

# Australian Open

Tuesday, 23 January 2024

Melbourne, Victoria, Australia

## Novak Djokovic

Press Conference



N. DJOKOVIC/T. Fritz

7-6, 4-6, 6-2, 6-3

THE MODERATOR: Questions in English.

**Q. You looked quite uncomfortable in the first two sets in the heat there. Was there an element of your thinking which was along the lines of I just need to hang on for a little bit and then when it gets cooler I'll be good to go?**

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Yeah, you could say so. I mean, I was looking forward to have the full shade on the stadium (smiling). It was a hot day. Obviously we started with a 16-, or 17-minute first game which took a lot out of us both players, and very close first set. Just physically grueling rallies.

He was, yeah, making me uncomfortable on the court because he was very aggressive. He served great. He was staying close to the line, taking the ball early, you know, making me, you know, run. I was oftentimes on the back foot.

So credit to him for playing really well. You could see that he had a clear game plan. He was really sharp. So it was definitely a struggle, you know, for me to play the first couple sets.

Then I think in the third things started to come together. I started to swing through the ball better. I started to feel better on the court and serve. Serve, also. I wasn't serving well at all first two sets, and then third and fourth, great. I think I maybe even served more aces than him, which is a surprising stat, considering he has one of the best serves around.

So that made my life easier on the court. Obviously winning my service games slightly easier, so to say, you know, cruising through, and then putting pressure on his service games.

But, you know, the way I played in the third and fourth is something that I'm really pleased with.

**Q. A scheduling question. Potentially going to get another late finish tonight. Do you think it could be a**

**possible advantage for you? Is it fair from a sporting integrity point of view, for the tournament? What do you think should be done?**

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: What kind of advantage will I have? We have two days. It's not much of an advantage that I see there. We are playing semifinals on Friday, so plenty of time for whoever wins that match tonight to recover.

Scheduling has become a hot topic, so to say. We talked about it, I think few matches ago I talked about it on the press conference, and I couldn't give a really clear answer to that, because, I mean, it's really up to Grand Slams and our respective tours to think about the ways to accommodate both male and female players in a proper way so we have no late finishes.

I think ATP came up with this rule change, but that's on ATP Tour. Grand Slams are not part of the ATP Tour. They have their separate rules and regulations that obviously are independent from our tours. We know that there are two sessions, right? So if you are scheduling two matches starting at 12:00 with men playing best-of-five, if it goes three, four hours, takes for them I think, whatever, 45 minutes to clean the stadium, bringing new fans for the night session, so it takes a lot of time, you know.

Coco Gauff played a long match today. I played a very long match today. Then you have the night session starting two hours after they were scheduled, after the time they were scheduled.

So not ideal, obviously not great also for Sinner and Rublev. I'm sure that they are not happy with a potential start of whatever. I don't know how the match of Sabalenka is going, but you never know. They could even start at midnight.

Yeah, we've seen in the past some late finishes. And I know for the crowds and for the tournament in a way it's kind of exciting to see a 4:00 a.m. finish, a 3:00 a.m. finish. I was part of some of those, you know. But it's definitely not fun for us, you know.

The good thing about the quarterfinalist on the men's section is we have two days. So I think that's plenty of time to get a good sleep and recover.



But yeah, I get your point. Look, there are different ways to address this. Maybe scheduling less matches on the center court, doing it in one session, which is most likely not going to happen, because every session carries a lot of economical value for them. So of course they are going to communicate it and try it that way and try to get as many people for different sessions.

And TV broadcasting, there's a lot of elements that are in play, you know. TV broadcasting pays a lot of money to the tournament and sponsors the tournament. So obviously, you know, in the end of the day, they are the ones drawing the line and saying, you know, we want to see this player at that session or et cetera, et cetera, you know.

Even though of course Craig Tiley here, who is a great person, and I respect him a lot, and he's always trying to do his best for the players. He's a tournament director and he's obviously trying always to communicate with players and take their opinions and consideration.

