

Roland Garros

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Paris, France

Victoria Azarenka

Press Conference

V. AZARENKA/S. Kuznetsova

6-4, 2-6, 6-3

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. As you said on court, your season has been a little bit sabotaged by injuries and it's been a tough one for you. How good does it feel for you to go through a physical match like that and feel good about it?

VICTORIA AZARENKA: Yeah, definitely. You know, like in terms of physical condition, I felt always pretty good. It just was like the injury that was, you know, mentally kind of draining and definitely not helping. Especially I was dealing with something that we couldn't really figure out what's wrong, like it was a lot of suggestions, a lot of MRIs and a lot of stuff, but it was kind of hard to, what will help, you know.

So it was a bit of a battle. Things were getting better. Then I play and the things are getting worse. So mentally was very, very difficult. Taking, you know, decisions to withdraw and not play was even more difficult for me.

Now, as I said, I practiced for two, two-and-a-half weeks pain-free, which was, you know, encouraging. It was really encouraging. Today playing, I don't know how long, two-plus hours we played with a lot of movement, a lot of tenacity, so I'm happy about that.

Q. You're a Grand Slam champion. You have lots of experience in playing Grand Slams. With that experience during the competitions, which things are easy for you during the competition at this stage of your career, and which things are harder for you?

VICTORIA AZARENKA: I will say that in terms of playing and competition and being on the court, I do feel like I'm enjoying a lot more. I feel like I'm motivated more than I was before. I feel happy. I feel like I'm learning more, and I'm pushing my own potential.

Anything around tennis I don't necessarily like (smiling). I'm not into traveling this much. Bubble life has been not something that, you know, was easy for me. I know we



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are in a difficult situation and it's not about, you know, complaining. But it was hard. It takes a toll, especially for somebody like me that I'm never around, you know, players' hotels usually, I never stay in players' hotels, I don't spend time around tennis. I always take my time out of competition to have that balance.

With unfortunately these conditions, it has unfortunately been a bit hard for me. Hopefully, I think we have been saying this last year, hopefully things will change soon. But I do hope that we're getting, you know, a little bit of adjustments now.

Q. Speaking a little bit more about that experience, you're someone who has had to do a lot of press conferences in your career. Curious what you made of a lot of what's been going on with Naomi's decision not to press and if you read the statement from the Grand Slams and your thoughts on that.

VICTORIA AZARENKA: My thoughts on that, I will say that everybody should do and do whatever they want. I personally don't share the same feeling. I believe that -- and I think that message maybe was not entirely written well, because I believe that press and players and the tournaments comes hand in hand. We are helping you guys; you guys are helping us.

So I think it's very important in developing our sport, in promoting our sport. I always appreciate that. But one thing I will say that it's not easy sometimes to be on this side. And I think if we all take a bit of responsibility like us doing our best to show up and give you honest answers, the same from you guys, you know, have a little bit sometimes compassion, because we are going through a lot. I think that's really important to have that balance from both sides.

So I hope that maybe not entirely that message but this message would be heard, because we are all humans, we go through a lot of emotions, and I really hope that we understand better.

And some things I do agree should be changed. I have mentioned that one time, you know, with releasing your medical information. I think something like this maybe can be a bit private where it's very sensitive, and some people need to realize that you're kind of opening up to the whole world and it's not easy.

So I think we can just maybe work to find sometimes a better balance where top players like Naomi, who is really important for our sport, doesn't maybe make the same announcement sometimes.

I think that would be really helpful.

Q. I wondered if you had any thoughts on Carla Suarez Navarro who has battled back from Hodgkin's lymphoma and making her last appearance at Roland Garros this year. I know you have faced her and been around her for several years. Any thoughts on her character, type of player and person she is?

VICTORIA AZARENKA: Well, I mean, just what she's been through just says everything about her character. She's a fighter. She's been an amazing person. Honestly, when I found out those news, I have sent message to Carla every week to see how she was doing, because I felt really close to this emotion.

I had an occasion in my family where somebody's battling through cancer, and sometimes you feel helpless. But that one moment of encouragement hopefully sometimes makes a difference in somebody's day, and I'm so proud of her. I'm so happy that she picked up her racquet again and she's competing here.

I'll be watching her play and I'll be cheering for her for sure.

Q. You talked about sort of how the COVID experience and isolating has been tough for you. Do you think it's had an impact on all the players, on the culture of the WTA and the ATP? Just the big picture with tennis and its impact.

VICTORIA AZARENKA: I think mentally it took the toll. And, you know, just looking at the Australian Open situation, you could see how different everybody's approach is, how different people are recovering.

Somebody like Jenny Brady played the final of Australian Open, and it's somebody will say, You know what? Maybe you should quarantine every time for two weeks.

It's absurd, but I just think that everybody deals with it differently. It's not an easy situation. I think from the outside world if we look at it objectively and we say, Okay, well, you're traveling on the tour, you're making money, you still have the job while other people don't have job, yes, that's right, but I think you shouldn't underestimate or overestimate somebody's struggle or success. I think that sort of compassion for each other will be helpful in going through hard times.

Q. Back to your tennis, the fact that you're pain-free now for two-and-a-half weeks and feeling good, does that mean that you have higher expectations about

what you can do? You built up a lot of momentum on the clay both last year and I wonder if you're feeling like you can do something at this tournament?

VICTORIA AZARENKA: Well, I always feel like I can do something at any tournament. I think expectation is the first step to disappointment. I think setting goals and making sure that you show up with a constant effort, that is something that I will ask myself every single day.

Where it leads to me, it's really a waste of energy, but I always believe in myself. I always gonna push myself to the limit. And the most important is not to self-sabotage yourself sometimes (smiling).

Q. Your next opponent, Clara Tauson of Denmark, very talented teenager, how do you see that match?

VICTORIA AZARENKA: Not to be disrespectful to a player, but I don't really know her. She's a young player, right?

THE MODERATOR: Yes.

VICTORIA AZARENKA: Yeah, I have not really seen her play, so it's going to be a bit of homework for me to do.

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