

Roland Garros

Friday, 27 May 2022

Paris, France

Felix Auger-Aliassime

Press Conference

F. AUGER-ALIASSIME/F. Krajinovic

7-6, 7-6, 7-5

THE MODERATOR: Very tough three-set match today. Can you please analyze it for us.

FELIX AUGER-ALIASSIME: Yeah, always tough matches against Filip. We have played in challengers level also and it's always been difficult three-set matches except the last time we played in indoors last year.

I was expecting a tough match today, and it was. But in the end of the day, I was serving really well. First two sets I thought I was playing a little bit better, was hitting the ball really well with just a few unforced.

My level was good showing today. Unfortunately went down in the third set, lost my focus a little bit, but it was nice to recover, and get that win in three sets was really important for me for what's to come.

THE MODERATOR: Questions in English.

Q. You are obviously coached by Toni Nadal and you're obviously playing Rafa in the next round. Talk about the dynamic of that. Will it be quite awkward for Toni or do you think you will get some insight into how Rafa plays given you're coached by someone of his family?

FELIX AUGER-ALIASSIME: I don't know if I need insight on how Rafa plays, to be honest. I think we all know what he does well (smiling). I don't think Toni will, you know, tell me anything new about how Rafa plays.

But, no, but we had the discussion, you know, it was black and white from the first time we started working together we knew it was a possibility that eventually I would play Rafa when I'm working with Toni. And actually now he's present here in this Grand Slam. But I think Toni will watch from a neutral place and enjoy the match.

Yeah, from my part it's another match, another opportunity to try to play, you know, a good match and win, but of course it's very difficult.



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I don't know how Toni feels. Maybe we should ask him, but he hasn't talked to me about it. But I think also you have to remember, because I know this question is going to come quite a lot, I just want to say that, you know, for me, like, Rafa's career and what he did with Toni is much bigger than the match tomorrow, you know. I think we can all say that regardless of what happens tomorrow, I think we have to see like it's much bigger than just this.

I mean, what he did with his uncle, like this match will not take anything away from both sides really, and I just think we need to see it as bigger picture. It's one match, let's play, but his career and everything is much bigger than this.

Q. You mentioned the bigger picture. Obviously Rafa Nadal, one of biggest elite in the history of this sport. But now this is not the first time that he had big injury or said he had a big injury for the tournament. I'm just curious if this is kind of a talk in the locker rooms that you really think, Oh, yeah, maybe he's really injured, we have to take care of this, or you think it happened a lot of times, this isn't so very big injuries or no big topic at the players.

FELIX AUGER-ALIASSIME: Well, first, we don't really talk in the locker room with other players. I personally don't talk with other players, thinking about talking about other players and what's going on with them and if they are weak or if they are strong.

I think, you know, Rafa, I think, like he said, I'm taking his words, it's something he's been living with all his life. It's not like a new injury.

Looks like now he's okay, from the first -- we knew from the start of the tournament we could play and we both had to win three matches. He won three matches without losing a set. I think his form and his foot is good.

But, you know, I don't know, I don't control this, so I can only focus on myself and what I control.

Q. I believe you have played Rafa just once before on clay a few years ago. I'm wondering what sticks out in your mind from that match, and can you take anything away from it or because it's been three years, maybe it's not all that relevant?

FELIX AUGER-ALIASSIME: Well, I think I'm a much different player than I was three years ago. I think that's

fair to say.

But what I remember, I have good memories, but also not feeling like I played the best I could have played even at that time when I left the match.

He was also coming off, you know, it was like his first match in a while. So it was a bit tense to start. I was serving well. I remember I had two good starts of both sets, but eventually throughout the set I just, as a young player, felt a lot of pressure, you know, to hold my serve.

I started forcing my shots a little too much and forcing my targets. He took advantage of it. As soon as he broke me, he raised his level and gained confidence. At the time he just played much better than me on that given day.

Yeah, I think I'm a much different player than I was three years ago.

Q. I know you enjoy playing the piano. So I wanted to know how many of the right notes you think you have hit on the court at Roland Garros so far this week? Do you enjoy conducting the crowd like an orchestra? If you could choose either a piece of music or a style of music to describe the way that you play, what would it be and why?

FELIX AUGER-ALIASSIME: That's not an easy question. No, I do like music. I do get a lot of inspiration from many different things.

At the end, as a person, you reach for emotions. I think as players we give to the crowd, and when you listen to music or when you go see a show, that's what you enjoy also, it gives you good emotions.

But a style of music to describe my game? I never thought about it, to be honest. I don't know. Playing the piano, I love many, many pianists, of course the classic. But there is an Italian pianist, Einaudi, that has really good music, he plays in a lot of movies, and you really feel good emotions when you listen to it. So I go with that.

Q. Coming back to Toni and Rafa, one more on that. He'd normally give you a tactical plan for opponents, take you through it. Is it not going to be a little bit weird this time around?

