

Australian Open

Thursday, 25 January 2024

Melbourne, Victoria, Australia

Aryna Sabalenka

Press Conference



A. SABALENKA/C. Gauff

7-6, 6-4

THE MODERATOR: Aryna, congratulations. You're into your second straight Australian Open final. Talk about your thoughts on the match and what you thought you did well today.

ARYNA SABALENKA: Yeah, it was incredible match. She's a great player, always tough battles against her. I think the key was that I was able to stay focused no matter what, no matter what the score was, I just keep trying my best, keep fighting for it.

Of course I'm super happy to be in another final of the Grand Slam. Hopefully I can do a little bit better than the last time (smiling).

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. What was the difference between today and in New York last year?

ARYNA SABALENKA: Yeah, well, I think in New York I played a little bit passive tennis. I didn't put so much pressure her. I mean, I did in the first set, but then I kind of, like, slowed down and start just trying to play rallies with her, which is not working well.

The whole preseason I was working on those approach shots, on coming to the net and finish the point on the net.

I'm super happy that I was able to do that on court today, and I think that's the difference between these two matches.

Q. In the first set you led 5-2. She was able to fight back and serve for the first set at 6-5. How did you maintain your composure to end up winning that first set?

ARYNA SABALENKA: Well, honestly in my head I just let that set go. I was just, like, okay, we're going to fight for another one. Still, that's what I meant when I said, like, no matter what the score was, I was just trying to do my best and fighting for it.

Even when the score was 6-5, 30-Love to her serve, I was just like, okay, I'm going to do my best, try to stay in this set and try to fight for this set.

Q. Is it hard to play someone when the last memory is not so good and you're once again in a really big stadium on a big stage like that?

ARYNA SABALENKA: Well, I wouldn't say last memory, like, was, like, a bad memory. We played a final of the Grand Slam. Yeah, I had chances, but she won that one.

But anyway, I wouldn't say that the memory is really bad from the last match we played. I mean, I lost that one, but it's just extra motivation for me.

Q. That's the answer.

ARYNA SABALENKA: Yes (smiling).

Q. People talk a lot about defending a title when you're here. Obviously for most players they don't come close the next time they come to this tournament here. Wondering the first time defending at a Grand Slam, what this experience has been like and how proud are you making it to the final again?

ARYNA SABALENKA: Well, of course that's tough, but worst case you're gonna lose it next year, nothing to defend (smiling). So I'm kind of, like, I don't know, not like I'm ignoring the pressure. I'm just shifting my focus and it's working well so far.

It's one more to go, and I'll do my best.

Q. You're into your third major final. Congratulations. What advantages will you see when you look across the net at a first-time finalist?

ARYNA SABALENKA: I would say emotionally I'll be, hmm, I don't know, like, very ready to fight. Not going crazy. Because when you play first final you kind of like get emotional and rushing things sometimes. When you're like third time in the finals, you're, like, okay, it's a final, it's okay.

It's just another match, and you're able to separate yourself from that thing. Just focus on your game. That's



it, actually.

Q. Are you as calm on the inside as you appear to be on the outside these two weeks? How much does experience help when you get to the latter stages of these tournaments?

ARYNA SABALENKA: Yeah, I think I'm pretty calm inside that I'm outside, like you said. As I said before, yeah, I'm defending champion, but worst case, I'm, like, okay, I'm gonna lose this tournament, and it's less points to defend next year. Then that's it.

That's kind of like helping me to just stay focused and just try your best in each match without thinking about defending something.

Q. I know they are still playing now so it's hard to make proper assessments. Both of your potential final rivals bring different challenges, different things from off the court. Can you just talk through potential matchups against both of the semifinalists.

ARYNA SABALENKA: Well, if it is Yastremska, we've played a lot of matches. She's a great player and she deserve to be in the finals. She have this fight spirit. Always fighting for every point.

The outside, I don't care about outside. I don't know. I feel like I know that she respect me as a player. The rest, I don't care. I'm there for playing tennis, not the rest. Yeah, I'll be happy to have another great fight with her.

If it's Zheng, I think we played once but we practiced a lot. We actually practiced here before the tournament, and she's playing really great tennis. She's really nice girl and really playing really great tennis once again.

It's going to be great battle if I'm gonna face her.

Q. Speaking about potentially playing Zheng Qinwen, you guys played in the quarterfinals at the US Open. In terms of the ball that she hits and what she brings to the table, she will be top 10 on Monday. What is it that makes her maybe unique as a player?

ARYNA SABALENKA: Well, I think her forehand is really heavy. Yeah, and she's moving well also. Fighting for every point.

Yeah, I think her forehand is really, I don't know, yeah, her best shot. I would say forehand, it's quite heavy. Yeah, she played really great tennis, putting her opponents under pressure, playing really aggressive tennis, and I think that's why she's -- she will be top 10, right? That's why she's in top 10.

Q. You spoke after the match how you barely had

any support the match before. Today obviously people were supporting Coco. Does it affect you mentally or it motivates you more if people are against you?

ARYNA SABALENKA: Well, it actually motivate me a lot. But at the US Open they were crazy. You know, like, it's motivation, but sometimes -- not sometimes, but at some time it's getting really annoying because they scream during the point and I totally understand that. It's absolutely normal, they support their player.

But I don't know, like, going to this match today, I kind of, like, knew that probably people will be supporting me more than her, and it was really nice to feel that kind of, like, support, like she had at the US Open. So, yeah, it was really enjoyable playing today.

Q. If it is Yastremska, it could be an unusual situation for a Grand Slam final. No photos or handshake together. Are you prepared for it to be different if that's the case and not have that be distracting, protocols to be different?

ARYNA SABALENKA: Well, I respect their choice there. I just respect their choice, you know.

If it's help them, if it's something they need, I'm happy with that. I don't care. It's a Grand Slam final, you know, like, I'm going to go there and do my best. If it's Yastremska or Zheng, doesn't matter. It's about tennis. It's not about something else, you know.

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