

Roland Garros

Monday, 31 May 2021

Paris, France

Novak Djokovic

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. A question about the night sessions. This year we have official night sessions for the very first time. As a player, do you feel is it added pressure when all the eyes are centered on you or is it a pleasure and privilege?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: I think it depends on the player. I can speak on my own behalf. I actually have a really good record playing in night sessions in all Grand Slams where we have a night session. So I don't mind it.

Only thing is that I'm a little bit sad that there's not going to be crowd. I heard that yesterday. I didn't know there was a curfew at 9:00 in the evening here, which is the time when I am supposed to start my match. Playing in front of an empty stadium in a Grand Slam will not be fun.

Hopefully I can win the match and then have an encounter with a crowd in the next round.

Q. Your rivalry with Roger has produced some epic moments, you've broken his heart on many occasions. 10 years ago in Paris he got the best of you. Could you take a moment and reflect on that match, the craziness of the atmosphere.

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Well, it's been 10 years, quite a long time ago. But, yeah, I remember of course losing that match. I lost that streak of, what, 43 matches. Yeah, it was an incredible run for me that ended losing to Roger in semis. But he played a fantastic match.

So it was of course disappointing to lose, but at the same time I just had to congratulate to him because he just played a better match. I think until really the last shot, we were kind of pushing each other. I think it was really difficult to see, as I can remember, because there was no lights, obviously no roof at that time, and it was already very dark. I think it was past 9:30 in the evening.

But it was one of the epic matches that of course you remember for a long time.

Q. Obviously a lot has been made that you're in the same half of the draw as Nadal. A lot of tennis to



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play before that match happens. Could you talk a little bit about your rivalry with Nadal, especially on clay. I know there was a period where you won 7 of your 12 matches against him on clay between 2011 and '16. He's won the last five.

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Well, I mean, when you speak about Rafa, you know that he's always going to give you his best on any surface. He's always going to produce some great quality tennis, particularly on clay. That's his most preferred surface. That's where he's always at his best.

I don't know. I mean, the record-wise the last four or five matches that I lost to him on clay, some close ones, some that he dominated, was probably due to the level of tennis that I played that wasn't just meeting his level, when his level on clay is always there, always very high.

If you don't meet him there, if you don't produce a high level of performance on this surface, you have no chance to win the match on this surface against him.

I know there's a buildup potentially for that matchup in semis. There's a lot of obstacles to overcome for both of us. If we get there, of course I know what expects me and I know what I need to do.

Last year I had a great tournament, but in finals he was just playing amazing tennis and I couldn't do much. Hopefully if I get a chance to play him another time here, the level of my tennis will be different because, like in Rome, for example, was very close until the last shot. It was really quite even, I felt. He got the better of that match.

But this finals in Rome gives me good sensation and kind of good feeling prior to potential matchup here. But, you know, I try to focus one day at a time. I'm sure he will do too. Let's talk more about that matchup if it comes down to that.

Q. How do you approach this year's French Open? When you consider the last one was only six months ago or so, is there a different mindset coming in this year compared to other years for yourself?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Well, the conditions will be quite different. Last French Open was played in October. Very cold, raining, heavy conditions. Just way different from the normal time of the year when we play French

Open, which is now.

If you ask me, I don't know which one I prefer, to be honest. I had a great tournament last year reaching finals. Also I've had historically a lot of good results in Paris, probably one of my most consistent tournaments, always reaching quarters or semis most of my years playing in Paris. I have a lot to hope for, I think, judging by the results in the previous years in my career here on this court.

But one day at a time. Win in Belgrade gave me a great preparation. I'm in a good state of mind and body, and striking the ball well. Now it's about really just taking it step by step, being in the present moment, trying to build the form so I can play better and better as the tournament progresses.

Q. What is your opinion right now about the Olympics? Have you decided one way or the other? What is your thinking? What are your considerations?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: I'm planning to play Olympic Games for now. As I heard, there's going to be some crowd, local crowd from Japan only. As I understand, 20%, 30% of the capacity.

If they change something, if there's not going to be any crowd, then I'll consider if I want to go or not. Right now I am planning to go, and I'm very excited about that.

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