

Roland Garros

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Paris, France

Henri Laaksonen

Press Conference

H. LAAKSONEN/R. Bautista Agut

6-3, 2-6, 6-3, 6-2

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. How does it feel, all your hard work, to make a breakthrough like this, reach the third round of a major, beating such a tough opponent?

HENRI LAAKSONEN: Yeah, I'm very happy how I played today through the whole match. I was playing very aggressive, and, yeah, I have had a tough season so far.

I played last week in Geneva a little bit better, and here I had some tough matches in quallies. Yeah, I got through them. I have been improving my game now every match.

Today was just amazing match for me. I was playing really aggressive and, yeah, it paid off. I think the conditions were, yeah, I like them here. Yeah, I'm playing forehand well. It's feeling great.

Q. Growing up in Finland, I know you have had a lot of success at Roland Garros, whether in the juniors or even as a pro, but as a kid growing up, were there a lot of clay courts that you played on?

HENRI LAAKSONEN: Yeah. Actually I grew up in Hyvinkaa (phonetic), that's like let's say 45 minutes from Helsinki to north, and we actually opened every year or they opened the tennis club. They opened the clay courts really early, sometimes like end of March, beginning of April already.

Yeah, sometimes we were playing when it was snowing a little bit, but, yeah, we had always quite long clay season actually. I mean, I just like it generally when I have a little bit more time for my strokes and slower conditions. So, yeah, it fits me.

Q. You mentioned you have been having a tough season. I know you didn't have a tour-level win before this tournament. How mentally have you been able to sort of stay engaged and work towards getting back to your best level?



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HENRI LAAKSONEN: I mean, yeah, I had some good matches there. It wasn't -- like, I lost couple matches, but I wasn't playing bad. It was just missing 1, 2, 3%, and, I mean, that makes the difference on this level. Either you win those matches or you lose.

So I didn't feel bad actually on court. It was just missing a couple parts on my game. I mean, here it has been going my way so far, so, yeah, it's close always. And I wasn't really happy and I'm still not happy, like my ranking is 150 or something like that. That's not my goal, but that's what it is. I just try to improve.

Yeah, I enjoy practicing and, yeah, happy that the results are paying off now.

Q. I mentioned before, as a junior the success you had at Roland Garros, how special of a place is that for you? What are some of your early memories of Roland Garros?

HENRI LAAKSONEN: Yeah, actually I played a semifinal here in 2009 in juniors. I think it was the same guys because we played a year before, European Championships in Moscow. We played, I think the four guys, we were in the semifinals already there. Yeah, that time I won. Now it didn't go my way that time.

Yeah, I have always nice experiences here, and this is the third year I'm in the main draw here. Yeah, I have been playing good matches here. It's just nice to play here. I have been practicing a lot at annex (phonetic). It's nice and quiet there at the park, nice courts. Yeah, the courts are great.

Q. Now that you're into the third round, obviously that's a big result for you. How do you sort of balance being excited with your performance thus far and still wanting to continue, going and seeing how far you could get?

HENRI LAAKSONEN: Yeah, to be honest, I wasn't expecting that I win today, so first I have to enjoy this one and then I think I have a day off tomorrow. I do my practice, and then when I have the next match, I try to continue from there where I left today.

I want to improve my game and trying to get better, and I think it's also helping not really looking too much into the results. Of course it's a great result, and, yeah, just I want to improve my game. Yeah, will see then what

happens.

Q. This match, you were so good from the beginning to the end, which sometimes you lack. Is that what you can show during training and now you have put it into the match?

HENRI LAAKSONEN: Yeah. Today for sure I started really great. I was playing very aggressive, and I was holding my own serves pretty easy. That gave me a lot of confidence.

Yeah, I think also in the second set I lost it, I don't know, 6-2 or 6-3, especially in the beginning I wasn't too far away from it. I felt pretty good on court. He started to play better.

I did couple mistakes, but I felt still after the second set that I still have something in my game that I can still push a little bit, and I was fortunate to get a great start for the beginning of the third set, so that gave me a lot of confidence, just to give good feeling also on the court. I was able to push.

I think I was serving not bad, and then my forehand helped me a lot. Especially conditions here, I was able to use a lot of my forehands, so that helped and it gave me more confidence through the whole match.

Q. I never seen you play the forehand so well as today. You had 33 winners. Was there something you were doing differently and playing like that, can you produce that level again in a match?

HENRI LAAKSONEN: I will tell you after the next match again (smiling). Actually already the last round quallies I had a tough opponent. He was bringing a lot of balls in. I didn't get any free points. I had to be really aggressive.

I was hitting a lot of winners there already, and, yeah, I think today was a little bit similar. I knew that I have to do something and not just to play the ball in.

Yeah, I mean, so far they have been dropping inside the lines. Let's see what happens next.

Q. It's your first time in the third round of a Grand Slam. Your first win against a top-20 player in your tenth attempt. Did you have different approach this time, or what do you think was the difference that you made it this time?

HENRI LAAKSONEN: I didn't have any different approach. Actually, I like how Roberto plays. I like his tennis. He's a tough competitor. He doesn't give any free points. He's always fighting till the end.

Yeah, I just went there to try to enjoy the match. Yeah, I think I started really great, so that gave me a big

confidence boost, and it also shows me that I can stay with him. I felt through the match I can stay with him. Of course I was playing on my limit, but I think everyone has to do it, and Grand Slams, everyone is playing great tennis here.

Yeah, I think the beginning was important to show me that I can compete against him.

Q. Would you say your biggest win or your nicest win ever?

HENRI LAAKSONEN: Yeah, I would say so, especially because it came in a Grand Slam, best-of-five sets. So those matches, you know, you can be two sets to Love up and it can still turn. You have to stay focused and you have to be in the game through the five sets or sometimes three, four, five hours even.

I really appreciate the win, and especially at the Grand Slam best-of-five, so, yeah.

Q. David Pultr is your coach. Can you talk about how you work together?

HENRI LAAKSONEN: Yeah, we started working together end of 2018. Then we had a little break, and actually now we started again let's say two, three weeks ago.

He was with me for two weeks in Marbella when I started the clay season. He was there helping me. We had a great two weeks, and then we decided we go again.

Yeah, he's also a little bit younger, and I think we have good time. I can practice a lot with him, and, yeah, I think we communicate well. We have good relationship, and I think that's important for player to feel comfortable and to perform well.

Q. Do you have plans for long-term relationship?

HENRI LAAKSONEN: Well, that's the plan (smiling). We were working almost for two years. Then we had a little break. Yeah, as long as he enjoys to work together and when the results are good, then there is no reason not to continue.

Yeah, I mean, at the moment it's working well. Of course that's the plan. Yeah. But in the end, it's results and you enjoy what you are doing.

Q. Making it to the third round, you already have 130-something prize money, thousand prize money. Is that your biggest purse? How important is that for you to carry on after like the whole COVID thing and everything? Does that give you more space now?

HENRI LAAKSONEN: Yeah, I mean, last year was

tough because we didn't have tournaments. So there was no income. I was lucky to qualify also to Australian Open main draw, so that helped me a little bit.

Yes, I think it's the biggest, like with point-wise and with prize money also, it's the biggest what I have earned. Yeah, I mean, in the end I'm still -- I don't know what I will be after the tournament. I don't know how the point system works anyway.

Yeah, I want to get back to the top 100. I'm not satisfied if I'm 140, 130, or 150. My goal is to get back into top 100, and, yeah, that's my main goal.

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