

Roland Garros

Sunday, 11 June 2023

Paris, France

Casper Ruud

Press Conference

N. DJOKOVIC/C. Ruud

7-6, 6-3, 7-5

THE MODERATOR: Tough luck, Casper, but great showing over the two weeks here in Paris. When did you think the match turned around in the first set when you were leading?

CASPER RUUD: I think obviously was the game at 4-2. That was unfortunate. I was some deuce here and there, and then finish with a really long rally where I missed the overhead, which was sort of a bit devastating.

But, you know, I was still leading. I mean, I don't think I lost because of that. But it would be nice to sit down and have 5-2 and then there is new balls obviously. So that was tough.

But, yeah, Novak just stepped up in the tiebreak, sort of played too good there in the beginning especially and had a big lead early and I couldn't recover. A bit disappointed I wasn't able to keep it closer in the beginning of the second. He pulled away too early and I wasn't able to recover.

Then third set was close. Didn't really have too many chances myself, but I just tried to hold my serve, stay in there and see what happened.

You know, I feel like every time I play Novak it's in a big match, so he's motivated to try to win. I feel like I played him many times where he's like the best version of himself, where he's just really locked in, and doesn't give you much. He makes it very tough both, you know, to win every point against him, he reads the game very well, it's tough to find winners against him.

Yeah, just all credits and honor to him for how good he is. I gave it my all, but it wasn't enough.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. Could you give us an idea what it is like to be down the other end of the court in the first set compared to the second set? I know you played very well in the first set, but he seemed like two different players.



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CASPER RUUD: Yeah. I think I had a good start, and he did some errors early on, maybe feeling a bit nervous, little stressed, I don't know. But I got some free points in the beginning and I was up 3-0. That was a great way for me to start.

Then from there on he, you know, minimized the mistakes really and found his level, found his groove. When you're playing him, it's sort of like if you're hitting a forehand, for example, from myself, who prefer to hit maybe winners with my forehand, if I hit a strong forehand that is this close to the line against any other person most of the time, it's gonna be a winner.

But to him he's gonna read it and he's gonna get there. So you know that you have to hit it this much to the line or on the line to hit a winner against him.

So he kind of pressures you in a way to go for more risks, and that's tough, because obviously against him you want to try to play as aggressive as possible, because if you're too much on the defense he'll just control the game, he'll put in some dropshots, and play just from corner to corner.

So I think I had a good game plan and it worked well in the beginning. Also because he did some mistakes. But, yeah, he just stepped up, like he knows how to do. It's not the first time he's done it.

You know, you can see why he's won 23 with how he's sort of turned the first set around and stepped up in the second and third when he had to.

Q. I wanted to ask you about the tiebreaker, not just this one, but others that you have played against him. What makes him so tough in that bracket of those last few points?

CASPER RUUD: Yeah, he just steps up. Either he plays ridiculous defense or he plays beautiful winners. Just doesn't do any mistakes.

He lets either you go for too much or he plays a beautiful winner. I mean, first point of the tiebreak we played a good rally, I kind of had him on the run on the forehand cross and then he just rips a beautiful forehand down the line this close to the baseline. It's sort of like too good. Then the next two points are also long rallies, where I can't exactly remember, but in the end I think I missed



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one forehand where I go for the winner and so on.

So it's, yeah, he just locks in and makes just you have to play either ridiculously well to win the points or he steps up with a winner himself. He knows how and when to step up. He's smart. He's played so many matches where he knows where he kind of has to raise his level.

Yeah, it's just annoying for me, but it's very, very impressive.

Q. You have played three Grand Slam finals now against three exceptional players obviously, but you've lost all three. It reminds me a bit of Andy Murray's career in that he lost his first four and sort of as a result brought in Ivan Lendl because he'd been through something quite similar in his career. I wonder if you've maybe consulted people who've been through similar things or might start to think about a voice that could give you that experience or someone who's been through something similar?

CASPER RUUD: Not yet, honestly. I don't feel maybe the need for that just yet, but let's see what the future holds. You never know. It can always be good with new, fresh eyes on your game.

Let's see. It's not something I've thought too much about. But yeah, it's like you say, I mean, obviously anyone you play in a Grand Slam final is going to be a good player. But the three players I've played is just Rafa going for, at the time, the record for 22, and then Carlos who was just on fire in New York, and then here, Novak, going for 23. I played very tough players, as you say.

There have been other maybe players in the final, also in the last years, that have maybe been more -- what should I say? -- playable or beatable, because these guys know what to do.

I can't just sit and make excuses, but let's see what the future holds. I think this is maybe the most important final that I reached, honestly, because first time was, yes, very cool. But here I sort of proved that whatever happened last year is just not like a one-time case. Even for next year when we come back to Roland Garros, people are going to look, Oh, Casper didn't just make one final but he made it twice.

Probably going to plant some respect in my opponents' eyes and hopefully I can build on that, and one day I'm gonna try to obviously aim for a slam title. That's my biggest goal, my biggest dream in my career and in my life. It's been close, but close but no cigar, so I'm going to keep working and try to get it one day.

