

National Bank Open

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Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Reilly Opelka

Press Conference



R. OPELKA/S. Tsitsipas

6-7, 7-6, 6-4

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. Congrats on making the final here in Toronto. I know after your match you talked about some of the places that you were playing back a few years ago. Could you just maybe describe some of the random places that maybe you played on the Challenger Tour and just what it means a few years later to get to your first ATP Masters 1000 final?

REILLY OPELKA: Yeah, I mean, the darkest day of tennis for me I remember too well, unfortunately, but I was playing a challenger in Central America. My coach and I were there. It was red clay. The courts were like completely unplayable.

I just remember Isner was playing in the finals of Miami against Zverev. We were stoked for him, stopping practice to check scores.

Then I remember like midtournament, I think at the first ball change of my match, they ran out of the tournament ball they were using, so we switched balls to a completely different brand of ball like midway through the first set. The court was like completely rugged.

I was like, You know what? If I even try, I could roll an ankle. I was, like, I want out of here. I didn't even compete. I wasn't even frustrated with myself. I just wanted to get out of there healthy. I remember just being livid, like I flew a coach, a physio, I invested in myself to do things the right way, and the tournament was unplayable, they didn't have food onsite, there was no indoor area to sit and hang out, it was all outside. It was super hot.

Then Isner just won, and I was like stoked for Isner, but I was like, Man, this is not the same sport that Sascha Zverev and John Isner are playing (smiling).

Q. To then think that and then now here today in

Toronto, there is fans cheering for you and that atmosphere, to beat a top player like Stefanos, I mean, what does that just say about where you came from to get to where you are now?

REILLY OPELKA: Yeah, I mean, it says a lot, but everyone has been there. You know, like, every player has been there, to be honest. There is only a few that haven't. Isner might be one of those. He never played a Grand Slam qualifying match, which is a unique stat, I always say.

But every player has had adversity at some point in their career. Everyone has had a dark day. Every athlete, you know. So, yeah, mine is not as dark as others'. I'll say that. There has been some really great stories from some guys that have turned nothing into something.

Yeah, I guess, I think that's a common thing a lot of athletes can relate to, but nothing special or out of the ordinary that I have done.

Q. Obviously your serve was huge today. What else was working for you against Stefanos that really kind of gave you the advantage?

REILLY OPELKA: I volleyed really well, and especially on like big points. Even in that last game I know I got lucky with that net cord on the forehand volley, but I played an unbelievable backhand volley, actually, at 15-Love, it's a huge point, to get 30-Love, and then finished another one with an overhead, I think.

So I think -- and down breakpoint a volley winner -- I really was clutch with not only my serve but with my volleys in the big moments.

Q. Talk to us about the no-look, between-the-legs shot.

REILLY OPELKA: I mean, that was my only option from there. I joke around, like, it's kind of somewhat a highlight, but tweeners are so common now. I always say they are so mainstream. They're not even that cool anymore, because everyone hits them. You can't find a Kyrgios match where he doesn't hit two of them. Hubert Hurkacz hits one every match. It's just like the only one I think I ever made (smiling).



Q. Your composure on the court was great. Is this your personality, or did it take some work for you to get there?

REILLY OPELKA: Yeah, I mean, it definitely takes some work to get there. I mean, there was still sometimes today, just like any human, I'll show some frustration, but it's something I have worked a lot on, and it's just required in order to beat the best guys.

You don't have time, I have learned, to waste energy on other things, and your mind has to be engaged on one thing only. As soon as you open the door to, you know, let it slip, you right away are distracted from some things that can change the match, like a subtle adjustment of a tactic or just having awareness of what they are doing.

So it's just, you know, better for me to focus on the task at hand, kind of, you know?

Q. Can you take me briefly through the breakpoint that you mentioned? Looks like you broke a string, and then the decision to go with the serve and volley on the second serve there?

REILLY OPELKA: Yeah, I mean, unfortunately I broke that string there, but I wasn't too concerned. Yeah, I think going to serve and volley was the right play in general. I had done it on other moments of the match, especially on the ad side. It wasn't completely out of the blue, and I think it was the right call.

A new racquet especially is not the time you want to be grinding out a point, especially that big of a point. I think that was the right call, and I was willing to live with it. If he ran around and hit a forehand return at my feet, I was willing to live with it. I think either way that was the right move.

