

# Roland Garros

Sunday, 27 September 2020

Paris, France

## John Isner

### Press Conference

J. ISNER/E. Benchetrit

6-4, 6-1, 6-3

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

**Q. You were playing a player you probably hadn't played before, a qualifier. What were your thoughts on him during the match?**

JOHN ISNER: That's a good question, buddy. I didn't know much about him. I think I practiced with him before. You never really know what to expect.

For me the formula is always the same, and that's just try to hold my serve, go about my business that way. I was able to do that today, I guess play some big points well in big times. I was able to get off the court in pretty quick fashion.

**Q. I think a clay court is probably always a big challenge for you, but it must have been even a bigger challenge when you're playing in those sort of conditions, cold and damp in the air.**

JOHN ISNER: Yeah, I mean, the last clay court match I played was this tournament in 2018. It's been more than two years since I've stepped foot on clay.

But with how the clay is now, I think it almost helps me in the sense that the really good movers can't really slide around like they normally can because the clay is really damp. It kind of played like a slow hard court, I thought. There wasn't much sliding. I'm not the best slider.

It's tough conditions. I really don't mind it.

**Q. What did you think of the weather out there and the conditions, whether this feels like the French Open or some other kind of tournament?**

JOHN ISNER: Well, I mean, this is really what you can get playing in roughly northern Europe in late September. This really isn't out of the ordinary.

I think the players, especially me, I'm very happy that we were able to play today. I mean, I went to bed last night thinking it was going to be a long day, one of those



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where I never really got on the court.

The weather cleared, albeit it was a bit nasty out there. Even in May you can have some cold, damp conditions. But it's never really been this cold and this damp and windy. It's just one of those things. All of us are happy to be playing right now, be playing a Grand Slam.

I think the FFT, the French Open, have done an incredible job putting this event on. The players are happy to be here.

**Q. In the past in Paris when we've talked to you about playing on clay, you've spoken about the idea that your serve is going to play pretty much anywhere on any surface. That's part of why you don't mind being on clay. The way things are this year, people talked about the balls being heavier than usual. If instead of maybe this being really bad for you, it might not be that bad for you?**

JOHN ISNER: Yeah, I mean, I don't think it's terrible for me. I played some matches here throughout my career when it's been hot and dry outside. I really like those conditions, as well.

Really I just think it's up to me. If I'm going for my shots the right way, not playing tentative, I think conditions like this can be pretty good for me. Hopefully I can keep getting stronger in this tournament and try to play the right way.

If I don't, it doesn't really matter what type of court I'm playing on. If I'm playing tentative, I just get run around on the court, my opponent runs me around. That's not a good recipe for me.

Conditions like this certainly give me a lot of time, which I do prefer. A lot of people think I prefer playing on fast courts. That's not the case at all. I much prefer playing on slower courts. I like my serve in any conditions. Outside of my serve, if I'm playing on a slow court, it gives me more time.

The court like the US Open was pretty quick, maybe a little bit too quick for me. I didn't really enjoy it that much. But I do enjoy playing on stuff like this.

**Q. A general question about 2020. It's obviously been a really challenging year for everybody. For you personally, what has been the most difficult thing about this year?**

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JOHN ISNER: To be honest, it hasn't been that difficult for me. Of course, I would have definitely preferred that we would go about business as usual, playing the same schedule over and over again. This was, of course, unexpected. It took its toll on the whole world, and still is.

But for me, it hasn't been difficult. I got to spend a lot of time at home. I've been healthy. My family's been healthy. My immediate family, my wife and kids, my parents, brothers, in laws, everybody has been healthy.

For me, there's absolutely no complaints. I've been very lucky throughout all this. Of course, there's countless thousands and thousands and hundreds of thousands that have been affected by this either directly or indirectly.

Again, I consider myself very lucky. It hasn't been difficult for me at all.

**Q. What was your decision in not playing Rome before the French Open?**

JOHN ISNER: I just didn't feel like I was ready to go over and play Rome, of course possibly Hamburg. I guess I was telling myself the best preparation for me at Roland Garros was to stay at home and train, just be there with my family. When it really came down to it, I just didn't want to leave them. I'm coming over here for one tournament and I'm flying back home afterwards. That was my plan.

I was telling myself all along, irrespective of how I did at the US Open, even though I lost first round, I stuck with that. Again, this year has been so different. Hopefully things can normalize next year and I'll play Madrid and Rome in May, early May.

**Q. Is Roland Garros 2020 a different tournament to past editions?**

JOHN ISNER: Yes, I mean, it is different. I think just the fact that we're playing in September and October, it's never been done before here. It's very different. It's got a different feel to it. Having no fans stinks. The atmosphere at this event is unbelievable, one of the best we have all year long. We don't have that right now. As far as that goes, it's very different.