Q. That first set was such a war. I think it was 82 minutes or something like that. When you went back

to your chair and you sit down and you have that break, what's going through your head and what do you tell yourself to get yourself ready for the next one?

CASPER RUUD: Well, there's no bad words allowed here so I don't know what to say. But you're thinking, you know, the F word (smiling) because you just lost a really tough set against Novak. He's going to build on it and it's tough to sort of bounce back from that. It was also very physical. And today was a bit like humid in a way, so it was kind of tough conditions out there.

But, you know, you just try your best to cool down and find energy and, you know, power for the next set. I wasn't able to. That was a bit disappointing. I let him get away in the second set too easily. That's something I must build on or be better at if I want to have a chance against these guys.

Yeah, it's tough losing a first set like that after long, you know, almost an hour and a half. It's tough, and it's tough to recover from that, but I tried, but yeah, showed that it was a very tough task.

Q. Casper, just wondering what you have learned about yourself actually during this kind of last two weeks. As you said, like backing up what you did last year and also obviously the start of the season obviously wasn't ideal, so coming here and making it all the way to a final, what you learned about yourself.

CASPER RUUD: I think I've learned that it's sometimes good to feel pressure. Coming in, I was pretty honest about how I felt in terms of having to sort of try to defend the final spot, what's at stake, you lose early, you lose over a thousand points in your ranking, and that's not fun.

I mean, in terms of ranking, if you're ranked No. 3 or 4 or 6 or 7, doesn't really change too much in my eyes. Just as long as you try to stay top 10, that's the goal for many players, including myself. If I had lost earlier than the final this year I would have probably dropped down. But it was a nice two weeks and nice experience to be able to perform under pressure.

I think I have learned that, you know, best-of-five sets on clay, I'm just gonna know for the future as well I'm gonna try to be a tough player to beat. I'm just going to try to be there, stay there, play every point in the right way, and if I have to make it physical, I'll try to make it physical for my opponents.

I think I've learned that last year was just not a coincidence and that I can hopefully have more nice experiences here in Roland Garros in the future.

Q. Casper, going back to that end of first set,

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beginning of second set, just curious were you aware of that, let's say, freakish stat that Djokovic had won the last 100 Grand Slam matches after winning the first set. Were you aware of that stat?

CASPER RUUD: No, I wasn't (smiling). But that's, yeah, just crazy. Like I said on court, you know, he holds all the records and these stats that are just ridiculous.

Just shows how complete of a player he is. He can win on any surface, anywhere, any balls that we play with. He will be up for the challenge. And, yeah, now it's probably the most significant record that he break of 23 slams. It's on the male side, that's the record for now. But I'm sure he will aim for even more if I know him the right way.

He's not done yet, I think.

Q. Obviously you have only just finished the French Open but Wimbledon is around the corner. Daniil Medvedev said that he's made friends with clay now. I just wondered if you made friends with grass?

CASPER RUUD: Yeah, honestly, I think it's fun to play on grass. Whenever I said that last year that golf is for -- grass is for golf players, it was more of a joke, that got taken too seriously. But I think it's fun to play. It doesn't suit my game very well. I feel a little uncomfortable in it.

If there is any time of the year where I need some rest and I need to recover a little bit from a long clay season, it's during couple of weeks during the grass, so that's why I don't play too much.

But it's always so fun to come to Wimbledon. It's maybe the most historic event that we have. If you ask people around the world, I think most people will say that they have heard about Wimbledon because of the name and all these things.

So I really look forward to being back there, and this year we're playing for points again. Going to try to be ready and give it my best effort.

I have become friends. I enjoy being on the golf course, and I enjoy being at Wimbledon. It's a nice surface. Yeah, it's crazy to think that, you know, tomorrow starts like a couple of tournaments on grass when we are sitting here fighting, sliding around on clay. So it's going to be a refreshing start and it's always fun to watch some grass tennis.

Q. Tough luck today. I just wanted to go back to ask you about facing Djokovic in a tiebreak, because his tiebreak record is so extraordinary, hasn't hit an unforced error in a tiebreak this tournament. Just wondered how conscious you are of that mode he goes into in a tiebreak when you enter a tiebreak with

him and whether that's something you actively prepare for ahead of a match with him?

CASPER RUUD: Honestly, no. I just know from previous meetings that no matter the score against him, he will always try to fight back. And especially around 4-All, 5-All, 6-All, he sort of just goes into this mode where he just becomes like a wall, and you know that you're going to have to play really well if you want to win points against him.

So it's just, you know, honestly all credits to him. He knows when to step up. I hadn't maybe visualized playing maybe a tiebreak in the first set. Maybe I should have. Maybe I will for the next time.

But I know now that this is the fifth time where there has been, you know, a close set and he's been able to win it. So just gonna try my best to one day hopefully beat him, even though he said no on court after (smiling). He's one of the biggest legends of our sport, and hopefully one day I can beat him. But at the Grand Slam level, it's going to be tough, for sure.

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