

# Roland Garros

Friday, 20 May 2022

Paris, France

## Naomi Osaka

### Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Welcome back to Paris. How do you feel being again in Paris?

NAOMI OSAKA: It's different from the other tournaments, and it's good to be back here.

THE MODERATOR: How different is it, in what ways? And how has your preparation given in the buildup you had a bit of an injury?

NAOMI OSAKA: Yeah, I don't know, for me I find it a bit ironic, like this clay court season is the one that I spent the most like preparation on, and it was really unfortunate that I had to pull out from Rome and I couldn't do that well in Madrid.

But I feel like I was able to explore Europe, because before Madrid, I was in -- I don't remember, but I was in a part of Spain. Yeah, I was in Mallorca, and after Rome I went to Nice, and, like, I saw cool cars in Monaco.

So it was really cool for me to be like able to explore that area.

**Q. Just in general, as you have been able to hit and things like that, have you been able to prepare for the tournament in these recent days as you'd want to in your hitting sessions or are you having to manage load and things like that and be concerned?**

NAOMI OSAKA: You know, like for me, there is no way I'm not going to play this tournament, so like of course you kind of have to manage things, but at the same time, like, I'm going to pop a few painkillers, like it is what it is.

I have actually played a lot of Grand Slams with something. I actually, Australia, when I played Kvitova, like for five matches I had this really bad back thing. So I think maybe there is a possibility I could play really good when I have an injury, because I feel like I don't have anything to lose.

**Q. Haven't spoken to you since the news broke out that you're starting Evolve. I want to hear more about that. How long have you been thinking about something like this? Why did you think it was important for you to make that move and how do you think it's going to change the landscape for women**



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**in sport and how they can manage their own careers?**

NAOMI OSAKA: Yeah, I mean, for me, I think it's really important, like I feel like I have said this a lot, but I think role models are really important, just to see somebody do something and it makes you feel like you can do the same thing too.

I found it really interesting that there wasn't a female athlete that's done this before but there has been so many men. So, I don't know. I think it's a journey, and I feel like I'm going to learn a lot on the journey.

Yeah, I think you'll also see the process with me, as well.

**Q. I wonder how much better you feel tennis is now looking after players who may have some personal issues or may have some problems with their mental health compared to where we were 12 months ago, and in which areas you might have noticed a difference?**

NAOMI OSAKA: I'm going to be honest. I don't know. Like for me, I mean, I have told people that I'm seeing a therapist now and stuff. But like, if you're talking about the general landscape of things, I know like after last year's French Open that the next slam I played was the US Open and they have like these little like retreats or things like that in the players lounge. I know here they have also like a mental wellness space.

So I think that it's cool that they are incorporating it.

**Q. You were talking about your determination to play this tournament no matter what. Where does that come from for you? Can you explain why so determined to play here even if you're not physically where you'd want to be?**

NAOMI OSAKA: I think it's because -- I'm not really sure, but like for me, I feel like there is like a limited amount of years that I could play tennis, so like I have to make the best out of it.

I know that there are a lot of other players that are possibly like injured, like really badly, and they want to play this tournament so much.

I think for me like a little nagging issue shouldn't be like a big deal. Yeah, it's a Grand Slam, like I watched this



tournament on TV when I was younger. It's still like a really big honor for me.

**Q. There have been other athletes like Simone Biles at the Olympics that spoke out about mental health during her competition. I wonder what that gives to you? Is that a good feeling or is it neutral if some big athletes speak out too about mental health?**

NAOMI OSAKA: Yeah, I mean, for me, I wouldn't say it's a good feeling, just because I know that they are probably suffering -- or maybe "suffering" is too harsh of a word -- but they are also going through things.

I found it to be a very interesting experience to go to the Olympics and to like walk through the Village and people were thanking me and stuff.

So I think athletes kind of all go through the same thing. It's just like people don't really talk about it.

**Q. Iga was in here earlier talking about how things have changed for her behind the scenes sort of in the locker room since she became World No. 1 and went on this streak and everything. Is that something you can relate to, sort of that experience...**

NAOMI OSAKA: Have I ever won like five tournaments in a row? I don't know (smiling).

You know, I can't relate to like that specifically, but for me I feel like when I was No. 1, there was like this incident where I was talking to another player and she was like, Oh, what side of the draw are you on? But, you know, like when you're No. 1 you're automatically on the top half.

So it was just like little instances like that that just made me feel like, Oh, I wonder if other people think I'm good enough to be No. 1 and stuff like that. That's just where my mind goes.

Yeah, for me, I have kind of seen her rise, so I'm like really -- it's really amazing to me how good she's doing. I kind of want to see like where the rest of her career takes her.

**Q. Injury and results aside, have you enjoyed the experience of sort of leaning into the clay? As you said at the end of Miami, you sort of set that as a goal for yourself, to lean into it. Sort of whatever happens happens. Has that experience sort of come to fruition?**

NAOMI OSAKA: You know, like I could think about the results and stuff, but I feel like for me, like, the overall experience this year has been better than last year for me, and just like bonding with my team and kind of exploring things.

