

Australian Open

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Melbourne, Victoria, Australia

Anton Dubrov

Jason Stacy

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Thank you for joining us. We have Anton Dubrov and Jason Stacy from Team Sabalenka.

Well done on the team and Aryna reaching another Grand Slam final, another Australian Open final. Just a few thoughts on how she's been playing so far this tournament, and I guess reflections on some of her matches so far.

ANTON DUBROV: I would say that I think it was pretty good start for us, in the first few matches. We just got our, Aryna got her rhythm, her flow. I would say the first really tough match for us from all the sides was with Amanda in the fourth round. Was pretty good managing energy, stick to the plan, and everything was smooth and clean.

So I think it was, like, extra confidence and belief in her game and style. So I would say that the main part here is, like, that she trust the process, what we're doing outside of the matches, I mean on the court and outside of the court.

She's also trying to develop every day better and better just to know where she can do more, where she can be more emotional, less emotional. She's kind of managing better all the aspects.

THE MODERATOR: Anything to add that, Jason?

JASON STACY: I agree with Anton overall, obviously. I would say a big part is just seeing how, regardless how she's feeling or what's happening, she's having more and more discipline to stick with what the plan is, the strategy, the things we have been working on. She's trusting herself and understanding what she's doing a bit better.

I think seeing that, no matter how the match is going, how she might be feeling or what she's thinking, she's just having the discipline just to be grounded where she is in the moment and just do the next step or whatever that happens to be with part of the plan.

It's been great to see, actually.

THE MODERATOR: Questions in English.

Q. She's obviously the top favorite, defending champion. What sort of new challenges does that present to her? Is it the case because she follows the plan, just follow the plan?

ANTON DUBROV: I think we already talk a lot about it, but not like on the slams but in previous tournaments where she was defending champion and everything, but we never see this tournament as like a defend. Because we already, we won it, so this one is another one.

It's definitely, I would say, different expectations from people outside, but we trying to bring our focus back that what we have to do to be better on the court, what we have to do to win this match, to play against this girl, like, what we have to do.

It's not about defending, because this one is a new one. It's always new one. Every next one, no matter what the tournament, would be like harder because of the expectations, because everyone, Oh, yeah, it's going to be easier for you, and blah, blah, blah. But no, it's not. Every time is just harder and harder. So you just have to managing it, understand what you're able to do, what you're not, and just go for it.

JASON STACY: Absolutely. The way I like to put it, probably two things is: It's just that mentality of we're here to play to win, not to not lose.

So if we think about we're defending something, trying to keep something we already have, that's just trying to manage your time and energy and playing it safe and making sure you protect what you have. We don't care about that anymore.

We're here to play to win. She has her strategy. She has her approach to things, and it's her job to dictate the patterns, dictate the rhythm, and just make sure that regardless what happens, she's here playing to win, not worrying about what happened yesterday or the day before or last year. So, yeah, 100%.

Q. Obviously last year from the outside looking in, Aryna had an outstanding season and was in with a shot to win really all four majors, if we think about it. Final match of the year getting nipped for No. 1. Curious what the conversations were like



immediately after the season was over and resetting for this season, was there disappointment that she had to get over, frustration, or did she let it go immediately? What was the immediate, I guess, response to 2023 going into 2024?

ANTON DUBROV: Yeah, we have like a team meeting straight after, had dinner together, and it was all kind of emotions. It was disappointment, but also, like, we talk a lot about our achievements, like, what we did great and what we can do better.

And I think the main topic was about, okay, so what was the next one? As always, Jason say, like, what was wrong, what we gonna do next.

So we always trying to focus, okay, we are here, it's like, yeah, we can be, like, disappointed or can be, like, frustrated, or we can be happy, whatever the emotions. But tomorrow we have to show up and do it again and do it better.

So we talk what we can do better, because, yeah, it was great year but you still think that you can do more because you were so close.

So that means, like, the goal is it's our, like, let's say, basic level, should be, like, higher and we have to develop more and more just to get better results, to develop better as a player, as a person, whatever.

So we talk about this, how we can be better and not just about Aryna. We're talking about the whole team.

JASON STACY: Everybody.

