

# Roland Garros

Tuesday, 1 June 2021

Paris, France

## Sloane Stephens

### Press Conference



**ROLAND-GARROS**

S. STEPHENS/C. Suarez Navarro

3-6, 7-6, 6-4

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

**Q. Obviously you know everything that Carla has been going through. Curious what your thoughts were when you saw the draw and what it was like being out there on court with her in her first match back?**

SLOANE STEPHENS: Yeah, obviously Carla is a great player, and I think when I saw her in Rome for the first time I think a lot of people were super excited to see her and just have her back around. Obviously she's been through a lot and we're all happy that she's better and healthy and being able to play again, which I think obviously is the most important thing.

Like I said, just having her around again, she's obviously been a staple on tour for so long. We all love her and love having her around. I think that was nice to see her, nice to see a familiar face after the pandemic and everything she's been through.

Obviously unfortunate to play her here, because she's always, I feel like she's done well here, clay is a great surface for her. A tough matchup but happy to be through.

**Q. Did it at all make it tougher just mentally for you in that first match back being the one who has to play her in her first match back?**

SLOANE STEPHENS: Yeah, I think so. I mean, it's like kind of like in the back of your mind, like, okay, she's going to come out and she's gonna fight and she's gonna play as hard as she can. And she obviously hasn't played so you're a little bit more free and a little bit looser.

That's always a little bit tough. But you just kind of gotta stick with it and do what you can.

**Q. I'm curious, you seemed to have such a nice moment with Carla at the end of the match at the net. What did you say to her?**

SLOANE STEPHENS: Okay, I feel like you're being nosy now, I can't tell you that.

No, I'm just happy that she's back playing and she's healthy. I think that's the most important thing. Having a competitive match like that is nice, you know, obviously to play and have that type of level after coming back and, you know, not knowing kind of how you're going to put out, what result you're going to put out, how you're going to be playing and feeling. I thought she came out and I thought she played a good match. She brought all that she had. You can't really ask for anything more.

**Q. Were you surprised by her level today?**

SLOANE STEPHENS: No, I mean, she's a great player, so she obviously is going to come out and play some really good tennis. Obviously with no stress of like points to defend, anything things like that, you come out and you play a lot freer. I thought she played her normal Carla tennis, up on the baseline with that one-handed backhand. I thought she, you know, played like she normally does.

She brought it to me today, and I thought she played a great match.

**Q. This is the first time I have seen you in one of these this year. Curious how you're doing, how -- I haven't seen you in person, none of us have seen you in person really for a long time, but how are you doing, Sloane?**

SLOANE STEPHENS: What a great question. I have struggled this year I feel like, but I'm just trying to make the most of it. I think for everyone last year was extremely difficult, and now this year we're getting to a point where a lot of things are finally kind of loosening up and we're kind of getting back to normal.

But I feel like there's still a lot of pressure to do your job and a lot of pressure to perform and still have that success and do all these things that people have the expectation for you. Literally just trying to take it day by day and go from there. But thank you for asking.

**Q. What are those struggles that you mentioned? What have those been?**

SLOANE STEPHENS: I think just COVID, death, like,



traumatic things happening in life, things that are out of my control. Yeah, I mean, life has happened and it has been very much so out of my control and I kind of just had to manage. And I feel like I have just done the best I can, and for that I can be proud and just thank God for being able to wake up and play tennis every day.

**Q. On that same note it sounds like a lot of people have been struggling this season on tour and of course last season. You being on player council, have there been conversations about kind of making improvements in terms of player mental health? Have there been conversations about that?**

SLOANE STEPHENS: Yes, there have been, quite a few. I feel like it is probably our No. 1 discussion, just because we all, everyone on the player council has gone through a lot.

Obviously on the player council the ranking groups are who we represent, are very different and the tournaments that we play and the experiences that we have on tour are all very different, but more so the same just because we're in different parts of the world experiencing different things. And to represent a player group that, you know, there are so many different issues and things happening, I think it's really tough emotionally on everyone and on their psyche.

But it is something that is always top of mine and always top of conversation just because it's something that we've had to deal with from, you know, 1 to 1000.

**Q. Can you talk at all about any of those initiatives that you kind of talked about?**

SLOANE STEPHENS: Well, I think most of it has been, you know, how do we make players feel happy and healthy in this environment that we're all in, that we are forced in, obviously because we are in a pandemic. How do we make players, you know, feel that they can still succeed in this environment, how do we make them feel like, you know, they're still able to perform at their best level, even though we are literally trapped in our hotel rooms like 24/7.

There's a lot of things that go into it and a lot of different things that we've had to manage and try to work through. I couldn't say there is A, B, and C, because it's literally A, example 1, example 2, example 3. Then B, like, there are so many different things. I couldn't pinpoint one exactly, but we do our best and we try to, you know, support the players as best we can.

**Q. I heard you've been training in Spain. Curious how you found that and what it's been like. You looked sharp form-wise and fitness-wise. Seems like whatever it is working. What's your new sort of strategy in coaching, whole situation?**

SLOANE STEPHENS: Yeah, situation. It's always very interesting. I like to keep it interesting.

No, I was practicing in Barcelona, my favorite city, and I was at BTT. I have been going there since I was 15. The USTA took us there one summer and literally I have gone back, like, a lot. This is like my eighth or ninth time going back there. I love it there, I love training on clay, I love working with Francis and Jordi and it's always just been a good experience for me.

And then speaking of just like making it work and doing the best I can, like, I am trying really hard to be, put myself in positions where I know I'm going to be happy, where I'm going to be healthy, where I'm going to really have a good mindset and be around people that care. And I think that's been really important for me.

