

Roland Garros

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Paris, France

Felix Auger-Aliassime

Press Conference

F. AUGER-ALIASSIME/J. Pablo Varillas

2-6, 2-6, 6-1, 6-3, 6-3

THE MODERATOR: Well done. How did you turn it around after the first two sets?

FELIX AUGER-ALIASSIME: Yeah, he played a good level. I think I played him once in futures five years ago, but very different player today. He showed up with a great level, and I think also myself maybe in a way I was making him play well with the way I was playing, a little bit, yeah, a little bit too flat, putting the ball, you know, exactly where he wanted all the time.

So, you know, he was just not really thinking and just like kept on hitting, hitting me, and moving me and hitting good targets.

Credits to him for that, but I think it took me -- you know, it was dangerous because it took me a long time to figure out, you know, what to change. But once I did, then little by little, you know, to get that first break and then to, you know, start feeling more comfortable as the match went on, then things got better for me, for sure.

THE MODERATOR: Questions in English.

Q. Can we just go over how meaningful perhaps that win is for you confidence-wise and just to get some really good vibes going in a place that you hadn't won before, playing on Chatrier, coming back like that?

FELIX AUGER-ALIASSIME: It's great. You know, it's such a lovely court. It's beautiful out there, and so it was really a treat and a pleasure to play on this court.

It was disappointing, you know, as I was in the match to see how things were going, I really hoped for better. But I think that's why also I wanted to really push myself and really try everything and feel like, you know, whatever the result is, when I finish a match, I feel like I left it all on the court. Because this was an important day for me, important win. I really wanted to get this first one here.

Yeah, I mean, I think I got rewarded for digging deep and finding a way to win.



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Q. Were you nervous walking out onto that big court? You have played on the big courts at the other slams. Is this one a little different? Do you still get butterflies?

FELIX AUGER-ALIASSIME: It's a nice feeling, but I didn't feel nervous, like I didn't feel -- other times, there is other matches, even in Rome when I played Novak, there was a little bit of extra nerves, you know, just because of the crowd and how the stadium is set up and playing Novak.

But today I felt good. You know, the way the match started wasn't due to nerves or stress. I felt comfortable. You know, the sound of the ball is good, you know, the court is nice. So there was nothing with the court that impacted me in a negative way, really.

Q. Not only your first win here but I think also your first win from two sets down.

FELIX AUGER-ALIASSIME: Yes.

Q. Just wondering when you found yourself in that position, what did you draw upon to sort of keep believing that you could come back from that situation having not done it before?

FELIX AUGER-ALIASSIME: Well, I always focus on the game, you know, rather than the score, which is kind of something you don't really control or it's kind of external. You know, I think I focus on, Okay, why am I down two sets to love? Because I'm playing this way or because I'm not putting enough returns, not serving well enough. Then I try to change that. Then little by little, you know, you start feeling more comfortable and you start seeing a few openings.

Of course once I got the first break, it was a relief, because I spent two sets without being able to break him.

Then to get that first break, go up 3-1 and then serve well and 4-1, and then, you know, I had more belief in me. But I don't think also at any point I lost belief, because I know how I can play, I know what my level is, and I knew that if I hung in there and if I tried to find a way to change things around, I would get my opportunity.

Q. One of the reasons, from my point of view, that things turned was your first serve. I think from sets 3, 4, and 5, you won 41 of 44 first-serve points. Was

that something mental that clicked? Did you feel that was a big difference maker?

FELIX AUGER-ALIASSIME: Yeah, I mean, of course my serve didn't change throughout the match. I don't know why sometimes -- like, I know I can serve well, and then I have to figure out why, you know, certain moments, because it's a very important part of my game, my first serve, and, you know, I win a lot of points with that. It's a big weapon for me.

There are sometimes days and matches where for a set, and then like in that case today for two sets, I'm not quite finding my targets. I'm missing too much first serves. Then things can be more tricky.

And then, yeah, I think maybe I was thinking also to, yeah, to not force my targets too much, hit bigger targets, to get my first-serve percentage up. But then once I felt I was comfortable again, then I kept going for it and then I guess I found my precision again.

THE MODERATOR: Questions in French.

