

# Roland Garros

Sunday, 11 June 2023

Paris, France

## Novak Djokovic

### Press Conference

N. DJOKOVIC/C. Ruud

7-6, 6-3, 7-5

THE MODERATOR: Congrats, Novak. Where do you rank this title among your career successes?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: One of the biggest ones, of course.

I knew that going into the tournament, going into the match especially today, that there is history on the line, but I try to focus my attention and my thoughts into preparing for this match in the best way possible to win like any other match.

Of course if I say that I didn't think about, you know, the finish line that is right there and that one more match is needed to win a trophy, historic one, of course, but my team has created a good bubble around me. So, you know, we did, I think, a great job into just staying into the present moment and performing as good as we wanted to.

And of course when I saw his forehand going wide, I felt a huge relief, and I was overwhelmed with wonderful emotions. Yeah, I'm very happy and very proud of it.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

#### **Q. Congratulations. How does it feel to be the greatest male player in history?**

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Well, thank you. I mean, I don't want to say that I am the greatest, because I feel, I've said it before, it's disrespectful towards all the great champions in different eras of our sport that was played in completely different way than it is played today.

So I feel like each great champion of his own generation has left a huge mark, a legacy, and paved the way for us to be able to play this sport in such a great stage worldwide.

So I leave those kind of discussions of who is the greatest to someone else. You know, I have of course huge faith and confidence and belief, you know, to myself and for everything that I am and who I am and what I am capable of doing. So this trophy obviously is another confirmation of the quality of tennis that I'm still able to



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produce, I feel.

I have said it in the beginning of the season that Grand Slams are "the" biggest priorities on the checklist for not just this season but any season, especially at this stage of my career. You know, if someone told me I will win first two slams of the year I would sign it right away.

Coming into French Open my record on clay was not good. I was not playing well, not performing well in the tournaments on clay prior to Paris.

But as soon as I came here, I just felt different, you know, in a positive way. I felt that I have a chance, very good chance against anybody in best-of-five. I know that most of the guys feel a lot of pressure coming into best-of-five match on Grand Slam against me, and that's exactly, you know, how I want them to feel. It's good thing that you have that kind of, you know, in a way, mental edge.

But it's just so much pressure and emotions and expectations from my side personally and from anyone else that, you know, once it's finished, once everything is done and dusted, it's just incredibly satisfying, of course, if you finish with the trophy, another Grand Slam trophy, and at same time it's huge relief, because I'm just glad it's over, because you have to, you know, deal with kind of those pressures and expectations on a daily basis and kind of live with yourself in your mind and trying to handle all the nerves.

So of course I feel incredibly proud, fulfilled. I'm so blessed to be able to share it with my family, my kids, my wife, my parents, everyone who has been supporting me in this journey.

Of course journey is still not over. I feel, you know, if I'm winning slams, why even think about, you know, ending the career that already has been going on for 20 years.

So I still feel motivated, I still feel inspired to play the best tennis on these tournaments the most, you know, Grand Slams. Those are the ones that count I guess the most in history of our sport.

I look forward already to Wimbledon.

**Q. That three-player standing or table that we've kept in our heads of slam totals used to be 16 to 9 to 1 at the start of 2011. Now it's 20, 22, 23 with the one going all the way to 23. What do you think about**



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## when you think about that sweep of time?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Pretty decent 12 years, I must say, for me. I mean, I have managed to, I would say, manage my own body and my own emotions, and the team of people around me in such way to be able to peak on the most important tournaments in the world, which are Grand Slams.

So of course when you talk about history, people mostly talk about the Grand Slams won or the amount of time you spent at the No. 1 rankings. I have managed to break the records in both of these statistics, which is amazing. Of course I know that it's not something that is guaranteed or is not something that, you know, will just happen just because people think that you've done it once so you can do it again.

I also am aware that even though I don't like to think about the age or age is just a number, it sounds like a cliché, but I really feel age is just a number in my case.

Truth of the matter is, and reality is, my body is responding differently, so I have to deal with more things physically than I have had maybe in the past. Maybe five to ten years ago I was recovering much quicker or, you know, just didn't feel as much pain in the body and the beating that I'm feeling today.

But in the end of the day, you will walk victorious through the finish line, and that's what we have done. Yeah, it's amazing. Seeing this trophy here, that also, for me, symbolizes a great battle that I had with myself mostly, of course with all the great players in Roland Garros that is one of the four greatest tournaments, but for me by far the toughest one of the four to win.

Kind of coming into clay season, I don't know what to expect. Every single clay season year in the last five, six years, it's been kind of a lot of ups and downs, some brilliant matches and some really bad matches. This surface is so challenging. It just makes you, you know, work for every shot double as much as on any other surface. I mean, that's how I feel, at least.