So, yeah, it may look like a lot of mumbo jumbo, but I'm just doing what I feel is best for me and where I feel happiest and how I'm going to, you know, raise my level and be around people that help me do that.

**Q. Obviously you're aware of all the conversations that have happened around Naomi and her decision to pull out yesterday. You commented on social media. What are your thoughts on that, just seeing her take a step back for her own sort of mental well-being, and that it came to that for her in this tournament?**

SLOANE STEPHENS: Yeah, I think obviously she did what was best for her. I think that the situation could have been handled better. I wish she was still playing the tournament. I think that's what, for women's tennis, having her in the tournament and being happy and healthy and performing at her best is what's great for the WTA and for slams.

It's unfortunate, because, you know, having to take a step back and say, Hey, like I need to do this for me, we should support her and applaud her, because a lot of people wouldn't do that. A lot of people play through being miserable and being upset and not being able to speak out and say those things.

So I think instead of basically traumatizing her and making fun of her situation, we should be more accepting and, you know, allow her to take the time she needs to work on herself and better herself so she can be in a better position to play tennis and be happy and enjoy her tennis.

But I think there definitely needs to be more open dialogue on what not only her but everyone on tour goes through. I think we don't talk about it enough.

And, yeah, I support her and I appreciate her speaking

out, because maybe that will help other players and other people speak out on, you know, how they're feeling. Feelings are real and we're all human, so I hope she takes the time she needs. I hope she feels better and I hope she gets back to winning.

**Q. You mentioned people making fun of her. Has that been happening with players? That was the big talking point around the tournament.**

SLOANE STEPHENS: Yeah, I think I have just read a lot of things that were just unkind and very insensitive. And I just feel like there's no -- there's no room for that. There's no space for negativity. There's no room for, you know, kicking someone when they're already down. Like, I just don't see that as a way to go forward.

Especially with someone on tour that we love and we adore and is really great for the game, there's no reason to do that. You should only support her. Like, last month was Mental Health Awareness Month. Look where we are, it's the 1st of this month and we've already gone back to just being, you know, who cares?

There's no room for that. There's only room for support and encouragement and, you know, getting back to the you that you love and playing tennis.

**Q. You mentioned the importance of stepping back. With everything you were going through at the beginning of this year with your family and then having to start off with the rough Australian quarantine situation, I don't know if it felt like a step back, but did you feel like you wish you could have taken more time away from being in that bubble, in that grind during that? How did that whole time play out for you? That could not have been easy.**

SLOANE STEPHENS: Yeah, I mean, looking back on it now, I should have asked to leave the bubble and I should have asked to go to my grandparents' funeral and I should have made those inquiries and seen if I could get out of the bubble and go home. I didn't. It's something that I'll probably regret for the rest of my life because I prioritized my tennis over things that were happening in my life.

I mean, the only thing I can do now is move on and move forward. There's nothing wrong with having a therapist or two and a grief counselor and all of these things. Like I said, I have to do what's best for me and work on myself.

And, you know, the decision that I made in Australia to play probably wasn't the best decision, looking back on it. But here we are. We're now in June, and we're focusing on other things, and, I mean, obviously I hope that never happens to me again, but if it did, I have the experience. I would know what to do.

**Q. I feel like you, maybe especially since you've gotten on player council, have this very protective almost mama bear attitude towards the rest of the girls on tour. I'm wondering if you have felt that more in this time when things have been tougher, just the need to look out for each other and have each other's backs in what can be a fairly competitive isolating world.**

SLOANE STEPHENS: Yeah, I definitely think now that we've all gone through so much, like I told them yesterday, I said, We may not agree with the decisions people make on our tour and, you know, at Grand Slams and at different occasions, but there is no reason why we can't support our players and our player group and the people that, you know, we see on a day-to-day basis, because there's nothing good comes out of being negative. We don't get anything out of not being kind to each other.

I feel like I've always been the crazy one where I would be at slams seeing people cry and I'd be like, Get them off the TV. I've just always been like that. I feel like being on player council has really made me see things through a different lens.

And again, I might not be best friends with someone, but I'm not going to let other people talk shit about them, like, I'm not going to let other people be mean to them or rude to them. Because of course everyone is always going through something that we may not have any idea about.

But like I said, player council has really, like, opened my eyes because I can kind of see, you know, the reality of a lot of other people's situations, where before I didn't really -- like, Yeah, I play tennis with them, no big deal.

Like I said, everyone is going through things and it's been enlightening and I think made me a better person to just kind of open my eyes and see what's going on around me and not being so self-centered and focused on myself. Like, I think it's just helped me just in general.

You get no more questions. We're done. This is already emotionally draining, okay? Come on. You get one more question. What's the question?

**Q. I am wondering if you've still been in touch at all with Vasek and the PTPA side of the equation? It's been quieter this year. I don't know if they are still working, working with the women to the extent they were before? What your sort of experience has been lately with that.**

SLOANE STEPHENS: Yeah, I think there's just been so many other things on our plate that that's kind of gone on the back burner. I think that they are still working and trying to figure out, you know, what ways work best for them to move forward.

I think as for me personally, I have since my Australia situation and everything that's gone on with me, I have taken a step back. So I can't sit here and tell you that I'm fully engulfed in that. I'm really not. I have completely, like, removed myself from a lot of things. Not just that. Just because I've had my own shit to deal with. So it's kind of, you know, it is what it is.

But I'm sure, yeah, I'm pretty sure Novak, they're still working. I think it will be interesting to see what happens with it, but I don't know exactly where they are with what's going on now.

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