Q. You might repeat what you have said in English but in French this time. At last you reached the second round here at the French Open. You were close to the cliff, I'd say. Now, that's probably emotionally something very strong for you.

FELIX AUGER-ALIASSIME: Yeah, that's true. I really enjoy that, because this year, as I was coming, I thought, I can play better, I'm playing better, I would deserve to win the first match here. I was down 2-0, I was two sets down, and if you look at the percentages, usually if you're down two sets to zero, you're bound to lose.

But I didn't want to give up. I thought I can turn the match around, and I can play better, find the ways and give me opportunities, like this case. I won this break and then the third set is the set I won very easily. I gained confidence, and I thought when I was two sets to one, I could go deeper. But I had to grind on that, and little by little, I turned things around in my favor.

But good feelings, and that was my first match. I played here on the Chatrier, I won here, so that's a positive day at the end of the day.

Q. I'd like to know something. Do you look at the draw? Have you done that for the French Open?

FELIX AUGER-ALIASSIME: Yes, I look at who's on the draw and which side, and then afterwards I tend to forget about it.

Q. Do you know what's going to happen during the round of 16?

FELIX AUGER-ALIASSIME: Yeah.

Q. What do you think about this?

FELIX AUGER-ALIASSIME: Well, I almost lost my match today, so round 16 is not like for tomorrow. He's going to reach that level, as well, he too. But his strength is that he's never thought he would win all the matches. He wants to test his forms, how things go. He's got to win his first three matches. I have to do the same as well and then we will see. We'll see. This would be a big challenge for me. But it's really deeper in the draw.

Q. Your results on clay in the last two tournaments were really good against Novak in Rome, quarterfinals. What's the most difficult thing for you on clay?

FELIX AUGER-ALIASSIME: Well, I like playing on clay. It's not that I don't like playing on clay. I win a lot of points on my serve, and if it's a hard court or if it's on grass, it's good for those who serve well, those who serve and volley and go to the net.

But on clay, I have to wait a little so that I have the right ball so that I can hit a good shot and come to the net in a very specific place on the court. Sometimes my shots were not strong enough so that I could come to the net.

But I try not to change my game too often. Of course you have to adjust a few things, the balls have more height on clay, you have to open up your angles, and the dropshots is something you can do.

But then all the good players don't really change the way they play, depending on the surface. Look at the best players. They do the same. They just adjust these little things here and there. For instance, on clay, I will hit perhaps one or two balls more than on any other surface.

Q. On the court you talked about Toni Nadal. You have been working with him for a year. What's he given you, practically speaking? What are the good things he's given you?

FELIX AUGER-ALIASSIME: Well, that's difficult to say, difficult to give you the details. You know, we were practicing together, hitting balls this morning. We will do the same tomorrow.

Well, Toni, he's a guy who -- how can I say? -- gives you a lot of feedback when you're practicing. If I miss a point, he's going to tell me you could do this or that, or watch the balls more, or try this, technically speaking.

So I can't say there is just one thing or one thing in particular. But he's given me confidence that I can reach the best levels if I improve a number of points, if I'm a more all-around player, and we talk about the things I

have to work on and improve.

First time we met, we thought, we know what the objective is, is to win tournaments, and increase the ranking, but then to improve on a yearly basis. And he said, no, that's what you have to do for the two or three years to come so that you're ranked amongst the best players. I think I'm ranked in the top 8 best players in the world, so that's what I have to do to improve my ranking and win tournaments. This is it.

And it's going to be the same throughout my career, that is, look at the things I can improve.

Q. It's your first win here in the main draw. That's a bit strange, but it really shows that you're very young. When I was looking at the score, you were quiet and calm. Is it because sometimes you felt a lot of pressure and stress but not today? You were always controlling your emotions?

FELIX AUGER-ALIASSIME: That's what I always try and do, that's something I have to work on and improve. Well, first I have to control my emotions better and better and control my thoughts. I want them to be optimistic and positive. I want to really focus on the game and look at the things I have to improve or improve the score. That's something I have worked on.

I always try and do this when I hit balls and during the matches and so on. Now I feel that it's going to be a question of habit. It is a habit. I don't need to repeat that. I want to remain calm and positive regardless of the tournament and focus on the solutions. It was the case today. It paid off. It really shows I have improved versus last year, for instance.

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