Q. It feels like American tennis is having a bit of a moment right now. There is 14 guys in the top 100, the most since '96. There is also Brooksby, Nakashima, Sebastian coming up that are younger than your quartet of guys, with Tommy Paul, Frances, Taylor. Could you just comment on the vibe and if you're excited to be kind of a leader now in that group?

REILLY OPELKA: I mean, I wouldn't call myself a leader. The press has been extremely negative towards American tennis, extremely negative, ridiculous, to be honest. We have 14 guys in the top 100.

So, yeah, when it comes to, you know, the press always being so critical on U.S. tennis, I don't have time to even

hear any of those comments. We have some unbelievable guys. Isner has been top 20 for a decade. Tiafoe has been in the quarters of the Australian Open, has beaten pretty much everyone. Tommy has had an unbelievable last two years. Fritz has been consistently top 30 for a long time now.

The media and the press have been extra harsh, I think, on American tennis success. They have been comparing it to an unrealistic era. The game is different. The game has changed. American tennis is in a great spot.

And the women's side, we have been fortunate with Venus, Serena, now Coco, Madison Keys has been great. American tennis is doing just fine. It's the media that has the problem; not us.

Q. If the tweeners aren't cool anymore, what is cool?

REILLY OPELKA: I don't know what's cool anymore (smiling). I don't know what the new wave is. For a while, the underhand serve was cool. The lefty serve that Fritz does, he thinks that one is real cool. That one might be cool. The tweeners are too mainstream now.

Q. A great win today. Another tight match. What do you feel like was the way that you were able to get your edge today to get the win? You both were serving super well. The stat I saw was he actually had more unreturned serves than you did, which is a pretty crazy stat during the match. How were you able to finally get that break, do you think?

REILLY OPELKA: I think it was just an accumulation of pressure put on him. I think he felt that, you know, I was serving well, was winning points in a lot of different ways on my serve. Even when he hit some good returns, I would crush some forehands or I came up with some good volleys.

I think I was winning so many points with so many different ways and different shots that the pressure just kind of stayed on him.

Then that game I broke, I didn't do anything special necessarily. I put in some good returns, but I think I got a double fault, I got the first ball, that shank backhand he hadn't missed all match, and I think it was -- maybe it was just a fluke game, but I'd like to think that it was pressure I put on him with holding so easily the whole match.

Q. It seems like a lot of times when smaller guys are playing the big servers, I feel once they get into the rallies they are hoping you're going to eventually not be able to get to get balls or you're going to make a

mistake because you're not going to be able to move as well. I've seen that when Federer is playing taller guys. It didn't seem like that was the case today. Didn't seem like you gave him a break in the rallies. Seemed like you were pretty on even foot. You must have been really happy with that?

REILLY OPELKA: Yeah. Definitely felt like he got real comfortable there, moving me with his forehand. I think to a certain extent it was too much. I played a little bit too much tennis. I think he got comfortable in that aspect where he's got to be like I'm running him, grinding him down, I like my chances here, I'm going to keep these points long, I'm hitting forehands everywhere, he's going side to side, this is right where I want to be almost.

So I think to a certain extent it helped that there were some games where I missed a lot of returns, didn't put much in play. The game I broke, I just came up with some returns, came up with an extra ball here or there. It had been maybe 20, 30 minutes since we had a long rally, and that's why I got some unforced errors.

Q. I'm just wondering what would it mean if you had a final against John Isner, an all-American final?

REILLY OPELKA: Yeah, that would be great, you know. It would be great for us. I think the tennis fans would be a little salty about it, which I understand.

Isner and I were joking around about what the definition of a servebot is, because we were joking, like is Kyrgios considered first team all-bot? Because he holds serve a lot. The stats kind of point towards him holding a lot, and it's considered a possible potential first team all-bot.

Right now it's Isner is first team. I'm first team. Karlovic is first time. Raonic, and I think Kevin Anderson. But Kyrgios makes a case for it, but we kind of came to the conclusion today that servebots have to be a little bit miserable to watch, and he's too exciting, too fun to watch, so he doesn't fall under the servebot, the full first team servebot category (smiling).

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