

# Roland Garros

Sunday, 28 May 2023

Paris, France

## Leylah Fernandez

### Press Conference

L. FERNANDEZ/M. Linette

6-3, 1-6, 6-3

THE MODERATOR: Leylah, congratulations. A very hard fought battle against a very good opponent. Can you give us the keys to the match win today?

LEYLAH FERNANDEZ: Today was a very hard first round match. In the past we've played against each other. It's always been three sets, and it was no different today.

But I think the biggest key for today was being aggressive, being offensive on key moments and also being very positive, not letting small mistakes get to me or her playing well frustrate me.

I was glad that I was able to maintain that throughout the match.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

#### Q. (Off microphone - question about next opponent)

LEYLAH FERNANDEZ: It's been a couple of years, but I do remember it being a very, very tough match. She's an extremely powerful player, a very good player.

I think it's going to be an interesting matchup on the next round. I'm going to talk with my team to see what I need to do, but right now I'm just going to enjoy my win, enjoy the night. Then, tomorrow I'll get back to work.

#### Q. Tennis media as well, did you watch some of Tauson's match in the first round?

LEYLAH FERNANDEZ: No, unfortunately, I did not. I didn't have the time, to be honest. She finish a little too quickly, but I'm just going to let my coaches watch some of her tape, and I'll do a little bit of my homework, too.

But, like I said, right now I just want to enjoy my evening, enjoy with my team, have a nice dinner and relax and also catch up on homework (laughing).

#### Q. Sorry for the off-topic question, but you watched Justine Henin when you were growing up quite a bit.



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Am I right?

LEYLAH FERNANDEZ: Yes, that is true.

#### Q. You were a big fan, if I recall. Can you talk about what drew you to her as a player? What was it that you liked about watching her play?

LEYLAH FERNANDEZ: It's interesting because I didn't know who Justine Henin was, but there was a coach who kept mentioning that I play a lot like her or my style of game can be a lot like her.

That's when my dad actually looked her up on YouTube because by then she was retired. So when we looked her up, I saw her play. I just loved the way she was hitting her one-hander, how she was hitting the slices down the lines, using the variation of her game to her advantage. It was interesting how she made the players uncomfortable while doing that.

I think that's what has drawn me to her game eventually and just seeing her how she was able to make her opponents very uncomfortable. That's why I like watching her.

#### Q. Obviously, you have a two-handed backhand, but she had the famous one-hander. How impressive of a shot is that for you to watch on those YouTube videos, what she can do with that shot?

LEYLAH FERNANDEZ: It was very impressive. Growing up I've always wanted a one-handed backhand. When I did try, it was a lot of fun, but it was super hard to control. And to be able to control a heavy, fast ball the way that she did, it was incredible.

I think it's inspiring to see a player who technically isn't that big, that tall, being able to put taller and powerful players uncomfortable.

#### Q. Tell me, Leylah, what happened when you shot the balls today with your serve?

LEYLAH FERNANDEZ: It happens. It's never easy to have problems with something simple, but it happens. I have to be patient.

I know how to serve. I talked a bit with my coaches, and they say it's normal. I just have to be patient, and eventually everything will come back, and I'll find my

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pace again.

**Q. Were you disturbed by that?**

LEYLAH FERNANDEZ: No, not really. I worked a lot with my coaches on how to accept difficult moments, moments that are not good for me. These are moments when I have trouble, and I try to always be extremely positive. This helped me a lot today in my game and in my serve.

**Q. Well, more or less, the same question, but slightly differently, if you don't mind. At the worst of the pandemic you had trouble with your service. You weren't the only one, in fact, because many people were stressed. How did you find a way of overcoming that? When you were very sick, what happened to you afterwards, and two weeks later because right from the start when you resumed, you were really practicing throwing the ball before serving.**

LEYLAH FERNANDEZ: Well, during the pandemic, the situation was very difficult for everyone, but I just tried to renew with the joy of playing. Obviously, football helped me a little bit. One can wonder how, but it's just it helped me relax. It helped me renew with the joy of playing a sport.

In Rome I served well, then two weeks later these moments come. They happen. I try to control them as best as I can.

But as I said, I'm very happy with the way I managed to accept these difficulties and to think positive in order to overcome my negative emotions so as to renew with the joy of playing.

**Q. You really had to battle today to overcome that?**

LEYLAH FERNANDEZ: Yes, I didn't have to fight against my opponent. Only I had to fight against myself. These are matches I like. Obviously one prefers an easier match, but it's never the case, especially in the WTA Tour, all the players are good.

And the three sets give me a lot of confidence. I know I fought well, and I know you can always improve.

**Q. Your second-round opponent, four years ago you played in Australia. Do you remember that match against her? Do you think it's going to be very different four and a half years down the road? You developed faster than she did.**

LEYLAH FERNANDEZ: Well, it's four years. It's difficult to remember. She's a very good player. She reached the top 50 at the same time more or less as I did, but then she had injuries and had to stop for a while. So

she's a very good player. She works as hard as all the players here, and it's going to be a very good second-round match.

I'll let my coaches watch her videos tonight. As for me, I'm just going to relax.

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