ANTON DUBROV: Everyone should be also developing themselves how they can help Aryna better. So that was the main topic of the night, how we all can grow.

JASON STACY: Just making sure we -- that's a big part of what we're always doing, is just making sure we have the right people doing the right thing at the right time, and that we're always kind of keeping each other in check, just to be sure we don't get caught up in something or maybe miss something.

I think that was a big part of the conversation, like Anton referenced, we always look no matter what happens, win, lose, good, bad, otherwise, is what worked well, what needs work, and what's our plan. For every practice, every match, everything, it's just simple as that.

So it doesn't matter if it was a great win or easy. There's always something that needs work. It didn't matter if you lost, there's always something that went well. You just got to find what those things are, be very specific, and what we have control over.

I think one of the things I remember actually from at the end was try to not get too much into this whole, like, oh, but look how far you came compared to last year or compared to this, you did this and this and that. I think we had a brief moment of that, just to acknowledge, yes, you did really well. She was very consistent through the year. There was a lot of things she took a step forward with, and she did it consistent enough, as Anton said, we could kind of consider that, okay, that's like a new level for you. We're not where we want to be, we've still got work to do, but we've definitely take a step forward. She showed throughout the year and already the start of this year that she has that new level that's hers.

But we didn't spend too much time on all that. It was just exactly like Anton said, okay, what can we do to get better? What's next?

Q. A slightly different question. The on-court coaching rules that are still being trialed, do you support them and do you utilize them much?

ANTON DUBROV: We're using them, but not that much, I would say, not talking a lot. It's more about trying to manage the energy sometime; where she has to come down more, where she should be more fired up. Where it's something, like, definitely you can see is not working, you're going to help 100%, but we are not like talking after every point, because with Aryna --

JASON STACY: Terrible.

ANTON DUBROV: -- is just easier to be simple, less words, just like one, two words, then she will be in the moment. She knows better what to do, she feels better.

Sometimes we need to help to feel it for her. Something she cannot understand, just put it and she's doing it.

JASON STACY: Just a little nudge every so often, like hey... (smiling).

Q. Obviously looking forward to tomorrow, just the matchup with Zheng Qinwen, I understand they practiced together here.

ANTON DUBROV: Yeah, they had one practice, I think Wednesday or Thursday we played, yes.

Q. What do you make of Qinwen's game? Where do you think the keys to that matchup for Aryna, what does she have to do?

ANTON DUBROV: As always, dominant. It's always really simple. Because they both playing aggressive but I think Zheng is, like, she's trying to get more to the longer rallies, try to keep her own rhythm. And I think with Aryna and with Zheng the same, who's going to be the first to take this step, who's going to take this

dominance from the first point, who's going to be this one who push more.

Nothing really I can say a lot right now, but who will find this from the beginning with less emotions, more with the plan.

JASON STACY: There you go. It's her job, she knows what she needs to do, and they make plans, he's the tennis guy, right? They make the plans, this is how the girls play and this is her strengths, weaknesses, all that stuff is great. It's not a focus on like, this is what our opponent is doing, and so we have to manage that.

It's no, this is what she's doing, put that aside, this is how you put your biggest strength against her biggest weakness, and you put on your game, your strategy, and make sure from the start you dictate that and apply that. The rest, whatever.

Q. Jason, what's on your head? I mean, is it a time of preparation for press conference from Aryna? I think it's not only signature. Why it's on the day off, not on the day of the match?

JASON STACY: It's just been the thing for the tournament. Our first day here, there was some kid wanted a ball signed. Oh, can you sign this ball for us?

She's, Ah, no problem. So she signed my head as a joke.

Then every day it's like a routine to sign my head. Non-match day, she just draws some random picture. They played tic-tac-toe on my head the other day. She won, by the way so it's good.

Then on match day she just signs it and does random stuff. Just part of the process.

Q. What is the pictures today?

JASON STACY: Today, I don't know, some sort of tiger or cat or something.

THE MODERATOR: It's a cat.

JASON STACY: A cat, and then she wrote "Meow" underneath it. I'm, like, Oh, gosh.

Why not, right? Just for some fun. I don't mind. I'm like a canvas (laughter).

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