

Roland Garros

Tuesday, 6 June 2023

Paris, France

Novak Djokovic

Press Conference

N. DJOKOVIC/K. Khachanov

4-6, 7-6, 6-2, 6-4

THE MODERATOR: Well done, Novak. Do you think that the perfect tiebreak was the key to turning the match around?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Yeah, it was probably the turning point of the match. Winning the second set or, you know, losing the second set would be quite a big difference.

But, yeah, probably two different matches in one. Match today, first couple sets, you know, probably the worst two sets I played so far in the tournament. And then the third and fourth were quite good.

Yeah, I kind of held my nerves in the tiebreak of the second, played a perfect tiebreak, really. Amazing tiebreak. You know, every single point I played it in a perfect manner. That gave me confidence boost, and I started swinging through the ball a bit more, feeling more comfortable on the court.

Then played a really good third set, had things in control until 4-2, 15-40 in the fourth, and then played a bit loose three, four points. Then I complicated my own life by losing the serve in the next game.

But, you know, managed to regroup very quickly, and played a perfect eight points to finish the match, yeah.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. You've been quite critical of yourself in your performances over the past 10 days. You're still here, you're in the semifinals. How difficult is it going to be to lift your level over the next couple of days so you can be at your best in a semifinal where you'll definitely face someone who has been at least to a Grand Slam final, if not won one?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Yeah, look, you have to try to be at your best on a given day. You know, everything was going in a great direction and then I stepped out on the court today and probably part of me stayed in the locker room. That's how I felt, that's how I played.



ROLAND-GARROS

But also credit to Karen for serving well, playing well. I made so many unforced errors, had a terrible start. That happens. That happens. The good thing about Grand Slams is even if you lose first couple of sets you still have a chance to win.

It's not the first match that I managed to turn things around. These kind of wins, you know, I think serve as a great confidence booster mentally, so also physically and emotionally for me. It's important to win a match where you were losing or you were being down and then you came back and won a match. So especially at the latter stages of a Grand Slam against the top players.

Now I have a couple of days off, which is two days actually, which is good, I think, to recuperate, recover all the energy, physical energy, as possible, and then give it all on Friday.

You know, of course it's a big success. Yeah, I am self-critical but I am also content with the result. I have to be. It's semifinals of a Grand Slam, and it's exactly where I want to be. Hopefully I can have another win on Friday.

Q. You sort of answered my question, but do you see a good side to the fact you struggled in the first two sets and were able to come back in terms of confidence and if you find yourself in this kind of tough position?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Yeah, absolutely. That's what I said. I didn't drop a set till today. You know, pretty much played really good and dominant tennis.

Then of course, I mean, it's expected. It's always the end of the tournament to have even bigger challenges and players that have possessed a great quality that can win a set or two off you, and that's what happened today.

So I take it as a really positive thing, and I will analyze my game from today with my team, and be better prepared for the next one, because I definitely need to have a better start in the semis.

Q. You and Carlos have kind of been missing each other over the last year at tournaments. If it is Carlos that you play, how much will you relish that occasion? A lot of players have talked about the joy he brings to tennis. Wondered what do you think he has brought to the sport?



NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Well, he carries himself very well. No doubt very nice guy on and off the court. Brings a lot of intensity on the court. Reminds me of someone from his country that plays with a left hand (smiling).

He deserves his success, no doubt. He's working hard, and he very complete player already and only age 20 -- 19, 20?

So we played only once in Madrid last year, 7-6 in the third for him. We haven't played since. Yeah, you're right, most of the tournaments this year we were not in the same draw but here we are.

If it comes to that match, that's the match that, you know, a lot of people want to see. It's definitely the biggest challenge for me, you know, so far in the tournament. If you want to be the best, you have to beat the best. He's definitely a guy to beat here. I'm looking forward to that.

But, he has to win against Tsitsipas, let's not forget about that. We cannot disrespect Stefanos who has played finals here and is top, top player for many years. So let's see what happens tonight.

Q. When you go from struggling a bit within a match to suddenly essentially perfect, that tiebreaker, the set that followed with one unforced error, can you explain at all how you turned that around and made that switch, how much of it is a strategy thing, a mindset thing, a decision to maybe take fewer risks, shots, whatever the case may be?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Well, in the tiebreak, the format is such that you serve every two points. Every point matters. Really, every point can decide in which direction tiebreak is going to go.

So I think it's kind of a mentality of a lockdown, okay, I'm present, I'm focused only on the next point and I have to really think about, you know, clearly about what I want to do against obviously, depending on who you're facing in a given opponent.

It worked really well for me. I must say I played a perfect tiebreak, 7-Love. Every point was perfectly scripted for me, so to say. Yeah, sometimes it works; sometimes it doesn't. I think I was lucky that throughout my career I have a very good and positive score in the tiebreaks. My opponents know that, and I know that. So I think mentally that serves me well. Coming into every next tiebreak, I know I maybe have that mental edge, you know, so I try to use it.

Q. Did you sense after the tiebreak a change in him? You had said in previous matches sometimes even when you're down, you know, one little chink, and you sense all of a sudden things are your way?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Yeah, it was. I mean, look, I played a perfect tiebreak. He didn't win a single point. Then he felt a bit down, you know, and then I used right away the momentum, broke his serve in the very first game of the third set. It's normal.

Things like this happen when you are leading, as he was for most of the first couple of sets, and then, you know, I managed to have a perfect couple of minutes of tennis and turned things around, and then just the energy of the court shifted to my side. I felt the momentum.

I started releasing and relaxing through my shots a bit more and going for it more, with more confidence, and he backed up a bit. So it's normal. You have these moments of confidence and doubt inside of you in a best-of-five match many, many times. The momentum shifts quite often in matches like this where it's so close.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports