

Roland Garros

Sunday, 22 May 2022

Paris, France

Sloane Stephens

Press Conference

S. STEPHENS/J. Niemeier

5-7, 6-4, 6-2

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

SLOANE STEPHENS: Thank you. It's good. Obviously nice to get my first clay win of the season, so hopefully keep it going.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. I am curious just what was the key to turning that around? Obviously you have been having a tough time in these last few tournaments and losing first set. What did it take to dig in a foothold and get things swinging your way?

SLOANE STEPHENS: Yeah, it's obviously tough playing someone they've never played before in the first round of a slam. It's tough playing someone who's played so well to qualify. She hadn't lost that many games so obviously she was playing well.

I knew I was just going to have to stick it out and kind of just stay with her, and that's exactly what I did. I didn't try to overplay too much. I just tried to stay with my game plan and just stick with it.

Q. So you did see how easily she was winning in quallies? You noted that?

SLOANE STEPHENS: Yeah, definitely. Then obviously never having played her before is difficult and then obviously first round of a slam there is a lot of emotions, a lot of things you're thinking about. So I just tried to stay calm and take my chances when they came. And obviously in the second set when I broke at 5-4 was a good opportunity and then just kind of unlucky for her the rest of the way.

Q. You could imagine that particularly in the UK but elsewhere there has been a lot of interest in the decision about Wimbledon and the points. You are on the player council. Did you support the idea of stripping Wimbledon of ranking points?



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SLOANE STEPHENS: I think the decision that was taken was the correct one. I think that there is a lot of things that happened behind the scenes that the press are not aware of, and I think there has been a lot of mishandling of how everything was handled.

We will just go from there. I mean, obviously I support our CEO, I support my council, I support the players. The decision that's been taken obviously wasn't taken lightly. I think when you are backed into a corner and that's all you can do, I think that's why the decision was made, and I support it.

Q. Could you enlighten us perhaps on a few areas where the media, as you said, perhaps the media are not privy to a few things? Could you maybe enlighten us to a few things we ought to know?

SLOANE STEPHENS: No. Snitches get stitches, so no (smiling).

But I can tell you that we worked really hard to try to make sure that everyone had a fair opportunity to play, and at the end of the day that's not what happened. I think a lot of players and people around were misinformed about what was happening and what was actually taking place in the weeks prior to a final decision being made.

I think that's a tad bit unfair, but it's the world we live in. We live in social media. We live in people talking and tweeting and all this stuff. So it is what it is, but I think the decision that was made was the best one for the tour and for the players.

Q. Would you have sympathy perhaps, for example, with Karolina Pliskova who did extremely well at Wimbledon last year, I think she's 1200 points, that basically she now has no chance to defend?

SLOANE STEPHENS: Yeah, I mean, it's really unfortunate. Obviously I love Kaja. I wish she could defend those points, but I think when you look at the principles and what our tour stands for, discrimination will never be tolerated.

That's exactly what's happening. As long as that's in play, there is no points, there is no points, but we are not going to pick and choose when that works.

You have to stand behind your principles and what the



tour stands for, and we are one, right? Whatever goes, that's what goes, and I'm sure Kaja will get back those points, she's a great player, as will other people.

I mean, it's not only her. It's a lot of players that will lose points. I'm going to lose points. But that's not what we stand for as a tour.

Q. You are always conscious to promote positive well-being. How important is it for you to make sure that you are feeling happy on the court and off the court? How do you get that balance between what you do on the court and what you do away from tennis?

SLOANE STEPHENS: Great question. Different.

I think obviously it's tough when you are traveling. I have been gone now from home four weeks. So I think at this point you just try to do whatever makes you happy, whatever makes you feel good, whatever is going to make you play best, whatever your team thinks is going to make you play best and have your best results.

I know for every player it's different, but for me it's literally whatever I'm feeling that day or, you know, if I need to have ice cream, great. If I need to do yoga, great. All of those things just depends on the day.

Q. The FFT was talking a bit about some of the changes they made in trying to figure out how to best reform or adapt after what happened last year with Naomi in the press conference situation. I know this has been a conversation point for WTA as well, how to make this process more fun or pleasant or enjoyable or easier or whatever it may be. Can you just talk a bit about what those conversations have been like and how you think things have changed in the setup on both sides, from a player approach or tournament approach or media approach, in this year that's passed.

SLOANE STEPHENS: Well, I think a lot has changed. Obviously Estelle asked me the first question at the press conference so it's a little less awkward. I personally have never had an experience that was totally atrocious at press, so I don't mind coming in and speaking to you guys. I think when there is an inappropriate question I say I'm not answering that or whatever.

I create my own boundaries, which I think the WTA has created for players who aren't comfortable speaking and saying those things. We have had a lot of conversations about that, about people just being uncomfortable and not wanting to answer questions, just because maybe they don't know what to say or they don't want to say the wrong thing and then it comes out poorly or whatever it is. I think we have had a lot of discussion about that.

