

Laver Cup

Saturday, 24 September 2022

London, England, UK

Matteo Berrettini

Novak Djokovic

Press Conference

BERRETTINI-DJOKOVIC/de Minaur-Sock

7-5, 6-2

Team Europe - 8

Team World - 4

THE MODERATOR: Welcome to the press conference of Matteo Berrettini and Novak Djokovic.

Questions.

Q. Novak, does it feel like you have been away from a professional match since the 10th of July?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Yes and no. To be honest, no, because the performance was great, both singles and doubles. I felt really good on the court.

You know, I haven't done too many bad things, I must say, on the court today, particularly in singles. Whatever I planned to execute, it worked really well. I'm obviously very glad that I got that one off my back.

Obviously after not playing for a few months, you don't know really how you're going to feel on the court. It's quite unpredictable. But last three, four days of practice sessions here, I have been hitting the ball very well. I like the conditions. I like the court. Suitable to my game.

So I was confident coming into the match, even though I knew that Tiafoe, coming off from some impressive wins in New York and, you know, great tournament there will also look to play well.

So I feel like I started off well. When you start these kind of matches very well, you know, I had I think the perfect first-serve percentage in the first three service games, you know, a lot of easy points there, and then that obviously allowed me to kind of swing with more confidence on his service games.

You know, I felt that I needed to make my presence felt, you know, on the court. That's what allowed me, I think, to get away with that comfortable first set. It was a big confidence boost for me.



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So yeah, I mean...

MATTEO BERRETTINI: I have to go to sleep, Novak (smiling).

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: From that standpoint, I will go into more detail. Let me speak about the first game of the match. I liked the way I served wide... (Smiling) Yeah.

MATTEO BERRETTINI: You explained very good. You were playing good. No, for real, for real.

Q. I have a question for Novak. After that Roger last night officially retired, do you feel older? How much...

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Do I feel what?

Q. Older. And more seriously, for how many years do you think that you can play on court?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Well, I feel older than him (pointing to Matteo), which I am. But I don't feel yet so old, to be honest, for tennis career, for my tennis career to finish.

I still feel my body is serving me, is listening to me well. That's the key I think when you get to 35-plus.

I think you just feel that things are different than when you were 25, for sure, with the way you respond, I mean, your body responds to some competitions maybe, or tournaments that you play in the schedule if you play a few weeks in a row. Obviously that's different. So I am adjusting my scheduling much, much more, you know.

I'm not playing as much as I played few years ago. I want to peak at the best tournaments, biggest tournaments in the world, which are Grand Slams and some of the biggest ATP events, playing for my country.

That's what gives me the most motivation and inspires me to play the best tennis. I really want to keep going. I don't have the ending of my career on the horizon at the moment. I can't give you a number of years. I don't know.

MATTEO BERRETTINI: (Snapping fingers.) (Laughter.)

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Depends how good are these guys and how much they are pushing me, Rafa, now that Roger has ended his career.

But, look, right now I don't feel also so comfortable

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talking about myself. You know, it's really, everything these days is about Roger and what he has achieved. It's a sad day, sad moment for tennis and sport in general to see him leave, but the way it all happened yesterday, I think it's a perfect way to say good-bye.

Q. A question for both. How did you prepare for this doubles, first time you played together? Did you talk strategies the day before or anything? Matteo, please answer first because you're falling asleep...

MATTEO BERRETTINI: No, no, I'm good.

We didn't really, like, prepare yesterday night or something like that. Obviously, like he said, it was all about Roger, like had to be.

After his singles, honestly, I felt a little bit of pressure. It was like, This guy didn't miss a ball now (smiling).

But, yeah, we actually started talking Italian. Okay, I'm going to return on this side. When you serve, like to do this. Do you like to play I-formation?

Then it kind of, like, everything happened pretty smoothly, I would say. It was really nice. We found the right energy. We got the break pretty early. Then I got broken. But we were there, and we fought hard and it was actually a lot of fun playing this time on the same side of the net.

Yeah, like he said on court, I think hopefully it's not going to be the last time.

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Yeah, I mean, just to add, after singles we had 10 minutes really. The actual conversation started to happen when I was in the toilet. So, you know, if I really need to explain it vividly how it happened, I mean, that's how it happened.

He was like jumping around trying to warm up. I was trying to get some food or shower and it was, like, Where do you play? But it happened very quickly.

Again, last night we went to sleep, didn't have a chance. He was focusing on his singles; I was focusing on my singles.