FELIX AUGER-ALIASSIME: I don't know. We haven't talked about it, to be honest. I mean, I just left the match, we saw each other a little bit, talked about the match today.

We will see tomorrow, but that's up to him. But for me, there is no -- I mean, I don't expect it, you know. But I don't think, yeah, I don't think we are going to talk much

about the match tomorrow.

It's not like even with my coach Fred, it's not like there is much to say. Like, you know, I know him, I've seen him play, I know what he does well. We all know.

But at the end of the day, comes to the match and you try your best and you try and find ways throughout the match. But nobody, Toni, Fred, or me has the answers to just win, you know, my next match.

It's up to me, at the end of the day, when I come on the court to try to find solutions.

Q. Obviously you are playing the next match against Rafa to win. Despite all the polite words of praise and respect, what would be the features of your game and your character which you think will deliver that desired outcome?

FELIX AUGER-ALIASSIME: Yes, against I think players like him and then, you know, Novak and those top players -- I played Novak in Rome -- I think, first of all, I like to focus on myself. Because I think sometimes we tend to think too much about who is in front of us, especially in that position, and not only you think about the game but you think about, like, the mountain that it is, to play these champions.

I think we have to, I have personally, to take the next match as it is, play the ball as it comes and really focus on myself.

I know that if I serve well, which is one of my good strengths, I will give myself the opportunities to put pressure on my, you know, opponent's service games, and, you know, move well, try to come in when I can with my forehand, really go in and out of the court.

It's all about, I think, focusing on my strength, what I do well, have a positive attitude like always, and, yeah, play with high intensity like I can do.

Q. I'm sorry we are coming back to Toni. Which part of your game have you improved since you are trained by Toni?

FELIX AUGER-ALIASSIME: Many things. I mean, we didn't approach only one thing in my game. But of course I think more of my baseline game than, let's say, my serve and my volley. We don't work these things as much.

I think I have always had a pretty good natural serve, but I think we worked a lot on my movement on the court, yeah, my intensity of footwork, the way I can now, you know, move, like I said before. But in and out of the court, I can defend better and, you know, I think I'm more precise with what I do, as well.

I think all the work that we have done, that I do every day, is I try to make my game more precise and efficient. You know, I think I have powerful shots naturally. But for me, the challenge all my youth actually was always to control that power and racquet speed.

So I think with Toni, we have been able now with that movement and footwork, that my game is more solid and precise.

THE MODERATOR: Questions in French.

Q. Unfortunately I'm going to ask you to repeat exactly what you have said in English. This is going to be very bizarre, because you are going to play Nadal with Toni as your coach. Did you talk with him about the fact that you would actually play him one day? Did you ask him some tips? Did you dare ask him some tips to know how to win against Rafa?

FELIX AUGER-ALIASSIME: No, I didn't ask, but as I said earlier, we know him well enough already. When we talk about Rafa, we talk about him together. We have already talked about what I could learn from him.

Toni did say things that Rafa would do less well or things on which I should focus. But as for that particular match, we knew one day that since we started working together, this is something that could happen.

It was already decided that Toni would watch the match in a neutral way, not to be on anyone's side. As far as I'm concerned, this is a match that I'm handling just as any match. I will focus on what I can do well. I will try to give my best. I will try to find solutions on the court.

But if there were secrets to win Rafa, he wouldn't have won 13 times the French Open, right? (Smiling.)

Q. When you are a young player like yourself, playing Rafa in Roland Garros where he's won 13 times already, isn't it one of the biggest challenges in one's career, one of the best opportunities, especially when one has Toni Nadal on your side?

FELIX AUGER-ALIASSIME: It's an opportunity like any match. It will be the opportunity for me to see how I can level with him as a benchmark, because he's had so much success here, to see if I really have improved my game during the last years, and I will try to see where I position myself towards him.

But I will handle it as any match, with confidence, with determination. I never played Rafa here, but it's one of the greatest challenges in our sports I was told. I have to approach it in a positive way and with an optimistic view, and this is exactly what I'm gonna do.

Q. For many years now we have talked about the next gen with Tsitsipas, Zverev, and others. There is a lot of onus on their shoulders. Rafa and Novak are still there, however. Does it mean that somehow the next gen has not managed to take over and has already lost their round to the next, next gen with Alcaraz, yourself, and Casper?

FELIX AUGER-ALIASSIME: I don't know what it means anymore, next gen, new next gen. It's not the first time that I hear that. We should stop trying to put labels on people's backs.

In the end, we are just as old as we are. We try to do our best. As for the older players, they try to do their best. On some tournaments they have won, and in 2020, for instance, it was more complicated, but Novak won in Australia. Wimbledon is always difficult, but he's got experience. He won there. In 2020 we didn't play, actually.

But then the younger players are starting to win Masters, and we only see young players against Novak, and only Medvedev manages to win against these older players.

I don't like to mix everything up, to put everyone in the same bowl. We try to do our best. Rafa and Novak have had a lot of successes. They are difficult to win, to defeat, but it will change one day.

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