But, you know, TV broadcasting channels have the biggest power. We know that. Which is not unusual because, you know, they are the ones that are giving us the stage, as well, the platform to reach out to millions of people around the world, which is great for us.

Yeah, it's hard to say what the best scenario is in this case.

**Q. You were using the towels and the ice packs on your head and all those things. Was any of it working?**

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Well, I mean, I tried everything I possibly can in the very short amount of time in the changeovers. But, you know, I think we both felt the effect of the heat. You know, when you're playing on a hard court, the heat is absorbed in the surface. So down there for us players, we feel probably even more heat than you would feel in the stands. And of course running.

Yeah, it's hard to put down your heart rate, you know, and kind of control your breathing. It's very intense. The high level of tennis and intensity exerts a lot of effort, and you feel, you know, you're spending a lot of energy and you don't have much time to recover.

Yeah, the icing, ice bags on the head, all over the body, you know, is one of the ways to try to bring the temperature down, cool yourself down a bit, because you feel you're trapped in this heat, inside and outside, particularly today (smiling).

**Q. Can you enjoy a match like that when you're out there, or is it just hard grinding work and the**

**enjoyment comes in the satisfaction of having won?**

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: I actually said that to my team right after the match. I said that this match was not an enjoyable match for me at all.

Of course I'm proud to overcome the kind of challenge and obstacles, and I'm of course pleased to win, but it was not enjoyable at all. It was really, yeah, suffering, a lot of suffering in every aspect.

No, you have days like that where you just have to accept it and face the circumstances and try to make the most out of it.

**Q. You achieved another milestone today. I'm not sure if you were aware of this, but 33 straight match wins at Melbourne Park, and that's a record you share now with Monica Seles. She did it back in the '90s. Wonder what that means to you and also to share the record with her because you have the nice connection with the childhood coach.**

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Of course, of course. It means a lot. I didn't know that I'm sharing this achievement, this record with her. It makes it of course even more special for me. I really love Monica.

I have had Monica in my head when I was growing up in Serbia pretty much every single day, because Jelena Gencic, my tennis mother, as I like to call her, she passed away in 2012, worked with Monica when she was young. So I was hearing a lot about Monica, Monica this, Monica that, Monica eats this, Monica sleeps this much, Monica practices this way.

So Monica was definitely one of my childhood idols and heroes, and I looked up to her very much. So when I got a chance to meet with her first time it was really -- I was very nervous. You know, so obviously she speaks our language because she was born in Serbia but spent most of her life, as she's doing now, in United States.

Yeah, I know that she had an incredible career, and particularly she played well in Australia. Yeah, we all wonder how far she could have went if she didn't, yeah, had to go through what she went through.

Yeah, about Monica, I have only nice words to say about her. I'm really glad that we are sharing this record.

**Q. On that streak, 33, what is it about playing in Melbourne where you can sort of dig deep and win those matches like that every time?**

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Well, I mean, if there is any tournament where I'm going to dig deep, it's the Grand Slam, right? Particularly here where, you know, I'm aware of the streak that I'm on and the amount of

matches that I have won in my career on the Rod Laver Arena. I don't want to let that go. The longer the streak goes, the more that kind of confidence, also expectations built, but also the willingness to really walk the extra mile, so to say.

Yeah, I just love playing in this court. It's been "the" court for me in my career.

**Q. Looking ahead, there is talk of perhaps merging the ATP and WTA. Do you think this could work? Is it a good idea? If so, why is it taking so long that people have been talking about it?**

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Yeah, I heard. I'm not sure if it's like a total merge or is it only a commercial kind of collaboration or agreement between the two tours?

I think to some extent it's logical, I mean, that if we are having so many combined events on the tour that, you know, we try to collaborate even further together and increase the value, I guess, of tennis overall.

But, you know, when it comes to the total merge, I'm not so sure if that can work, to be honest, because a lot of things, there is still a lot of differences, you know, with the rules and the way that the tours operate.

But commercially, yeah, I mean, why not? Let's see what happens. I'm not in the council anymore, so I don't have any inside information to share with you, but let's see what happens.

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