

# Roland Garros

Wednesday, 31 May 2023

Paris, France

## Thanasi Kokkinakis

### Press Conference

T. KOKKINAKIS/S. Wawrinka

3-6, 7-5, 6-3, 6-7, 6-3

THE MODERATOR: Congratulations. Can you speak about how happy you are after that victory and very long match?

THANASI KOKKINAKIS: Yeah, definitely feels better when you come on the winning end of those. Had a heartbreaker against Andy earlier in the year and not many moral victories. Yeah, it was a tough one to take.

Yeah, you can't count these guys out no matter how old they are. They just play. They get better and better, and you can see why they are multiple Grand Slam champions.

Stan is a legend. Still is, obviously, but he was a legend out on court today. He was very nice, very respectful. Yeah, hats off to him.

The crowd was going nuts for him, but it's a fun atmosphere. I love playing against that, so it was awesome.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

**Q. After finally winning one of these, what are you going to tweet?**

THANASI KOKKINAKIS: Honestly, that tweet that I did came into my head when I didn't take those match points. I was, like, oh, no, it's happening again.

I don't know. I'm sure it's the same in other sports, but as a tennis player, the amount of rubbish that goes through your head while you were playing. I was, like, 40-Love, I've got a bit of a cushion, stay focused. It went back to deuce. I was, like oh, no. The crowd was going nuts. I can't lose another one of these.

So I just tried to stay calm and stay focused. But, yeah, I haven't thought about my tweet. Yeah, I don't know. It's just relief, just super happy.

**Q. You talked in the past about the struggles that you've had. In particular there was a lovely phrase**



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**that you used at the end: I disappeared for five years. When you think about getting back into the third round of a major, do you put it into perspective with some of the low points that you went through?**

THANASI KOKKINAKIS: Yeah, it's crazy. I hit an age where I thought about quitting pretty early on. I think I was 21 or 22. Then played a couple of matches and tried to look back on the good moments that I had and the good wins that I had in the past and kind of used those to fuel me.

There's a lot of dark days, but winning those matches in those atmospheres is what makes it worth it. I've missed on a lot of opportunities in the past due to injury and other stuff. But, yeah, I've still got a bit of my career left, so I'm going to try to make the most of it while I can.

**Q. Thanasi, did you see Nick's tweet?**

THANASI KOKKINAKIS: I saw a little bit of it. Saying he was going to sleep, and I better not lose another one of the thrillers?

**Q. Yes.**

THANASI KOKKINAKIS: Hopefully he can wake up a bit happier now. I definitely will be.

**Q. What did you feel like? What was going through yourself when you were lying on the court?**

THANASI KOKKINAKIS: Oh, just relief. I was just honestly, Thank, fuck, that ball missed. Pardon the language. Sorry. But that's exactly what I was thinking. I was like, I've let it go. I feel like it's going out and I saw it drift wide. I was, like, you're kidding, thank you.

Just pure relief. Happy I got through that, just how it was going, losing that from 40-Love. I don't think I played too bad of points. He kind of just got stronger in the match, and he really made me earn it and made me win it.

So just super happy and super proud of how I was able to stick together and win that.

**Q. Did the Murray match come into mind?**

THANASI KOKKINAKIS: Yes, the Murray match came into my mind. The Hurkacz won when I had five match points or whatever and didn't take it. I was like, oh, no,



there's another one going. I can already imagine what the journos are going to tweet. I was, like, just keep it in, just try and focus.

**Q. Having in mind everything that has happened to you in the recent times, does this feel like walking on a tight rope, or are you back on solid ground? How does it feel now?**

THANASI KOKKINAKIS: I've never really thought of that analogy, if I'm honest. Yeah, I know where my game is at. I should have been in the third round of Australia, but that's tennis. That's what happens. I put myself in my other position here.

Yeah, I've been playing consistently for a couple of years now again, and I just made a pledge to myself to try and play full schedule. I only 15 tournaments last year, and I reached my career high that I had when I was I feel like a baby.

Yeah, I'm really going to try and make a push this year and see how well I can do. Who knows if I pass it? Who knows if I don't. Least at least I'm going to give myself a chance.

**Q. Obviously you had a lot of injuries. We know that. But I think you're a big-stage guy, a big-match guy. You like those kind of matches. You can play against great players and challenge them. You're still young. How far do you think you can go in the rankings and in tournaments like this, like Grand Slam?**

THANASI KOKKINAKIS: I'm not too sure, to be honest. I'm taking it one match at a time. I saw my draw. I knew it was tough. It doesn't get much easier from now.

The names you have to kind of beat to progress, it's just crazy how guys like Djokovic and Nadal have won 20 of these. This stuff is so hard, to be honest. To try and win five sets is brutal. It's a pain, especially on clay. It's a massive relief, and then you're, like, shit, hang on, I have to go again in two days. I'm just going to swear. I'm sorry. It's me (laughing).

This stuff is so hard, so for people watching at home, it's like, oh, you should be able to do that or whatever. They don't understand how hard it is and how impressive these guys are.

I don't know how good I can be or what I can do. I'm not trying to put a limit on myself, but what I do know is that I'm going to give myself every chance and see what I can get to.

**Q. If I have it right, 20 years ago Stan won the juniors here in 2003. Can you recall when I guess you were about 7 or so what you were doing in 2003**

**either tennis-wise or otherwise?**

THANASI KOKKINAKIS: I don't think I had picked up a racquet when I was 7. I started pretty late. I was playing basketball to start.

Yeah, that's all I've got for you. I don't really remember. I was 7 years old, and I was playing basketball and at school, so I wasn't really thinking about Stan's junior career.

