

Roland Garros

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Paris, France

Novak Djokovic

Press Conference



ROLAND-GARROS

THE MODERATOR: Welcome, Novak. Past the first round against Nishioka, did you have a look at your round? Everybody knows you're in the same quarter as Nadal and then eventually Alcaraz or Zverev in the semifinals. Have you looked at that?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Yeah, I had a look at the draw. I think every player always looks at the entire draw and studies it in a way. You can only focus on your next challenge and match. And of course, you know, it's a very tough top half of the men's draw, but there is something that you can't really affect. It is what it is.

For me, I'm really putting my thoughts on starting the tournament well against Nishioka and then I will take it from there.

THE MODERATOR: Questions in English.

Q. We are expecting a statement tonight from the ATP and the WTA in relation to Wimbledon and the potential of stripping them of ranking points. If that happens, what would be your response? Is that the right decision if that goes ahead?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Well, I did answer a couple times in Rome and Madrid, so I will just wait and see when the statement comes out and then we can talk about it. Right now I have nothing more to add.

Q. You're the defending champion. You beat Rafa here last year, you have referred to him, as a lot of people, as the king of clay. You have had a great deal of success, you obviously have a great deal of confidence in your own abilities on clay. How do you regard yourself and him, in fact, coming into this tournament?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Well, I mean, we talk about favorites for Roland Garros and clay, you know, that, Nadal always has to be right at the top, because of his records particularly in this tournament.

And then, you know, you have Alcaraz that obviously is the story of men's tennis in the last four or five months with a big reason. He's had some tremendous leaps forward on rankings and the results that he's been achieving are phenomenal for someone of his age. He

has made a quantum jump really forward in the last five, six months.

So, you know, I feel I am always in that contention to fight for any Grand Slam trophy. I believe in my own abilities to get far and to fight for, you know, one of the most prestigious trophies in the world of tennis. As a defending champion of course more so, to believe I can do it again. Reliving the memories from last year is something that obviously gives me goose bumps and motivation to try to replicate that, if I can say that.

But, I mean, obviously every season and every year is different. There is so many players that want to put their hands on that trophy in a few weeks' time. I'm very much aware of it.

I think that experience of being on the tour for such a long time helps to know how to spend energy on the court match after match, bring out the right intensity, manage everything that happens off the court, as well, and peak at the right time, so to say. You know, best-of-five, obviously things are different. Grand Slam I think awakens so much motivation and emotions in a tennis player. It's the dream of many tennis players to win a Grand Slam.

That's why, you know, you cannot underestimate anyone and probably not compare the performances of those players on any other tournament with the potential performance here in a slam.

So knowing that, that's kind of my approach with respect towards the players and the game and the tournament, but, you know, believing in myself because I have done it before and I know what it takes, so I'm excited to hopefully have another great year.

Q. I wanted to ask you about playing here and also more generally on clay and whether that surface more than any other tends to change and can have an effect on a match and so from week to week, tournament to tournament, and maybe even across what you hope will be two weeks here, from day to day, it can almost be different, a different surface than it was the day before, and also can that element of it contribute sometimes to more surprises on this surface maybe than we see on the others?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Well, this surface is the most demanding one I think from various aspects. First

physically, you know, you always need to expect that you're going to play a shot or two more than any other surface because of the nature of clay. It's just slow and, you know, it requires a lot of effort mentally, emotionally, physically.

You know, I think all the players know that. So of course they adjust their training regimen going into clay season. I think there is a lot of endurance intervals training, trying to play more.

And of course I cannot speak on behalf of the other players, but for me particularly, historically it always has required some time and several tournaments to really feel comfortable playing on clay.

Rarely did I feel my best on clay in the first or second tournament in the season. So that was the case this season again. It took me two tournaments to really, you know, feel that I'm getting closer to desired level. I reached that level in Rome.

So, you know, I hadn't dropped a set there and won the tournament. Rome has been a very successful tournament for me in my career, and it was really coming at the right time. I always managed to get to the later stages of that tournament in just the week before Paris, perfect time to really find form.

Yeah, I mean, that's me. Obviously some other players maybe feel more natural on clay and maybe get to the desired level quicker.

Q. What is your feeling about this very special draw? Very difficult part of the draw. Do you think it will make it more difficult?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Well, I have trained mostly with right-handed players and I'm playing with a lefty, so it is difficult (smiling).

Q. Can you say a few words about Jo-Wilfried Tsonga, because he's finishing his career? I'm sure you have certain words for him left.

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Well, I wish him the best possible farewell to the tennis that he can imagine, and I'm sure there is going to be a lot of support for him on the center court. I think he's playing some seeded player the first round, so I'm sure that it's going to be very emotional for him. And of course all the French crowd watching him play over the years, you know, he has been one of the most charismatic, energetic tennis players out there.

Just a lot of power. When he was at his best, he was, you know, constantly in top 10 of the world, playing finals against me in my first Grand Slam finals. It was his first Grand Slam finals as well in Australia, so we go back a long time.

I know Jo very well also a little bit from the junior days. We always got along very well. I have tons of respect for him. Really, really nice guy, great guy. He brought a lot of attention, positive attention to the sport with the way he was behaving and he was playing.

I think he can be very proud of everything he has achieved and left behind in this sport.

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