So it's kind of symbolic in a way that I won my historic 23rd here in Roland Garros, makes it even sweeter and greater knowing what it takes to win Roland Garros for me. It's not to take anything away from of course the winning of any other slam, but just Roland Garros is a highest mountain to climb for me I think in my career. That's why it's even more satisfying.

**Q. Congratulations. A lot of us in here are focused on the fact that for the first time ever you're the leader in the men's singles Grand Slam titles race. It's been so long you've been chasing Roger and Rafa and they've had that honor for many years, and does it hold any special significance for you now that**

## you are there all alone for the first time?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Well, the truth is that I have always compared myself to these guys, because those two are the two greatest rivals I ever had in my career. I have said it before many times that they have actually defined me as a player, and all the success that I have, you know, they have contributed to it, in a way, because of the rivalries and the matchups that we had.

Countless hours of thinking and analyzing and what it takes to win against them on the biggest stage, you know, for me and my team, it was just those two guys were occupying my mind for the last 15 years quite a lot. In a professional sense. (Laughter.)

So it's amazing to know that I'm one ahead of both of them in Grand Slams, with Rafa, but at the same time, everyone writes their own history. So, you know, I still think that everyone has a unique journey that they should embrace and stick to. But of course having the three of us, with Andy of course, as well, that we cannot forget, in the last 20 years, it's kind of reached the golden era of the men's tennis, as people like to call it.

So I'm really grateful to be part of this group of guys.

**Q. Congratulations. I see your family is here and you were talking about dealing with the pressure. Can you tell us what did you do yesterday before all this? What do you think you'll be doing tomorrow and the next few days?**

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Well, I skipped practice yesterday. It's kind of a story of the Grand Slams this year for me. I think I practiced only once in the days between matches in Australian Open. There I had a little bit of a bigger reason to do that, because I was, you know, I was dealing with an injury. So I needed every single hour necessary to recuperate and be able to treat the leg and be able to perform.

Here, I haven't dealt with any big injury, but, you know, I dealt with a lot of exhausting hours on the court. I just felt that sometimes less is more, you know, with my team, when we talk about, you know, what is the priority after my semifinals match, we all agreed that the biggest priority is to recharge and recover and get as much hours of rest and treatment and maybe some specific exercises and fitness that would just keep the tonus of the muscles.

And then in terms of hitting the ball, I will not forget hitting the ball in one-and-a-half days. And I think that worked well, obviously.

So yesterday I had parental duties. I had some time in the forest, in the nature. I love walking around in the national parks or forest or the woods, you know, just having this tranquil time. I watched Champions League

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finals, as well. I had a good sleep. Did all the chores, all the things that are part of my routine in order to, you know, rest well and prepare well for the match.

And your question was what will I do in the next days? I mean, now it's going to be I guess time for celebration and fun. I think I miss that, to be honest. We have been too serious for too long. So now a little bit relaxation, spending some quality family time.

And, well, I don't have much time, to be honest, because the grass season is around the corner. Actually for me, it's going to be only Wimbledon in the plans of playing on grass. So I will move to London quite soon, actually, and then train and get ready for another Grand Slam.

**Q. You spoke on court about belief and the importance of that. Where did you learn that? Could you describe perhaps an instance where you struggled with that and you didn't believe, and how you were able to push through that?**

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Well, my upbringing was probably different to most of the other players from my generation. You know, going back to '90s when I was four, five years old, and we had couple of wars. Serbia had embargo. I couldn't travel for quite a few junior tournaments.

So it was a lot of adversity and very challenging times for everyone in my country. My family was on a very low budget. But they still, my parents still decided to support me in my dream, which is, you know, to become professional tennis player and hopefully win Wimbledon and be No. 1 in the world.

You know, 95-plus percent of people would be laughing at them, were laughing at them, and were discouraging them to spend whatever is left over from the family budget into such an expensive sport. And coming from the country that had almost no tennis tradition, it was extremely challenging and the chances of me succeeding were very slim.

But I was fortunate to encounter some very important people that have affected my journey as a professional athlete and development as a human being in a very positive way. Those were Jelena Gencic, I like to call her my tennis mother. She passed away about 10 years ago, but she was incredibly big influence on me, on and off the court.

She was a true mentor. And she worked closely with my parents, that, you know, gave basically her space and permission to spend a lot of time with me, also when we are not training on the court. I used to go to her home, and I have said this story many times, but we did many different things that were kind of, I would say, shaping my mind as a human being, but also as a professional, as a young player who dreams of becoming a professional.

