

Roland Garros

Friday, 26 May 2023

Paris, France

Aryna Sabalenka

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Aryna, welcome back to Roland Garros. Just talk us through how you're feeling and also how your preparations have been here.

ARYNA SABALENKA: Yeah, I'm super happy to be here, feeling good. Preparation going well. Just can't wait to play my first match here.

THE MODERATOR: Questions in English.

Q. After your loss in Rome, you said you were completely wiped. So I'm curious how well the last two weeks have gone in terms of just resetting you and could it have been a blessing in disguise to not have to, you know, play a two-week tournament right ahead of Roland Garros?

ARYNA SABALENKA: Yeah, I actually think that what happened to me in Rome was good. It was good lesson for all of us. Yeah, I was exhausted, but we did good recovery.

I was able to recharge and start everything over again.

Q. Could you tell us a little bit about your first feelings on the clay in Paris and what did you change in your game potentially and for the clay especially?

ARYNA SABALENKA: Feels definitely better than in Rome. Courts are way better than there. Yeah, I feel really good on these courts. Yeah. I don't know what to say (smiling). It feels good.

Q. How aware are you that you could potentially be the World No. 1 at the end of the tournament? How much of a motivating factor is that for you, if so?

ARYNA SABALENKA: I'm not focusing on that. Because every time I'm focusing on something like that, like points, ranking, results, and I'm not playing my best. So I'm trying to focus on myself, on my game, and make sure I bring my best tennis and then we will see after these couple of weeks what gonna happen.

Q. Tennis is often about rivalries between players. I'm wondering, do you feel as if you are establishing rivalries with you, Iga, and Rybakina, the three of you, at this sort of top of the game right now?



ROLAND-GARROS

Maybe the three of you are separating yourselves a little bit from the group.

ARYNA SABALENKA: What do you mean, separating ourselves? Like we are not close to each other or what?

Q. Sorry, that the three of you maybe are here (indicating), and the rest of the players are a little bit below, that the three of you are establishing yourselves as the top players in the game.

ARYNA SABALENKA: Yeah, I mean, that's something really great. I mean, I think it's good for tennis to have like, to see the top players consistently doing well. I think it's pushing everybody to a next level and pushing everybody to do better and to play better.

That's how I was pushed by Iga, you know, last season (smiling). I think that's something really important and good to see. I think it's good for people to watch these kind of matches and to see that top players are reaching the last stages of the tournament. Like, I think it's good for people to watch high-level tennis in the finals.

Q. On a similar subject, Iga said that it gave her extra motivation that she's playing you and Elena more often in finals. Do you feel the same or do you like that if you get to a big final you're playing maybe the same people and you have other matches fresh in your mind, other finals?

ARYNA SABALENKA: I really like it, actually, because it's always tough battles against Iga or Elena. So that's really an extra motivation. That's what I'm saying, like that's really pushing you in the next level. You're working so hard to get the title. There is no easy matches.

So, yeah, that really like motivate me a lot to keep going, to keep doing what we're doing.

Q. You have had an amazing season obviously from the start. I just wonder if you feel like it's translating to this surface, maybe you're a better player than ever in many ways. Do you feel like you're a better player than ever on clay?

ARYNA SABALENKA: Than I have ever been?

Q. Yes.

ARYNA SABALENKA: Yeah, I think so. I felt different on



clay than I used to feel last year or like two years ago.

Yeah, I feel like I'm doing better on clay (smiling).

Q. For the very first time, you're coming into a major having won a major. Does it feel completely different this time around? Does it feel like there is a bit more pressure on you? There is obviously more attention, but what is the mindset coming into the French having won the Australian?

ARYNA SABALENKA: Actually, after I won Australia, I thought it's going to be easier, but it's not easier the same -- I mean, the same, I still have to bring my best tennis, and the thing that I have one Grand Slam in my pocket, it's not going to help me to win this one. Everyone will come and try to beat me. So I have to bring my best tennis every time I'm on the court.

So it's not changing anything. It's like probably mentally I'm like I believe in myself more than ever that I can do well on the Grand Slams, and yeah, probably can get some more Grand Slams.

Q. In Stuttgart, you said if you could finish the war you would do it. Was there any reaction by Marta after this sentence? How will you handle the situation with no shake hands in the first round against her?

ARYNA SABALENKA: Well, I don't know if there was any reaction from her. But yeah, that's true if I could I would stop it.

And about the no shaking, I kind of can understand them. Like I imagine they're going to shake hands with Russians and Belarusians, and then they're gonna get so many messages from their home countries. So I kind of understand why they are not doing it. At the same time, I feel like sports shouldn't be in politics. Like we're just athletes. If they feel good with no shaking hands, I'm happy with that.

Q. Off of the earlier question, are you ready to be No. 1?

ARYNA SABALENKA: I think yes (smiling). I don't know. Yes, I think so. I think I improved a lot, and I have everything to be No. 1.

But again, I don't want to focus on that. I just want to focus on my game, and I just want to bring my best game every time on the court, and after the season we'll see if I'm ready or not.

Q. After Rome you said you needed some time to recharge. Do you feel recharged? What did you do to achieve that?

ARYNA SABALENKA: Well, I did a lot of treatment with my physio, of course. I had a few days off to enjoy Rome, then Paris. It was really good couple of days.

Yeah, and then I start practicing again.

Q. On playing Marta, is it hard going into a match knowing that your opponent has those negative feelings about you kind of personally? I mean, I know obviously it's wider than you, but it's sort of about you.

ARYNA SABALENKA: I don't want to waste my energy on this kind of stuff, you know. This is like, it's not about -- it's none of my business, you know. So if she hate me, okay. I can't do anything about that.

There is going to be people who loves me; there is going to be people who hates me. If she hates me, I don't feel anything like that to her.

Q. I asked you before about playing on clay and you feeling maybe that you are maybe better than before. Can you elaborate? What are some of the things you are able to do better now? How would you look back on your performance the last three years? Third round three-setters each time. Does that leave a little bit of a bitter taste in your mouth?

ARYNA SABALENKA: Yeah, last years wasn't really good for me here at Roland Garros. It's an extra motivation for me to do better.

Yeah, I think physically I'm stronger, so I'm able to move better on clay and I'm not rushing things and I'm calm on court. So a lot of things I improved since, I would say since last year, so that's why it makes me better player on clay.

And, yeah, results here wasn't good enough last years. I'm gonna do everything I can to improve it.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports