

Australian Open

Wednesday, 24 January 2024

Melbourne, Victoria, Australia

Rohan Bopanna

Matthew Ebden

Press Conference



BOPANNA-EBDEN/Gonzalez-Molteni

6-4, 7-6

THE MODERATOR: Congrats both of you. Just talk about the significance of this win. Bops, you will reach No. 1 in individual ATP rankings on Monday.

ROHAN BOPANNA: Thank you. First of all, I think the match today we played extremely difficult. We knew the guys we were playing against for some time now. Unfortunately we hadn't played them before, but this is the first time we were playing them as a team. We knew we had to stick to our strengths.

I think we came out really playing some positive tennis. We got an early break, and I think there was one game where Matt was serving, which was a little tricky for us, but I think Matt came up with some big serves, you know, to get us through that game and close out that first set. And in the second set, we had Love-40 on their serves. Unfortunately we couldn't convert.

But I think overall we were the better team today, you know, in every department. I think we played extremely well. The good part, I think we played very aggressive tennis, and any time we are doing that, you know, I think it's always the best scenario for us as a team.

And of course, you know, this win gets me to the World No. 1 ranking once this tournament is done. I think for every player out there, it is a dream. It was my dream, and, you know, more so when you're playing the sport for couple of decades.

Then now at this juncture for me to get to World No. 1, I mean, I think my perseverance to the sport, to stay in it and to keep fighting and to keep working hard, you know, and have such a great partner by my side, I think the consistent year we had last year is why, you know, this helped me get to this stage.

I mean, Matt and I both have equal points, so technically I think we should be No. 1 together, you know.

MATTHEW EBDEN: Thanks, bro.

ROHAN BOPANNA: The rules are a little different when you play one tournament more, one tournament less. Hence I got the little edge, but I'm 100% sure Matt will be there, as well.

Yeah, still, it hasn't sunk in fully, to be honest. We are very, very proud. I think Indian tennis, India needed this. You know, we don't really have many tennis players coming up. Sport is slowly coming up. I think it's just going to inspire a lot of people. I don't think just in tennis. People all over the world, you know, being 40 and above, I think it's just going to inspire them in a different way (smiling).

THE MODERATOR: Matt?

MATTHEW EBDEN: Yeah. I mean, he said it all. It was a big goal of ours when we started this partnership over a year ago and we talked about it. We said, look, you know, we made our intentions clear. Said I want to get to World No. 1, win the slams, the big tournaments. We have ticked a lot of boxes the last year, and this is another one of those.

Yeah, he has the 1, I have the 2, whatever, but I saw the equal points. I'm happy to claim that (smiling). Hopefully at some spot we get the right digits equally or switch it around or something.

But, yeah, I mean, huge milestone. We should acknowledge it. It's an incredible thing for Bops, especially at his age. I think, I'm pretty sure it would be the oldest No. 1.

ROHAN BOPANNA: No, I am.

MATTHEW EBDEN: I was pretty certain. That's an incredible testament to his hard work. This last year it would have been easy for him to think, oh, I'll just have another decent year and retire in the next couple of years, but I asked him to commit fully. He pushed himself. We pushed each other. He pushed me to improve. We both improved. We worked hard together. This is a testament of all that, and incredible effort.

Yeah, we should acknowledge it and enjoy it. At the same time, we know we've still got lots of work to do here and another match tomorrow straightaway. After today



we go back to work (smiling).

THE MODERATOR: Just to clarify, Rohan will be No. 1 because he played three less tournaments than you over the last 12 months.

MATTHEW EBDEN: I've actually got more points overall. Some don't count. (Laughter.)

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. Rohan, congratulations. You're saying you're still working through it personally. I wonder whether you've had any congratulations yet from people? We know Narendra Modi is a big sports fan. Have you got a text from him or anyone else? Before you answer, can I ask you, Matt, Rohan mentioned early this week, end of 2022 you both didn't have partners. He said it was mutual getting together but also you didn't really have any other options. Can you take us into your mind back then.