I think it's worked well so far. Estelle, do you think it's worked well so far? Yeah, I think it's been good. It's a work in progress, but I think it was the right thing to do to try to make it more comfortable for the players and for you guys, so it's not a weird situation.

Q. How did you learn to sort of set those boundaries for yourself? What was that learning experience for you?

SLOANE STEPHENS: Yeah, I think it's a learning experience. I think when you get comfortable with the people in the press conference, you see them week in and week out, it's okay to be, like, We're not talking about that today, that's not why we're here. I think just for some people in general to say that is difficult.

I see you guys pretty much after every match and I'm like, Don't ask me that question. It's okay. It's okay to say that, but I think in prior it hasn't been okay because you don't want to come off like seeming like you are a butthole. So it's, yeah, it's that. But we are working on it.

Q. You recognize your personality, you're maybe readier to sort of be...

SLOANE STEPHENS: I'm more outspoken. We will say that. Yes.

Q. Always a joy.

SLOANE STEPHENS: Yes, I know.

Q. I just wanted to ask about after a couple of years of smaller crowds here, almost none, what was the atmosphere like, what's it like around the grounds, how does it feel different, if it does, with full attendance and all that?

SLOANE STEPHENS: Yeah, it was really nice obviously today. It's different when, like you go from very limited crowds, from no people, limited crowds, and then to now. Like I would say today during the match there was people walking and moving, like during the points. It's something we haven't had in like two years. Like just in general, having to be aware of like the crowd and the people and the people very close to your towel boxes and all these things.

It's an adjustment, but I think in general for the sport and just for the atmosphere, having crowds back is incredible.

Q. On a separate topic, there is a new tournament director here this year, Amelie.

SLOANE STEPHENS: Yeah.

Q. Wanted to ask your thoughts on seeing her both in terms of Amelie in particular and as a former

player and coach and all of that, seeing her now in charge, and also maybe the idea of having a woman as a tournament director here for a change.

SLOANE STEPHENS: Yeah, I think it's great. We are super excited to have her.

We met in Madrid, and we have had so much more conversation with our council and just having more openness about what's going on here. And obviously everyone loves the French Open, but being able to have discussions around what we really care about and their missions and what they are trying to do, like I think we've aligned better. I'm not saying that because she's a woman but she's honestly like the best, we love her.

I think it's great that she's in that position, and she's able to make some change and for the better. Obviously the tournament is already amazing.

But having her and having that dialogue has been really nice.

Q. When you are preparing for Roland Garros, how much do you think about the tournament and how much do you think about what you might like to do away from the tournament as well?

SLOANE STEPHENS: Well, I have weeks -- well, I have like a year, a year, a full year to plan what I'm going to do the next time I come to Roland Garros. It's very planned out this year.

We are doing French pharmacies, so all of the amazing TikTok videos you see of people, what's your favorite product, that's what I'm doing this time. I have really enjoyed that and I have been planning that for like a long time.

All the things I want to do, I always get them done.

Q. Is the pharmacy stuff mostly like skin care stuff?

SLOANE STEPHENS: Skin care products, body washes, like body lotions. But only stuff you can get in France, like a lot of them are not in the U.S., so you have to be very cautious.

Q. The other thing, you talked about improved communication with the FFT under Amelie, with what happened with Naomi here in the statement, it became very adversarial or standoffish between her and the slams coming out with a pretty harsh statement against her, how do you look back on that with the year's clarity and if things could have been handled better and if you hope maybe things are set up to be better if communication is getting better, like you are saying.

SLOANE STEPHENS: Yeah, it's definitely getting better. Obviously last year the situation happened, super unfortunate. I wish it could have been handled better on both ends, because at the end of the day we want to do what's best for the tournament and we want to do what's best for the player, right?

I think there was a lot of mismanagement about the whole situation. But I think what we are trying to do as the tour in general, like on player council, we see things like this happen and we want to make it better and improve the experience for the player and for the media, like I said.

When it happens on the spot and everyone is playing in the tournament, it's very hard, as a council, or just other players in general to react and do anything at that point. So I think it's taken us like a full year, whatever, to get back to this point to really kind of evaluate, okay, like what have we done, have we improved. Like take a good look in the mirror and say are we making it better for the players? Is the experience better?

I think overall in general at every tournament it's gotten better. It's more comfortable, like I said, for players. But it's something you're not going to be able to stop working on it because every week there's new players, there's new people, there's younger girls. There's things that everyone has to learn, and I think being able to work through that with the tour and obviously the player council has been difficult but I think we have made some good strides.

Q. (Question off microphone.)

SLOANE STEPHENS: Yeah, I think so. I think it's better in person just because you can see the person. Zoom was a little weird. Tech was a little strange. Wi-Fi was not always great. There was a lot of adversity dealing with like the tech thing, so I think it's just easier being face to face. Not that I just want to see you guys all the time, but it's much easier. Yeah.

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