

Roland Garros

Friday, 2 June 2023

Paris, France

Novak Djokovic

Press Conference

N. DJOKOVIC/A. Davidovich Fokina

7-6, 7-6, 6-2

THE MODERATOR: Questions in English.

Q. At the end of the second set, your reaction, I have seen players win some Grand Slam and not react as you have done. Can you tell us how tough was the first two sets and what was it at the end of this set?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Well, it was extremely tough for various reasons. First, you know, three hours for two sets, I don't remember when I played last time three hours, two sets. Maybe against Nadal in one of our matches.

But, I mean, this was looking like if I lost one of the first two sets, it was looking like it was going to go four, five hours. It was just a kind of a day and conditions that were I think very challenging for both players physically. Lots of exchanges. Serve was really not an advantage for either of us.

Really, I mean, it was cat and mouse every single point, trying to outsmart your opponent. We were doing a lot of running. Not just left, right, but forward and backward, especially when he was playing from that end where he is playing against the wind he was dropshotting a lot.

He was making me work for every point. Yeah, I just have to be, in the end of the day when I draw a line, very content to win this match in three sets.

Maybe it was, I would say, more deservable and probably more fair, I guess, if you see the kind of a match it was today that this match went at least in four sets, because he was serving for it in the first. He had his chances also in the second. I had my chances. We both had chances. We both had kind of up-and-down.

You know, at one point I lost completely my second serve. I had three double faults in one game, handed off the break when I was a break up.

Weird things happening, to be honest today. But yeah, that's Grand Slam tennis, you know, for us playing best-of-five in the slowest surface in sport. I think I heard



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a lot of players, I actually talked with a lot of players, we all think that the balls are slower than they were in previous years.

So that makes it even more difficult to make a winner, you know, so you've got to work more for every point. It prolongs the duration of the match, exerts more energy.

But in the end of the day, it was a straight-set win. I'm really glad that I managed to kind of gear up in the third, and now basically focuses on recovery and trying to get ready for the next one.

Q. We saw you called the trainer there at the end of the second set and get a treatment to your thigh. Is that fatigue rather than any kind of injury and are you concerned about how you might pull up for the next round?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Look, we don't have much time to start to name the many injuries I have, and the list is quite long.

So, I mean, you know, I don't want to sit here and talk about these things that are not preventing me from playing. I still kept on playing. These are the circumstances that you, as a professional athlete, have to deal with. Accept it. Sometimes you need help from physio during the match. Sometimes you need pills. Sometimes you need help from the god or angels, or whoever. Sometimes you just have to deal with the reality.

Reality for me nowadays is that, yeah, my body is responding differently than it did few years ago. You know, I have to adjust to this new reality, so to say. But at the end of the day, I managed to finish the match, as I said. And, you know, on the court you try to do your best, everything possible, so you can finish the match and win. That's what happened in the end.

Q. In these conditions, is it possible to assess the level you're at right now? Is there a point of assessing it or is it a case of just doing with what you have right now in the tank?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Well, I'm very self-critical, so I know that I can always do better and I can always play better. But I also try to remind myself, as also the people in my team try to remind me daily, that there are a lot of positives, that I have to try to stay optimistic and look

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ahead and be in the moment, try to make the most out of it.

You know, it's normal that during the tournament, regardless of the history that I have or experience or whatever, that I have my doubts. You know, we all have our doubts. It's important to understand what are your strengths, as well, and focus on those, you know, and deal as you said, you know, deal with what you have at the moment.

You know, I'm happy with where I am at the moment with my game. Can it be better? Certainly. Certainly.

You know, I still didn't drop a set. I did play quite a few tiebreaks. But, you know, look, it's important to keep going. I have been in this situation really a lot of times in my career, so entering the second week, the matches, you have to expect that the matches are only going to get tougher.

But if they don't get tougher, then it's great, but I have to be ready for it.

Q. The other day you spoke briefly about a patch you were wearing on your chest. An Italian company Taopatch I think they're called, or Tao Technology have said that's what you are wearing. Can you share more about what benefits you get from it, whether that is it, and how long you've been wearing it for?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Just I said a few days ago, it's all about Iron Man. Just trying to be the Iron Man of tennis.

Q. Novak, you have won 22 Grand Slams, and you're the only player left in the men's draw who has won Roland Garros before. Do you ever stop and think to yourself what it is that makes you different from everyone else competing on the tour right now?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Thank you for your question. I'm sorry, I was really trying to focus because your accent is a little bit strong. (Laughter.)

I still have a lot of, you know, drive to be on the tour, particularly for slams. I have said it many times before. So, you know, I try to focus the attention of the preparation and all the motivation and prepare myself as best as I possibly can for Grand Slams, where I want to peak and where I want to try to, you know, hopefully get my hands on another Grand Slam title.

I did it this year, so, you know, I know that I'm capable of that. Obviously different surfaces, different conditions, different circumstances. But, you know, Grand Slam win is a Grand Slam win at this age or this stage of my life. So I know that I am still capable and I still possess the level and the quality of tennis that is necessary to

challenge all the best players in the world for Grand Slam titles.

You know, I am grateful to be where I am, and how long that's going to last, I don't know. I really don't know.

You know, I don't have an end in my head clear, but, you know, as long as there is this drive, as long as I'm able to push myself on a daily basis to really have clear goals and objectives and things that are really pushing me to stand up every day and say, okay, you know, I'm ready to do this, you know, over again for God knows, you know, how many times in my career, at times it's, especially nowadays, it is challenging, more challenging than it was when I was younger, but that's why I think it's extremely important for an athlete to have clear goal and objectives long term, short term, because when you make a plan, when you make a strategy and you know what the big goal is, then I guess it's easier to go on a weekly basis, on a daily basis, about your business.

So I try to have that clarity of what I'm doing, where I'm headed, what are the tournaments where I want to play the best and peak and really give it all. So Roland Garros is one of the four of those tournaments.

Q. Can I just ask you about your relationship with the crowd here in Paris? It's been described over the last couple of days as one of the most hostile places to play tennis. Because you're the favorite, they often want to cheer for the underdog. I wonder what your relationship is with that and how you feel you win them over as the match goes on?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Up and down, I would say, throughout my career. They gave me a lot of support I think the years where I was losing in finals or, you know, the last couple of steps before winning a title. Those years, you know, I received quite a lot of support and love, and I was very grateful for that. I have wonderful memories.

I still get support, you know, even today. I think majority of the people comes to enjoy tennis or support one or the other player. But they are individuals. You know, they are people, they're groups or whatever, that love to boo every single thing you do. That's something that I find disrespectful and I frankly don't understand that. But it's their right. They paid the ticket. They can do whatever they want.

At times, you know, I will stay quiet. Not at times. Actually 99% of the time I will stay quiet. Sometimes I will oppose that, because I feel when somebody is disrespectful, you know, he or she deserves to have an answer to that. That's what it is all about.

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