

# Roland Garros

Thursday, 10 June 2021

Paris, France

## Novak Djokovic

### Press Conference

N. DJOKOVIC/M. Berrettini

6-3, 6-2, 6-7, 7-5

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

**Q. Looking forward, it's Rafael Nadal. You're the only player that has ever beaten him at Roland Garros. Do you feel you've built up your game and belief enough to take on this challenge on Friday?**

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: I'm not the only one who beat him. Robin Soderling beat him, as well. That's all, actually. There's not many players that won against him in this court (smiling).

Yeah, I mean, obviously it's a well-anticipated semifinal. A lot of people talked about that potential matchup. Here we are. We are going to face each other another time. We had some battles over the years in this court. Last year he just dominated the finals against me.

Obviously different conditions are going to be played on Friday. Then it was the case in finals of last year, so I'm hopefully going to be able to also perform at the high level than I have, especially in the first two sets in the last year's final.

The quality and the level of tennis that I've been playing in the last three, four weeks on clay - Rome, Belgrade and here - is giving me good sensations and feelings ahead of that match. I'm confident. I believe I can win, otherwise I wouldn't be here. Let's have a great battle.

**Q. On the rivalry, it's the most prolific rivalry in tennis since Navratilova and Evert. When you go into a match with Rafa, is it a completely different mindset you have or do you just treat each match as another match? How do you approach them? I would think it's pretty difficult.**

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: It's not like any other match. Let's face it, it's the biggest challenge that you can have playing on clay against Nadal on this court in which he has had so much success in his career. In the final stages of a Grand Slam, it doesn't get bigger than that.

Of course, each time we face each other, there's that



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extra tension and expectations. Just vibes are different walking on the court with him. But that's why our rivalry has been historic I think for this sport. I've been privileged to play him so many times.

I was mentioning before rivalries with him and Roger have made me a stronger player, allowed me to understand how I need to improve my game to get to the level where they were actually when I started playing professional tennis.

Yeah, I'll probably pick Rafa as the biggest rival I've ever had in my career. The anticipation for the match against him, any match, any surface, any occasion, is always different from any other.

**Q. There were uncanny similarities between tonight's match and your Taylor Fritz match at the Australian Open with play suspended to let the crowd out, actually with the score exactly the same in the fourth set. What was that like to play through tonight? Do you think the match should have started earlier to avoid that situation?**

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Well, I didn't mind actually leaving the court because I felt like I needed a little bit of a break and reset. Yeah, it's unfortunate for the tournament, for the crowd, to have that curfew. But we knew it before the match. Referee came up to us and said, If it comes close to 11:00, we'll have to empty the stadium. That's what happened.

I thought the atmosphere was Davis Cup like, to be honest. It was a lot of fans involved, every single point cheering, screaming. Just electric atmosphere out there.

Yeah, I'm happy that I had that experience of playing in front of the crowd in the night session. I'm not the one to ask about schedule, honestly. I'm not sure what should I say about that. But match could have been also over in the third set at 5-4 and serving in the tiebreaker.

The crowd lifted him up. He was playing some really powerful tennis. Especially in the third and fourth he served tremendously strong and precise. It was just very difficult to read his serve and play someone like him.

He's very talented. He can play well from the back of the court. He's got a lethal forehand, dropshots. Kind of don't know what's expecting you. When he's on, it's tough to play him.

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**Q. Obviously you let out that cathartic scream at the end of the match. How quickly does your mind shift to Rafa and the next match? Is it instant?**

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: No. I have not shifted at all actually to Rafa match. You guys are probably talking for the first time about that matchup in few days with you guys today now, because I was really fully focused on quarters, trying to surpass the very tricky opponent and great challenge tonight.

This match had it all: falls, crowd, break. It was a lot of intensity. I just felt under tension the entire time. I felt like I missed some of the chances to end the match in the third set. I didn't want to give him too much opportunities to dictate the match. That's why it was just super, super stressful to constantly be under pressure on my service games because his service games were quite smooth with the big serve.

Yeah, the reaction in the end was just me liberating that tension that was building up for the entire match.

**Q. What did you do in the break when you went off? Is that the kind of break where you're not allowed to see coaches? It's just you in a room?**

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Yes, we were not allowed to see any of our coaching staff. We were just by ourselves in the room. Matteo had his room, I had my room. We had a 15-, 20-minute break. I just changed my clothes. I had just a little calm time by myself just trying to regroup, reset, rejuvenate and gather my thoughts and understand what I need to do tactically going back to the court.

I knew that the atmosphere obviously on the court is going to be completely different. It took a little bit of time I think for both of us to really warm up. It was great that we had at least those three minutes. But I felt like going back from that break I was a better player. I kept him on his heels. On his service games I had more or less every service game of his opportunities to break, some breakpoints. It was quite close.

I was pleased with the way I served when I served. I think I didn't lose my serve today once, which is great playing against somebody like Matteo who is really quality tennis player.

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