excited to enter the second week. I look forward to the battles because obviously the opponents are higher ranked. I play Tsitsipas or Fritz. There's no easy matches, no doubt about that.

But experience of knowing what I need to do with my own body, with my training, with the maintaining of the kind of level I guess tennis-related specifics that I need to work on and also recovery has been on point.

Yeah, just day by day it's going in the right direction.

**Q. You've played all the people who are left a lot. Do you watch any tennis at this point either that's going on or any videos? Can't imagine there's much you have to learn about Stef, Fritz, Sinner. How does that play into your game planning?**

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Even though I know the guys, I still have to do my homework because everyone is trying to get better, right? Especially the guys at the top, they want to move the bar at least for 1 or 2 percent, or try different things, maybe, yeah, disguise their flaws in the game and improve them so they're not as exposed in the certain shots. That's why.

I mean, it's my passion and my love, but it's also my work and my profession. Of course, along with my coach and team I have to do things on a daily basis to make myself prepared for every opponent.

As far as it comes to me watching tennis for fun, I do like to see it. For example, the other day I enjoyed watching Rybakina and Blinkova. I mean, it was incredible, one of

the most exciting super tiebreaks ever that we have seen.

Of course, I watch the other men's matches, the big rivals, how they're doing, how they're playing. Of course, we all have an eye on each other. It's no secret. In the evenings when you are kind of winding down, you switch on the TV and you watch some exciting matches. Of course, there's less and less matches, and you know exactly when they're played. Of course, you want to tune in and check out a few games or a set or whatever.

It just depends. Of course, I have a closer look to my section or part of the draw, or my next opponent, than I would maybe the other side.

**Q. When it comes to these sort of games, 6-Love, 6-Love, it sounds weird, but is there a sense of boredom? Is there a way to motivate you? Is it just about the majors, breaking records, or is there something deeper that helps motivate you? At your age, is there something else that motivates you?**

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Yeah, I mean, there are a few things. Obviously still, of course, winning majors, breaking records, and being at the top of the game is something that is always an objective and a goal, no doubt.

Also love for the game. I really love competing. I'm very passionate about it. I bring in a lot of energy, a lot of enthusiasm in the practice weeks trying to build my form to be ready to compete with the best tennis players in the world.

Being separated from the family hurts me more and more. That's the part that I struggle with more now. So, yeah, I try to balance things out with working with my schedule in such way and calendar that is suitable to me.

I think I earned my right to choose what kind of tournaments I want to play. Of course, Grand Slams being the biggest ones, the pillars, the priority on the schedule list.

I love the thrill of facing a break point or having a break point, just those kind of emotions are still awakening something that is very deep. I try to not take these moments for granted because I don't know how long it's going to last. Depends on different things.

But I'm still here, I'm still enjoying myself. Of course some days more; some days less. Grand Slams are Grand Slams. There's not much additional motivation that you need, other than being part of the most historic tournaments.

**Q. You're motivated to break records. Do you have a plan on retirement? Do you plan on going out as No.**

**1 still or will you retire when you feel like your game is just dipping a little bit?**

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: I actually talked about it few times the last year or so, that I feel while being No. 1 and still on top of the game, I don't feel like leaving tennis in that position. I feel like I want to keep on going. When I feel that I am not able to compete at the highest level with the guys and be a contender for a Grand Slam title, then I'll probably consider going into retirement.

But that can change, obviously. I mean, a lot of things can change. I'm not a teenager anymore. I'm a father and a husband. A lot of things happening in the private life off court that I enjoy, that require my attention, my presence, my energy.

Yeah, still I'm really blessed to be where I am. Let's see how far it goes.

**Q. Considering all the records that you've broken, are you now enjoying tennis more than ever?**

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: I thought maybe I would this year feel slightly more relaxed, for lack of better term, or maybe less tension, less stress on practice sessions, matches. But it's not. It is as it always was: very high intensity. You can see it even today. I was 6-Love, 2-Love up. It was a long game, and I was like going on with discussions, heated discussions, with my box.

Yeah, I always look for the best performance from myself. So I put a lot of effort every single day into making it happen. When it doesn't happen, I'm frustrated.

Yeah, it's still there. The fire is still burning. I think that's what allowed me to be where I am and achieve the things that I have achieved.

Part of me, of course, is enjoying the process, otherwise I wouldn't be playing. In the end of the day, I'm not playing anymore because I need more money or I need more points or whatever. I just want to play. I really enjoy the competition.

The drive is there. That's the most important thing an athlete should always have and nurture. I don't think I'll be able to, while still competing, really kind of nonchalantly go out on the court and have fun with it. It's just not me. Yeah, I'm a fierce competitor, as many guys out there.

Yeah, that's kind of my style.

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