

Roland Garros

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Paris, France

Aryna Sabalenka

Press Conference

A. SABALENKA/K. Rakhimova

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Q. Aryna, thanks for doing the press conference. Before we start, I know there was a tense situation in your second-round press conference, and if you wanted to address it at all.

ARYNA SABALENKA: Yeah, after my match I spoke with the media like I normally do. I know they still expect some questions that are more about the politics and not so much about my tennis.

For many months now I have answered these questions at tournaments and been very clear in my feelings and my thoughts. These questions do not bother me after my matches. I know that I have to provide answers to the media on things not related to my tennis or my matches, but on Wednesday I did not feel safe in press conference.

I should be able to feel safe when I do interviews with the journalists after my matches. For my own mental health and well-being, I have decided to take myself out of this situation today, and the tournament has supported me in this decision.

It hasn't been an easy few days, and now my focus is continue to play well here in Paris.

Q. Speaking of playing well here in Paris, your match today, just what are your thoughts on how you played and managed the match?

ARYNA SABALENKA: Yeah, I think I played way better than I played in the previous matches, and I'm super happy with that. It wasn't easy match. She's moving well, putting a lot of balls back.

Yeah, I was trying my best every point and super happy with the win today.

Q. What do you think you did better today compared to your first and second round?

ARYNA SABALENKA: Less unforced errors and, yeah, I was more focused and I played with more discipline.



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Yeah, basically that's it.

Q. Did the thought of your third-round barrier here in Paris creep into your mind at all getting ready for this match?

ARYNA SABALENKA: Actually, not really. But in the middle of the second set, I thought, like, actually, I never get through this one, but then I was like, okay, Aryna, this is not something you have to be focused on. Yeah, I put away these thoughts really quick in the match.

Q. I think the last time that you had kind of a similar barrier at the slams was when you made the run at Wimbledon, kind of getting past that round of 16. That obviously seemed to really loosen you up for the rest of your kind of Grand Slam career, obviously. But do you feel like something like this could, now making your first fourth round here in Paris, could be a similar thing for you in terms of your belief and your freeness going into the second week here?

ARYNA SABALENKA: I don't know actually. If something happened to you once, it doesn't mean that it's going to happen one more time. So I prefer to focus on myself, on things I can control.

Of course, this win gave me so much belief in myself here in Paris, so I know that on the next match I will go there and do everything I can to win another match.

Yeah, definitely this win give me somewhat belief.

Q. In your experience, how different is the second week of a slam than a first week? Does anything change now that you've gone through the first week, you've won three matches, you know, you've looked really good out there, pretty dominant. Do things change mentally, physically, schedule-wise? What is the second week of a slam like for you?

ARYNA SABALENKA: I feel like the only thing changing is it's less people around, you know, (smiling). That's the only thing. The rest, you still have to go there, you still have to show your best tennis. The first week will not help you. The second week, you know, still you have to work hard, you have to show your best tennis, and you have to fight for it.

Q. In today's match, you played a lot of -- obviously

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you were incredibly offensive as you normally are. You also played a lot of really good defense, especially in the corners. A few key points it seemed like that really came through. Your well-roundedness as a player has been obviously the story of you becoming a Grand Slam champion. Can you talk a little bit about the physical work that you've done with Jason, with your team, to get you to be that strong and confident when you are not in control of the point, when you have to defend?

ARYNA SABALENKA: Yeah, I think that's really important. You cannot win a Grand Slam only with aggressive game. You have to defend, and you have to move well. Physically you have to be strong.

Yeah, that's something we worked a lot last year. I mean, we always work hard on my fitness, but sometimes you have to build the base and then put it on the next level.

So I think like first years with Jason we were just building my base, and now we are able to make me physically stronger, I mean, make sure I can play long rallies, I can defend, I can run long.

That's something what we've been working on last year and this year, of course. And yeah, that's something what I have been working on and I'm super happy to see these things helping me during the matches.

Q. Not to get super technical, but when you're working on the base, building the foundation, the base of your fitness, compared to the work then once you have that base and you're building upon that, what's the difference in terms of the fitness program, like the exercise? Like, what were you doing, what were you guys focusing on to get stronger foundation-wise, and then now, what do you do to kind of build that extra explosiveness or that extra whatever it is that's working for you?

ARYNA SABALENKA: I think first you have to build good, how is it called, the muscles, like...

Q. Core?

ARYNA SABALENKA: Yeah, the core.

Q. Like abs and back?

ARYNA SABALENKA: No, no, not only abs, back, glute. Just to have these muscles and have them strong and then you can put on it a lot of running so you're not getting injured from like just running. So you have this strong base and, I mean, strong muscles, which is going to protect you.

And then you put -- how is the word? -- conditioning on

it? So that's the difference, that we are doing more condition right now. And of course before and after each hit we do like some core exercise, and when I have few weeks off I do a lot of conditioning work.

Q. Are you, on your off days, paying attention at all with what's going on in the other half of the draw? Just because there are some implications for you with respect to rankings, with respect to draw, all that sort of stuff.

ARYNA SABALENKA: Not really. I used to, before Australian Open, I used to follow like every match, you know, I just like to watch another -- when I'm resting, I like to watch another working (smiling). I don't know. Now, I don't know, I have time for that.

Q. Okay.

ARYNA SABALENKA: I do a lot of, I don't know, work, recovery stuff, and then at the end of the day I don't want to watch tennis. I want to just watch some movie and then relax, forget about tennis for a little while, and then start everything over again.

So right now, not really. I'm not really following tennis. Probably that's also the key. You're just focusing on yourself. Because doesn't matter what happen in another draw. Like, I still have to show my best tennis. If I'm not doing that, then there is no way I can become World No. 1, for example.

Q. For sure. What are you doing then to take your mind off tennis? You mentioned --

ARYNA SABALENKA: Movies.

Q. Just movies? What are you watching?

ARYNA SABALENKA: I don't know. I like detectives a lot. Comedies as well. Like nothing crazy, you know. Something easy, something which can help to just switch off and relax and probably have a good laugh or just like if it's really interesting for me, people, things. I don't know, something that's different.

Q. Next match you will play either Sloane or Yulia. They haven't played yet. Starting with Sloane, talk about the challenge of playing her, obviously someone who likes the clay, has made the final here.

ARYNA SABALENKA: Yeah, she's a great player. It was always tough battles against her. She's moving well, putting a lot of balls back. Not so many unforced errors from her. So you have to win the point.

Yeah, it's really a tough opponent, and it's going to be great battle and I'm really looking forward for this match.

Q. Then with Yulia, different challenge?

ARYNA SABALENKA: I would say not really. Like she's also moving well, putting a lot of balls back. So once again, you have to win the point against these kind of players.

Yeah, that's going to be great battle. Once again, I'm really looking forward for this match.

Q. Going a little bit off of what you said before about the second week of a slam, every player treats it differently. Do you want your focus to get sharper in the second week of a slam, or do you want to just not change anything, just kind of take it one match at a time and keep it chill? Like I don't know which way you treat it.

ARYNA SABALENKA: I prefer to stay the same. Like if it worked well in the first week, why I have to change something?

So, yeah, I prefer to, like on the match day, yes, I'm really focused and ready to go, but when I have some off time, I prefer just to separate myself from tennis, make sure I'm not getting overexcited, you know, not wasting my energy for overthinking. So yeah, I just prefer to stay the same.

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