But we never played together, you know. But the way we played on the court, seemed like we played many, many times before. Hopefully he's going to give me this pleasure to play with him again.

MATTEO BERRETTINI: I don't know, but... (Smiling.)

(Matteo exits.)

Q. I want to ask you a question about the Laver Cup itself. You spend time in the locker room of course

all year round with a lot of these guys, but how is it different here when you're part of a team together? I would imagine it's also a lighter atmosphere than normally during a regular tournament. Also about this event, I'm wondering if you think there is anything it needs to do in the future or something that could make it become more important on the tennis calendar and more of an event that fans pay attention to when there isn't somebody retiring.

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Well, first of all, the atmosphere is completely different in the locker room than what we experience normally on the tour, because we are teammates, we are not rivals for the only time probably. Other than this week, we are always rivals unless we are part of the same Davis Cup or ATP Cup team, part of the same country.

Also, our team members, some of us brought team members here, like coaches, physiotherapists. They are not allowed to get into the locker room. It's really Team Europe, only us players. We have a couple of physiotherapists that are normally working with ATP but they're here and coaching team of Team Europe, and that's it.

I like that. I like that a lot, because it allows us to interact with each other, to get to know each other better, because when we have our team members in the locker room and on the tour, then you spend more time with them. You know, it's more comfortable and maybe you don't interact with others as much.

As for the Laver Cup, I think Laver Cup is doing great, honestly. I mean, each year, you know, the experience for the players is better and better.

I have played it only once in Chicago four years ago, but I had a fantastic time. This year even better. I mean, of course, you know, one of the greatest reasons for that is because I experienced Roger's farewell last night that is the biggest story in the sports globally.

But also, just because the concept of the Laver Cup is so unique that regardless of whether Roger is retiring or not, to your question, I think this competition will live and creates very beautiful memories for players that players take with them on the tour, and they talk about these experiences and memories with each other. So it creates better bonds and relationships between the teammates, even though we are rivals on the tour, but it feels like after this week, you know, we feel closer to each other in a way.

We respect each other. Of course we always did, but, you know, it's kind of more of a friendly atmosphere that you take later on on the tour.

I love it. I think it's a great idea. It's a great format. I'm

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sure that it will have a successful future.

Q. You say you're listening to your body. Obviously you would not have chosen to miss the US Open, and I'm sure that hurt you a lot. But given that you are 35 and having to listen, is there some sort of blessing in taking an 11-week break from competition in the middle of the year? Might you have to build in breaks to increase your longevity?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: I'm a strong believer that everything happens for a reason. So of course you can always see things half-full or half-empty glass, so I try to be optimistic in life and positive.

If I have not played and traveled to United States, then I might as well do as best as I can something very valuable with that time for me. My health, my family, my body, the quality time that I spend when I'm not on the tour with people that I like to spend time with or do some other things.

Then if it comes to professional career, when it comes to tennis, you know, have more time to work on the court, specifics, something that is related to my game that I would like to work on technically or tactically, et cetera.

So I did have that time, even though I must say it was, you know, not really comfortable training and then playing points at the training sessions and then hoping, you know, to go and then getting, receiving not good news for Cincinnati and then, you know, again, working my training schedule so I could travel to States, to New York, and then again didn't happen.

So it was kind of on and off in terms of program on the court that I had and training regimen, which I didn't like. I don't enjoy that.

I mean, every athlete wants to have clarity when it comes to schedule. Okay, I mean, I have this competition, I have this training block, I have this recovery time. And then you can organize yourself better.

This time it wasn't the case, but still, as you said, I had plenty of time and used that time to, you know, for good things for stuff that happened off the court for me, family first, and then of course all the other stuff that I have.

I have a tennis center in Belgrade, so I was greatly involved with that. As I said, in this stage of my career, it's really not about running to play every week. I don't want to do that. Right now it's focusing on what matters the most for me at the moment, you know, when it comes to tournaments, and I said previously, you know, what are those tournaments.

Then also, trying to preserve the body and have a long career. I don't have years in my mind, whether that's

another year or ten years or whatever it is. I just want to keep going as long as I feel good and I can compete with the youngsters, that I could be one of the candidates to win Grand Slams.

And also, what, you know, gives me kind of a good feeling is to visit the places that I normally did not visit, like Tel Aviv, for example. I'm playing there next week. Kazakhstan after that. I didn't play in these places ever, the tournament. I'm excited about that.

We always have pretty much the same routine, the same scheduling. So that's nice to visit new places. It gives me goose bumps, you know, and excitement to go there.

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