I was only, yeah, seven, eight years old, and she really had me, you know, watching these tapes of all the best players, both male and female at that time. You know, had to know exactly why is a certain shot hit in a certain time on a certain surface, et cetera, et cetera, from the very young age.

So she was treating me very maturely, and she thought that it's never too early to start, you know, with this kind of mindset and development.

Then she taught me also the importance of relaxing and listening to classical music, reading poetry, singing, and reading, breathing consciously, and so forth. You know, she was definitely one of the most impactful people I ever had in my life. That's a long answer to your question.

But yeah, I think that belief aspect came a lot of course from my parents first and from her, from Niki Pilic, as well, who was my tennis father, who still is my tennis father. He's still training several hours a day in Croatia, he's 80-plus years old, one of the most persistent people and passionate people for tennis that I have ever met in my life.

I was very lucky, very lucky, I must say. You must have luck in life. I was very lucky to encounter those two people that really, they were working together to kind of shape me in the person and player that I am, along with my parents, of course.

So yeah, my father, my mother is a rock. She's incredible woman that kept family together in the toughest moments. My father is incredibly driving force of the family, someone that has instilled in me such power of belief and, you know, positive thinking into like achieving goals that it's beyond anybody that I have ever met.

He believed so much that I -- you know, because he never played tennis. No one played tennis in my family, so he had to ask people who were experts, who were knowledgeable in the field, in the sports, in the tennis, to know whether I have a potential, I have a talent, whether he should invest money or not.

So again, we were lucky to encounter these two people early in my career, and they convinced him that he should go ahead. So of course he and my mom had to go through a lot of difficulties, financially, emotionally, whichever way, for me to sit here and talk to you.

So I don't forget about that. I actually carry it in my heart and I'm eternally grateful.

**Q. This is your moment of course and your night but since I'm Norwegian press, you have played Casper several times now, and beaten him every time. He's**

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**never taken a set against you. What does he have to improve to be able to win a Grand Slam? And since you saw the Champions League final last night, who's the bigger Norwegian, Erling Haaland or Casper Ruud?**

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: (Smiling.) What I said on the court, I truly meant it. He and his family and his team are very, very nice people. Very respectful, very down-to-earth, humble, and one of the hardest-working players on the tour, Casper.

So he deserves his success. He's one of the most consistent players that we have in the last five years. Yeah, it's unfortunate for him to lose his third Grand Slam finals, but I'm sure this is not his last finals. He's going to answer better, you know, what he thinks he should do in order to win a slam, but, trust me, it's not that easy, you know.

Every slam, it's like a different mountain to climb from the beginning, because slams are the tournaments where every player dreams of playing when they are young, so that's why everyone is extremely motivated to play the best tennis and make a mark in these tournaments.

That's why I would say that playing in these tournaments against anybody is more challenging than playing in any other tournament, really.

So I think he's got, he definitely has, you know, no doubt that he has quality to win a slam. I mean, he played three finals, two on clay, one in New York, so he's very close. He's very close.

You know, I didn't answer to the previous question of where I didn't believe in myself. You know, I had a great foundation, but I remember when I won my first slam and then for three years I didn't win another slam, and I lost, you know, several finals and many semifinals, mostly against Nadal or Federer. That's where I was really doubting myself, whether I could do it or not, because, you know, you get far but then you fall on the last hurdle. The more times you kind of fall, the more you question everything, you know what I mean?

But it seems to me that he's the kind of a guy that doesn't let the failures take him down. He actually learns from the failures and moves on -- well, failure, I mean, what is failure? Sorry, that's not the right expression. Playing a finals of Grand Slam is incredible success.

So learning from that experience will help him, I'm sure, get stronger and get better. Because as I said, discipline and dedication is not an issue with him. Those are the core values and words that you need to have in order to try to reach the highest goals.

THE MODERATOR: Questions in French.

**Q. So 23 titles, it's incredible, phenomenal, and now we all ask the questions, are you the greatest? And you answered that. But these 23 titles, what does it represent for you? Now we all ask the question, are you the best? What do these two things represent for you?**

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: What is the second thing?

**Q. The fact that you are considered maybe as the greatest of all times with this 23rd title.**

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: I said before that this discussion, I prefer to leave it to other people, because there are a lot of people talking, and it's good for our sport to have this historical discussion, but of course I have a lot of self-confidence.

For me, on a daily basis, I'm the best on the court, because with this state of mind, it's the only state of mind or spirit that can lead to historical results and this trophy. Afterwards, statistics are there, but we have a lot of different factors. It depends on the point of view of a person or the organizations that discuss these things.

So I don't want to enter in these discussions. I'm writing my own history.

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