At the same time it's a Grand Slam. There will be no asterisks whoever wins this event, whether it's Rafa, Novak, Thiem, any of those guys. It's different, of course, to be playing this late in the year. But I think we're all happy to be here.

**Q. Your next opponent, Sebastian Korda, how well do you know him, what might you know about him? I don't know how much you pay attention to what else**

**is going on at a tournament you're playing in with matches that don't involve you, but wondering if you had any thoughts on the idea of seeing Andy Murray and Stan Wawrinka play each other in the first round?**

JOHN ISNER: Well, the first part of your question, I've gotten to know Sebastian decently well over the last year or so. It's really good to see him start having great results. I mean, he's still so young. To see him qualify here and win a first round, that's a huge result. Correct me if I'm wrong, he's 19 years old or something. He's a great hope for American tennis.

I'm very happy to be playing him next round because in five years' time I won't be playing, he'll be right in the prime of his career. To be able to say we squared off against each other I think is pretty cool.

Him and I get along very well. We both really love hockey. He's a Boston Bruins fan, I'm a Carolina Hurricanes fan. They eliminated Carolina again in the Playoffs. Gives me some crap for that.

He certainly has an incredible pedigree given his father's tennis career, his two sisters doing amazing things on the LPGA Tour. Good to see him having success. That's a very, very athletic family, no doubt about that.

As far as seeing that matchup, look, that's possible when you have someone who is as good as Andy being unseeded. You also have Dominic Thiem playing Marin Cilic first round. There's always players you go to a Grand Slam that aren't seeded that are going to be difficult first rounds. Of course, Andy Murray is one of them. Cilic is one of them, as well. They just happen to be playing two of the best clay court players in this field.

In 2011 when I played Rafa first round, I think I was like one or two out of being seeded. That's just what can happen. It will be good for spectators, that's for sure.

**Q. What is your comfort level with the hotel here in Paris, if you feel like the people in the tennis bubble are being protected from the rest of the guests enough?**

JOHN ISNER: Yeah, I personally do. We're wearing our masks. We're not leaving the hotel, of course, to go out to dinner or do anything like that. Speaking for myself, I feel very safe. There's no doubt about that. I think they've done a good job.

The hotel, it's nice. It's got everything you could ask for. The rooms get really cold at night when you open your window. That's awesome. I like that.

Look, it's a great place to be able to stay and compete at a Grand Slam at. I feel very safe. I think most of the

players do, as well.

**Q. Have you had any close calls in the elevators, in the lobby with a fan or not?**

JOHN ISNER: No. Even if I did, I'd be fine with that. I think it's important not to freak out too much if someone gets too close to you. We got to get back to normal here. Normal behavior, in my opinion, is very much needed.

It's fine. I've taken a few photos outside the hotel. They don't allow fans inside the hotel. We keep our distance. Our masks are on. It's totally safe. I would feel safe if we didn't take all these precautions, as well.

Again, the players have been protected very well here.

**Q. I think you said you were going to be flying straight home. Does that mean you don't think you'll be coming back to Europe for any more tournaments? Are you going to be playing again this year?**

JOHN ISNER: Well, I'm entered in Vienna, pretty sure I'm entered in Vienna, and back here in Paris, the indoor event. One of the things I told myself as I get older, I do want to sort of play less. I love it over here in Europe, it's amazing. I especially love it in Paris. I really enjoy my time at home.

I had a great plan prior to the pandemic of what my schedule was going to be. I was telling myself I was going to play Madrid, Rome, come home, play the French Open, then go back home again.

Definitely going home after this. As I said, I'm entered in Vienna and Paris Bercy.

**Q. Have you ever had the second serve yips?**

JOHN ISNER: Not really, no. I've had the yips in every other part of my game. That's for sure. When it comes to my serve, no. I get the yips on the golf course quite a bit. If there's one thing I'm good at, it's serving a tennis ball, and I can do that pretty consistently well.

**Q. Does it surprise you to see the troubles that Sascha has had with his second serve recently?**

JOHN ISNER: Yeah, it's a little surprising. I've played against him where he's served incredibly well. He can serve you off the court because he's a big, strong guy.

Of course, I mean, I haven't dug into his serve too much, but there's probably some things technically he can do a little better. I'm sure he's working on that as well. It's mostly a mental thing. Any time you have the 'yips' in any sport, it's very mental.

Look, he'll be fine. If that's the part of his game he's got to worry about, he's going to be fine because I know he's going to fix that. Every other part of his game is so, so solid. To be that tall and wiry and move that well, have his second serve in a sense be a liability right now, is actually a pretty decent problem to have. Once he fixes that, it's going to be very scary.

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