

National Bank Open

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Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Reilly Opelka

Press Conference



R. OPELKA/R. Bautista Agut

6-3, 7-6

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. You mentioned in your on-court interview just the challenges of losing those first-round matches, being in the bubble. Given those challenges, what does it mean to get your second career ATP Masters 1000 semifinal?

REILLY OPELKA: Yeah, it makes the time in the bubble go by a lot quicker (smiling). Yeah, I guess everyone is always happier when they are winning.

Yeah, it means a lot to get another semi. I had a slow start to the year, so, you know, in terms of keeping me in the hunt for being seeded at the slams, which is a big priority of mine, this was critical. Honestly, I had four big wins back to back, all against tough guys. I think I'm playing at a high level right now.

Q. You mentioned the slow start to the year. Was there a particular moment that stands out where your game started to turn the corner where you could find success on the court?

REILLY OPELKA: Yeah, I remember in Rome when I was there, I was practicing early. I got to Rome a little bit early and I was practicing before the tournament started, off-site even, and my coach and I just kind of got down to business there. We set up our own shop, had a nice gym in the hotel. There was two red clay courts at the hotel.

That's kind of where I think a lot of things happened. There was one or two practices I remember in particular where things started to click. It doesn't always work this way, but I got, you know, validation that week with the semifinal run, that the adjustments being made were the right ones.

Q. You were quite good with your movement, getting the balls back, which is unusual obviously for a player of your height. At the end of the match, on the camera

you wrote "Servebot" as well. What did that message mean? Do you think you have proven that you're not just a servebot and doing so much better off the ground? Can you give your thoughts on that?

REILLY OPELKA: I don't know. I mean, quite frankly, Isner and I joke about the term "servebot." It's pretty stupid, like, slang. Of course I leave it to the tennis media to come up with that word or term or whatever. We just joke around with that term now.

But, yeah, I mean, anyone who knows anything about tennis knows that the ball comes back no matter how good your serve is. Maybe one or two matches a year where Isner and I pitch a perfect game, we don't have to hit too many balls. Isner's more than serve, as am I. You don't get to be 20 in the world with just one shot. It's just silly. It's ridiculous.

Yeah, we just kind of throw that term around, because it's just a weird term, but yeah, I don't know. We found the positive in it.

Q. I wanted to ask you specifically about your game this week. What do you think you're doing so well or differently to win? You had several different kinds of matches. Kyrgios was different and obviously yesterday with Harris. What are a couple of things in your game you're doing so well especially this week on the hard courts now?

REILLY OPELKA: I'm hitting my forehand really well and I'm serving well. You know, I usually do those things pretty well, but when they are just a little bit sharper, when my serve is a little bit more accurate and my forehand unforced error count is low and I'm maintaining the same aggression, that's kind of when runs happen.

It was honestly pretty similar last week even in Washington. I didn't get rewarded with the result, but I was playing good tennis. My first serve was the only thing that was slightly off, but besides that, I have been on the right track for a couple weeks now.

Q. Tsitsipas, you played him last year, playing hard at that time in Cincinnati, 5-6 in the first set and you had to stop. What are your thoughts about getting another



shot at him? I imagine you're feeling healthier now. What are your thoughts on playing such a great player, Tsitsipas?

REILLY OPELKA: Yeah, he's great, a good player. It will be a good test against one of the best in the world.

Yeah, I'm definitely in a better position physically now than I was then. I'm happy for the matchup. If you're playing Stefanos, it means you're having a good week. You know, it's a big moment, it's a big match because he's one of the best in the world. So, yeah, I'm looking forward to it.

Q. Your body feels healthy after these tough matches in the heat?

REILLY OPELKA: Yeah, the heat has been fine. It hasn't been too hot, to be honest. Just humid. Yeah, my body is feeling good.

Q. I love the way you were talking about your opponents after the match today, about RBA, and you went into detail about how tough Tsitsipas is and why he is where he's at. We follow your social media. Doesn't seem like tennis is your entire life, which is awesome, but seems like you definitely know the details of what's going on. Are you a tennis junky behind the scenes? How much do you prep for matches watching other players' matches? How much detail do you get into?