MATTHEW EBDEN: Yeah, it was a little bit like that. I mean, there's always a couple of options, but yeah, realistically you need someone ranked sort of top 30 and we were both in that range. We were both left looking for partners. Everyone else is mostly always paired up. Everyone sort of has their partners.

At the end of the season some guys switch and change or some guys retire or whatever, and there's a couple of people looking for new partners, and we were both looking and it worked well. He plays on the deuce; I play on the ad. We've known each other for a long time. We thought our games could complement each other well. We thought, let's have a go.

Like I said before, I didn't want to just have a go. I had to check in with Bops what his goals were, what his thoughts were, did he want another whole season, two more? Obviously all those questions.

When we set out, achieve everything and go for the top and the best, credit to both of us for all our hard work. You know, especially Bops, being his age, I don't know how many years older than me, seven, eight years older than me, whatever, so especially at his age, the amount of work and the schedule and the amount of tournaments and travel and work that we do, day in, day out, all year, to reach the summit now, for us at this point in our, well, careers and lives, it's incredible.

Yeah, I'm very proud of us, both of us, and of course Bops, as well.

Q. Rohan?

ROHAN BOPANNA: Yeah, to be honest, I haven't really checked it. I came out of the court, cooled down, and my

famous thing which I do is the ice bath. This is what really has kept me going. I went straight in there and got a stretch and came here.

I haven't really checked my phone, but I know my phone is buzzing quite a bit. Yeah, I'll check it peacefully after everything is done when I get some time and just sit down, and, you know, enjoy those moments. And of course, get ready and come back tomorrow straight up.

Q. You didn't seem to know Rohan was going to be No. 1. I got that from the postmatch on-court interview. But you did that chest bump. I was wondering why you did the chest bump.

MATTHEW EBDEN: I mean, I knew we were close. I had a brief little look. I don't like to look too much at that sort of thing. I like to just stay present, stay focused on each match, and try and fight through each match, and the results in the end will take care of themselves or they won't.

I knew we were close. I thought, I don't know if this was the match. I thought we maybe had to win again. It was just a tough match, and then a close match, one to fight through. Yeah, I guess there was some special feeling about it, you know, for us to reach No. 1 -- well, 1 and 2, whatever.

It's, yeah, as a team, it's where we want to be, it's everything we could ask for. Like we say, really important to acknowledge and enjoy it, but we have the semifinals tomorrow also. After today, like we said, we're back to work.

Q. Rohan, can you just explain what you have changed, say, in your training and maybe day-to-day life in general to still play so well at 43, say, compared to 10 years ago?

ROHAN BOPANNA: First thing, play less tournaments than Matt, to start with. (Laughter.)

No, I think the most important is to really figure out what's really best for you, so what really worked for me is to find what kind of recovery and training I needed to, you know, in order to play at a high level. What that took was to do a lot of mobility, use a lot of TheraBands, work a lot on my recovery in terms of ice baths, stretching, cooling down.

The real focus was on that, more so not to really go out there and run on the treadmill or lift weights. You know, that was not something I wanted to do when I hired my physio, Rebecca, from Belgium last year. I told her specifically what I needed, because I have no cartilages on my knees. It's completely worn out.

So I told her, these are my conditions. I need to

strengthen my quads, strengthen my hamstrings and glutes specifically because then I won't have any pain playing these matches.

I said, No matter what happens, even if the days we are practicing if I'm not 100% fit, that's fine. I want to feel 100% fit during these matches. You know, that's the commitment I had done, you know, when I decide to play with Matt. I said, Okay, I've got a fantastic partner by my side, so I can't just let him down by just saying, I just show up on the court.

I think that is something I've always had in terms of when I take up a challenge, I try to persevere in it and bring in that willpower. I think that is what has, you know, helped as a team a lot. And then until today, I mean, if there's somebody hitting a dropshot, I still say, You, I don't go up there.