Also like experimenting with play style and stuff like that. It's been a really great time. I honestly defended all of the points that I had to, so I'm good. And, yeah, like I don't think I have anything to worry about, but I'm an overthinker, so there might be some minor issue that pops up.

But for the most part, I think like this is, for me, I'm setting out for it to be an enjoyable experience.

**Q. Last year here was very much not about your tennis. There were all these other things swirling and off the court and all of that. I'm just wondering whether, when you returned to Roland Garros this year, what the feelings were that you had. Did you think back to last year and how things happened and all of that, away from the court? Is that all sort of completely out of mind, or how you sort of dealt with coming back to a place that maybe not everything was as comfortable as it could have been for you last year?**

NAOMI OSAKA: Yeah, I'm not gonna lie. Like when I first came here, I was very worried. I was just kind of worried if there would be people that like -- of course I also didn't like how I handled the situation, but I was worried that there were people that I offended some way and I would just kind of bump into them.

But I think like everyone has been really positive, for the most part. I'm not really so sure.

I was also very worried about this press conference, because I knew I'd get a lot of questions about this. But, yeah, I think for me where I am right now, like I have -- I wouldn't want to say it's like it hasn't left my mind. Of course I'm still thinking about it, and I'm like kind of also prepping just in case like I go on the court and a fan says something like in Indian Wells. Yeah, for the most part I think I'm okay.

**Q. Curious how different, if at all, you feel as a person now compared to the Naomi of 12 months ago? I guess also since you said you were worried, how has the press conference been?**

NAOMI OSAKA: You know, and this might be more of like a comment for like Courtney or, you know, like people that have come with me like growing up, like since I was like 16 in Stanford or something, but I kind of feel like I was funnier back then (smiling). Like I used to be able to like say jokes and like not really care if anyone got it. Like I could reexplain the joke and whatever.

I feel like the thing that's changed is like me trying to figure out the crowd. Like, I feel like I'm a standup comedian and I'm trying to figure out what's okay and what's not okay.

But, yeah, I think maybe that's changed for me. Like I'm kind of analyzing what I can say and what I can't say.

But for the most part, I try to be kind of myself and whatever.

**Q. Your first round, you know who you're playing?**

NAOMI OSAKA: Wim told me like literally two hours ago.

**Q. Curious what your reaction is that you get to play the last person you played at a slam this year. Do you find comfort in the fact you had two match points? Is there more motivation you want to beat her? What was your reaction in general?**

NAOMI OSAKA: So my reaction was I thought that Wim was joking. I was like, You're joking, right? No, I'm not joking, in his accent.

But, yeah, like for me I think it's better for me to play her in a first round than in like when people get warmed up and stuff. So it's easier for me to play a seed in the first round than to play them in like any other round.

I think that we both will draw from the experiences. I think me having two match points is comforting.

I'm honestly not sure if clay is a better surface for her, because I know she went to the semis a couple years ago. So yeah, I'm glad that I played her in Australia, so like I can draw from that experience.

I know that I did like this exhibition match with her in Indian Wells, and she completely killed me (smiling).

So, yeah, hopefully I'll get more than two points.

(Naomi's answers to questions in Japanese.)

NAOMI OSAKA: For me, I think it's really amazing that she's a tournament director. I actually spoke to her, like I was hitting on the court and I was walking off the court, and I saw her.

Yeah, it's really weird because I have never really seen her in person like up close before. I was just watching her matches on TV, so I think that it's really amazing. I also think that she's very kind and that she will do a great job. It will be really cool to see like, I don't know, the progression of the tournament, I guess.

I would say when I was playing against Anisimova, it wasn't really like there was a shot she played that I didn't like. It was just kind of funny to me, like she would randomly hit a ball so well that I would just start laughing, because it felt like that wasn't supposed to happen.

So, for example, like her return, her service return is really amazing to me. Like I would hit a really great first serve and she would hit a winner off of it. It would happen multiple times to the point where I know it's not luck, like she's intentionally trying to do that.

So I would say it's not that I don't like it, but it makes me feel like I need to get better. So I kind of love playing players like that, because I think it also improves my game. I know you had a second question, but I forgot.

Okay. Yeah, for me, I feel like there is a possibility that playing her on clay might be better for me, just because I think I hit a heavier ball, and I don't know why I'm telling you this, because this is also like my strategy (smiling).

Yes, so I think it will be a great match (smiling).

I would say I thought it was a joke, because honestly, like, so I had a dream a couple days ago that the draw came out, and I had to play Iga. Like for me, I was scared (smiling) because I was thinking, like what's the worst possible player to play when I'm unseeded. She came in my mind, so thank God that didn't happen.

So then I just like completely forgot about the draw, I didn't even know that it came out yesterday. I actually thought it was coming out today. So then Wim was like, Oh, you know the draw came out. No, I didn't know. Yeah, you play Anisimova. Oh, you're joking, right? So it was that kind of conversation.

So I wouldn't say like I don't want to play her, because I feel like for me I'm the type of person that if you beat me, like it motivates me more to win and I also learned a lot from the match.

So, yeah, I guess I will see what happens when we play.

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