**Q. Were you any good?**

THANASI KOKKINAKIS: I would like to say I was all right, but then I realize I was pretty selfish, so I decided to pick up an individual sport, which I'm now kind of regretting. It's a torturous sport.

**Q. When the match against Stan was announced, we know that Nick Kyrgios posted out a popcorn tweet, and everyone was labeling this as a box office match. When you were out on the court, how much did it feel like real life? How much did it feel like a bit of a film? How important was it for you to control what you could control?**

THANASI KOKKINAKIS: Yeah, well, the film wasn't going very well at the start, so I wasn't enjoying the movie too much. Yeah, I just tried to find a way. Then when I got the second set and when I got the third, and then when he was coming back in the fourth, and the crowd was going nuts, I was, like, oh, God, it's one of these ones again.

They're the fun ones. They're what you play for. You don't grow up practicing and spending hours and hours to try and play on some side courts against lesser or lower-ranked guys in challengers and stuff like that. You work your way through that to try and get to these moments.

And playing a legend, yeah, he was showing glimpses of him at his best, especially early on. I just tried to weather the storm.

Yeah, incredible atmosphere. I feel like I've got a lot of dramatic matches. It's probably my fault that I can't put them away earlier or a testament to these guys that I'm playing. They're just legends, so they make it really tough on you.

Yeah, definitely a pretty crazy ending. But, yeah, I'm happy with how this movie ended in that match.

**Q. You mentioned the Murray match. I wonder, do you look at that match as kind of the toughest loss of your career and the one that's haunting you the most, I guess? Obviously it motivated you today, but I wonder how you think about it kind of.**

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THANASI KOKKINAKIS: Yeah, I definitely thought about that one for a while. There's a lot of matches you can look back on in your career and say I should have had that. But I'm sure all these guys, these players, there's so many opportunities. Tennis, the margins are so fine and so small, so you can play an incredible match and just come up short, and you feel like it's a disappointment and a failure.

But I think that match, although it was super hard to take and kind of made me kind of know what to expect on a day like today and kind of try and look back on those moments and try not to dwell on it too much, as tough as that was, and try and use that as fuel and try and realize what I did wrong there and try and correct those mistakes here.

**Q. Where do you rank this? At the same level as the Fed one in Miami or higher?**

THANASI KOKKINAKIS: It's different. The Fed one was obviously a better win as far as ranking goes, and my ranking was outside 100, so I was a crazy underdog in that match, and no one was really expecting it.

But I think as far as the effort I put into this match and equaling my best Grand Slam result again after eight years, this one -- yeah, I don't know what order to place it, but this one is definitely right up there.

**Q. And the laundry came back?**

THANASI KOKKINAKIS: Yeah, I had a few extra shirts that I found in a box. So, yeah, it fits well.

**Q. Are you a State of Origin man at all?**

THANASI KOKKINAKIS: Mate, I've got no idea about NRL, to be honest.

**Q. I was going to ask you if you're interested in who won today.**

THANASI KOKKINAKIS: You can tell me, but it won't change my day.

**Q. Okay.**

THANASI KOKKINAKIS: Are you a Queenslander? Did you get the W?

**Q. No. One man short as well.**

THANASI KOKKINAKIS: It's going to be a tough day for you. Apologies. It's all right, my Suns got bounced in the playoffs.

**Q. Some players around the world decide to either**

**skip the clay court season or the European leg of the tour because of the challenges or the surface or a mixture of reasons. Why did you decide to set yourself that challenge this year?**

THANASI KOKKINAKIS: I think it's just a surface that my game kind of suits, to be honest. I just haven't played enough tournaments on it, but I think my game, when I'm playing well, can kind of suit the clay. Obviously, there's some things that doesn't suit my game as well. It makes my serve tougher. I don't get as many free points there.

From the back I feel like I've got time to kind of do what I want a little bit more so. I don't know. It's a Grand Slam. I'm not taking it for granted.

I'm not going to beat these guys that play clay nine months of the year. The clay swing is there. It's a Grand Slam. I'm trying to give myself the best possible chance to advance. I'm not going to be the guy that just kind of plays hard court tournaments and then maybe plays one before.

**Q. Basketball-related. I know you're a big NBA fan, so NBA Finals coming up. What's your take on the Finals and Nikola Jokic in particular, since I'm from Serbia?**

THANASI KOKKINAKIS: Well done, because he's a freak. He knocked my team out, and he looks slow and unathletic and is torching everyone. So he is crazy talented, and he killed Phoenix. Him and Murray killed them single-handedly. I think they're the favorites. But what Miami has done, I think no one predicted that. I'm going to be Denver in five or six, yeah.

**Q. How confident did you feel going out for the match? Wally saying on Stan Sport that he felt no doubt that you were going to win that match against Wawrinka.**

THANASI KOKKINAKIS: Thanks, Wally. I'm sure he probably felt a bit of doubt about a set and a half in, but it's nice having that backing.

I definitely gave myself a shot, but kind of I came out a little bit tentative, and I saw the way he was playing. I was, like, it could be a tough one for me today, and it wasn't looking good.

But when I was able to scrape through the second set and turn that one around, then I was, like, here we go. I've got a genuine shot here.

Yeah, I definitely thought I could win going out there. I'd be lying if I didn't. Kind of the way that that was going, I was, like, this is not what I had planned in my head.

Yeah, that's tennis. That's five sets. You feel like you

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play a lot of matches in one actual match that you're trying to deal with. So many momentum shifts, and you just have to be really tough mentally and physically out there, but I definitely thought I had a good shot.

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