REILLY OPELKA: Yeah, I think everyone does, to be honest. It's just part of the job now. We have access to it. We have down time. I think it's part of the job, you know.

Little details do add up. They do make the biggest difference. So I think, yeah, to a certain extent I definitely am pretty aware of a lot of guys on tour. I know pretty well, have a good idea in the back of my head how a lot of guys play. Everyone in the top 50 kind of does, yeah.

Q. I thought your movement, it's been great all tournament. I can't imagine moving around the court or imagine playing someone who is 6'10" moving around the court the way you are right now. You won a point today doing a 360. Do you feel like a continuous improvement in that side of your game?

REILLY OPELKA: Yeah, I do. Honestly, I think the more, for now, like for the meantime for the next five, six years until physically I get older and things start to slow me down, but I think the more I play, the more comfortable I get with my movement, you know.

Guys are always looking to run me, keep me on the move,

so I think it's just -- I mean, I have the speed, for sure. It's just a matter of always staying sharp and being precise with all my steps, you know, like not really missing a step, like split-stepping at perfect time, just being efficient with my movement. I think that just comes from playing high-level matches often.

So I think the more, you know, the higher quality of guys I play like Agut and Tsitsipas tomorrow, it's the tour what makes us all improve.

Q. It certainly looks on paper and on the court that you have turned a corner. Eight out of nine wins at the Masters 1000s. You mentioned win over Harris why that was big for you yesterday, because you felt maybe you were outplayed but yet you were still able to come away with a victory. Does it feel like you've turned a corner? Does it feel like you're ready to step into the realm of being a consistent top-20 player now?

REILLY OPELKA: I don't know. I'm just getting better. I'm getting a lot better. I think my forehand has improved a lot. Everything is improving. That's kind of what's fun.

I don't set numbers on myself. I don't really set a ranking goal. I just try to get better. I think it's so hard to be, like, too result-oriented in this game just because the conditions are different every week. I really think last week to this week is such a perfect example because I really played great last week but I lost third round to John Millman in straight sets but I played really, really well. I just didn't get validated with the result there.

So I think just being aware it's a long season, there is going to be some ups, downs. If I end up top 20, great. That's the goal. This is where ideally I want to be. I want to be a top player. That means I'm making runs in slams, Masters, I'm seeded, means I'm a threat, which I want.

Yeah, it's hard to say. I don't know if I have turned a corner to be there consistently yet. It's hard to say that after, you know, only two good weeks this year, to be honest. I have only had two or three good weeks. But that's sometimes all it takes in this sport.

Q. A comment you made about Stefanos' forehand, you called it the best in the game right now. Is that from experience from that one set you played with him, or is that just being intuitive and watching a lot of television and seeing what he's been capable of doing with it?

REILLY OPELKA: Yeah, it's just from watching a lot. Yeah, if you look at his movement, you don't see him hitting many backhands. He can go anywhere with his

forehand. He's one of the few guys who is not too western now, so he's one of the few guys that can take the ball early, take time away, change direction.

Yeah, he can do anything he wants with it. So, yeah, I would say that's the biggest reason why he's No. 3 in the world. Is he 3 in the world? Yeah. If you take the big three out of it, I mean, him and Medvedev, him, Medvedev and Dominic Thiem have kind of been the top guys. Him and Medvedev especially in the last six months have been the top two outside of the regular.

Q. I was just wondering if you could just talk about the way you deal with pressure, the pressure of the game.

REILLY OPELKA: Yeah, you know, it's tough. There is always like -- that's what I guess makes tennis exciting is there is always a pressure point you can always find, a pressure situation in every match.

I think everyone deals with it different, and I think it just, as players get older and more experienced and have played more matches, they deal with things better. It's like you don't -- you know, when I was younger, the big moments, man, this is a big moment, I need this, whatever. Now at 23, ah, I have good results on my ranking for the year, I'm not worried about my ranking dropping as much, I'm not worried about like a third-set breaker that could put me in the semis here.

There is less things that you're worried about, I guess, or concerned about as you get older. You always know there is another week, always another tournament, usually it's the next week. I try not to emphasize each moment so much, because there is going to be another one in five days.

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