MATTHEW EBDEN: But when I say "you," you run. You get there fast.

ROHAN BOPANNA: These are specific things. I said let me focus on what I needed in order to really help myself get better on the court and then work together as a team.

Q. Have you thought about your career ending some years ago? What kept you going?

ROHAN BOPANNA: To be honest, I think that break during the COVID kind of really helped. You know, those four months sitting at home, trying to find out what to do. That's when I discovered yoga. I mean, it always was there in India but I never really tried it. I just thought, you know, it was something I wouldn't enjoy it so much.

I tried this Iyengar yoga, that's a specific type of yoga. Luckily I found the place where the teacher was right next to my house. So I could just walk during the pandemic, go about four times a week, do about 90-minute sessions.

That actually tremendously made a huge, huge difference. You know, a lot of people talk about how they are benefiting from yoga. I personally, today, say that has made a huge difference. I tried a lot of different methods for my knees. Unfortunately it was not working.

And I think yoga in a way not only strengthened my legs, my body, but also, I think made me calmer on the tennis court. You know, it kind of really helped me focus a lot better. I don't feel rushed on the tennis court. You know, I think clearly there. I think that in a big way has, you know, made that change.

You know, very rare you get four, five months off this sport, unless you have an injury or you can't really play. But that was a blessing in disguise, I think, and it really worked out for me.

Q. Rohan, just when did you really realize that you could make it? Obviously you had the goal to become World No. 1, but was there a moment that you realized that, wow, I can make it to World No. 1? Was it going through your head today during the match?

ROHAN BOPANNA: I think end of last year we had really some good matches. We were extremely close to finishing as a team also No. 1. Also, if we had won US Open, the Grand Slams, a few other Masters Series which we lost in the final, I think we were close.

I definitely knew coming in to starting this year if I did well in a Grand Slam. You know, the Grand Slams are the ones you get maximum points. So there is a good opportunity for me to do well.

Not really worry about everything around it. And thankfully for me, you know, we played well this week so far, and, you know, we got two more matches to go. You know, the job is not really done.

But still fantastic to be where I am today.

Q. Regarding the court bubbling, is that a point of frustration for players? Do you think something better could be done to prevent that from happening?

MATTHEW EBDEN: A little bit. I mean, I've played here since I was 13 years old, 14 years old, in Melbourne at these courts. I don't think I've ever seen bubbles in the courts here. Around the world sometimes it happens. But here I've never seen it. So yeah, it was a bit surprising, I would say.

Yeah, a little bit frustrating. Even out there, we wanted to just flatten them and play on. We already started the match. Better to just keep going and we were all warm and playing out there.

So a little bit frustrating, I guess. But as Bops said, experience would show us better that we don't play that match with bubbles everywhere and keep worrying that they're there. Let's just get a clean court and move. It was the best decision, I think.

So, yeah, we moved on, and that was it, yeah.

Q. Now that you have made three consecutive semifinal appearances at a Grand Slam, is there a sense that you sort of wish you had joined forces together earlier in your careers?

MATTHEW EBDEN: Yes and no. I was obviously playing singles and focusing on that for 15, 16, 17 years, playing doubles as well as much as I could, but Bops

was specializing in doubles for a long, long time. I wouldn't have been able to make that full commitment to a doubles specialist, let's say, while I was playing singles.

On my terms, no, not really. I transitioned to doubles in the last couple of years, and that's worked. But, yeah.

ROHAN BOPANNA: No, I think it's extremely difficult to say that. You know, I played with so many, you know, partners across these years. You don't know where you can click with somebody.

I think, after a long period of time, I think I found somebody I could play the entire season with. That definitely makes a difference. You know, you grow as a team. I think we have also learned from each other, you know, what works for us, what our strengths are, and how we can improve.

I think, yeah, absolutely in hindsight it would have been amazing if we would have played for a long period of time, but still, we are enjoying where we are today, and I think there is no really complaints on that.

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