

Roland Garros

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Paris, France

Aryna Sabalenka

Press Conference

A. SABALENKA/M. Kostyuk

6-3, 6-2

THE MODERATOR: Aryna, you are undefeated so far at Grand Slams this year. Talk about the match today and what were you most pleased with your performance.

ARYNA SABALENKA: Yeah, it was emotionally tough match, and I'm super happy that I get this win. In the first games, things didn't work well for me, but I'm happy that I was able to get through this match.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. It was tough in the beginning. Maybe some nerves, first match of the tournament, all that stuff. How were you able to unlock yourself from 3-2 down in the first?

ARYNA SABALENKA: Yeah, magically (smiling).

Yeah, was tough first round, and especially after such tough loss in Rome, I mean, I know I was exhausted, but still this match is in your head. Emotionally, I was a little bit nervous at the beginning.

Yeah, I was just trying to keep fighting, keep finding my rhythm, keep adjusting to the court. Yeah, like point by point I start building my game. Yeah, I start playing better and with more rhythm. Yeah, was able to go for my shots without a lot of mistakes.

Q. Congratulations on the win. You said in your court interview, and you've just told us now, it was an emotionally challenging match for you today. To me, you always seem like a happy person. You smile and laugh a lot. Sometimes we see you sing or dance. Do you make a conscious decision to be a positive person, or are you naturally positive? Are you affected sometimes about how people see you and the things they say about you?

ARYNA SABALENKA: Whew. Well, first of all, I'm naturally like a positive person. On court just my style of the game, I play aggressive, so I'm more aggressive on court. But off court, yeah, I seem to be more positive.



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I focus on things like what they saying about me, like on positive things. If people don't like me or hate me, I kind of understand that, it's okay, it's their decision, their opinion. I don't want to prove them that I'm a good person or bad person. I just focus on people who likes me.

Q. It was obviously a bit confusing at the end. It was a little bit fractious. You were talking to the umpire and then to your box, as well. Can you just talk us through what was going through your head at that moment and kind of what your reaction to it was.

ARYNA SABALENKA: Yeah, I couldn't understand what's going on. Because, I mean, we all know Ukrainian girls will not shake hands with us, so it's kind of not surprise for us, but probably for the public today was surprised. They saw it as disrespect me as a player, so that's why it was booing to her.

But at first I thought they were booing me. I was a little confused, and I was, like, Okay, what should I do? I spoke to my team, make sure that I understand it right. Then I kind of understand what's going on, and then I was saying thank you to the public, kind of like I felt sorry for what I did at the first (smiling).

Q. You called it kind of a tough match emotionally. Do you feel because of the obvious kind of more attention that would be on the match because of the matchup of a Belarusian player against a Ukrainian player, does that weigh on your mind knowing there is going to be a bit more attention on how it will end with the handshake and all of that?

ARYNA SABALENKA: Yeah, probably because of that, and as well like first match of the tournament. The second thing is you're playing against Ukrainian and you never know what's gonna happen. You never know, you know, how people will -- will they support you or not. I was worried like that people will be against me, and I don't like to play when people so much against me. So I was worried about that.

Yeah, the beginning was very emotional, but then I got through it and I started playing tennis and focus on myself instead of the rest of the things.

Q. With this Roland Garros you might become World No. 1. As World No. 1, you should be a role model. I think you are already a role model for many people,



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for many tennis players in the world. World No. 1 is a very difficult status. What is your message to the world? Because meanwhile, this situation with Ukrainian players show that you're twisting it as if Ukrainians hate you, but they do not say that they hate you. The only thing they want to know from you is either you condemn the war or you support the war. This is the only thing that Ukrainian players want to hear. You're avoiding this question. You're coming up with different answers. So you say it's politics, even though missiles launched from Belarus does not choose if it's a politician or tennis player. What is your message as the World No. 1? How can you sort it out with Ukrainian players that there is no more words "hate" or something like that? Thank you.

ARYNA SABALENKA: First of all, I'm not saying that they are saying they hate me.

Q. You did. You did many times.

ARYNA SABALENKA: No, but listen. First of all, when I get the question about Ukrainians, they ask me, like, So you know that they hate you? Like not personally or politically, they asking the question. So I'm answering the question that if they hate me, like I don't feel anything like that.

About the war situation, I said it many, many times: Nobody in this world, Russian athletes or Belarusian athletes, support the war. Nobody. How can we support the war? Nobody, normal people will never support it.

Why we have to go loud and say that things -- this is like one plus one, it's two. Of course we don't support war. If it could affect anyhow the war, if it could like stop it, we would do it. But unfortunately, it's not in our hands. That's the part about Ukrainians.

The secondly, as the World No. 1, what's my message? Okay, let's get back to the country. I'm from small country, from Belarus, who was working really hard to get to this level. This is the message to a lot of young athletes who is from small countries, who don't have enough money, who's just from the small countries, that they can do well in this sport. That they have to work hard and believe in their selves and they can do whatever they want to. This is my main message as World No. 1.

I don't know if I'm role model for a lot of people or, as I said, there's going to be people who don't like me and there is going to be people who likes me. I'm focusing on people who likes me and who want me to be the best. You know, I want to show my best tennis, I want people to enjoy tennis matches, to enjoy my matches. So this is my message, to bring the joy for people. I don't know.

Q. Can I just ask you about the post-match handshake as well? You said you thought the crowd thought it was disrespectful. Do you think it's disrespectful that they don't shake hands with you and do you think she deserved to be booed?

ARYNA SABALENKA: I don't think so. I understand why they are not shaking hands with us. I can imagine if they gonna shake hands with us, and then what's gonna happen to them from Ukrainian side. So I understand that. And I understand that this is not kind of like personally, you know. That's it.

I think probably she don't -- not probably. I think she don't deserve to be, yeah, to leave the court that way.

Q. On the conditions, it's supposed to be very hot the whole two weeks. On clay, what kind of conditions do you prefer and what do you think helps your game? Because obviously sometimes when it's rainy and heavy it can be hard for big hitters.

ARYNA SABALENKA: Yeah, it's difficult conditions for me. After Rome, I had three weeks to prepare physically, mentally, to these courts.

It's tough, but I really like it, because I have an extra time to adjust and to go for my shots.

Q. A similar question. We know you can do well on clay. We have seen it at Madrid, Stuttgart. Here is obviously different and tougher for you. Why is it tougher, and how have you maybe improved at playing in these conditions that we see more in Rome and Roland Garros?

ARYNA SABALENKA: Yeah, used to be tougher because probably physically I wasn't ready for these kind of courts, because it's slower so you have to play longer points, so you have to be physically strong.

Yeah, I worked a lot over last years to improve this part of my game. I think right now I'm ready more than ever for these kind of courts, and I'll do everything I can to show my best tennis and to go as far as I can here at the French Open.

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