

# Omnium Banque Nationale

Monday, 7 August 2023

Montreal, Quebec, Canada

## Victoria Azarenka

### Press Conference

V. AZARENKA/M. Linette

6-3, 6-0

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

**Q. Were you determined to beat the rain in the second set, or did she lose her rhythm because you basically expedited it? It was fast.**

VICTORIA AZARENKA: I spoke to the tournament director, and it was, like, can you help us out because we're kind of behind a little bit?

Honestly, it was quite challenging because it was just unpredictable. It wasn't heavy rain. It was just spitting, and then you were, like, don't know, and we keep getting half an hour breaks. It was quite challenging.

I felt like I was just really focused, and I was determined to finish today. I was determined to finish today.

**Q. Players are used to deal with rain, but at what point does it become a challenge? Is it when you have to play two games in a match? Is that only when it only reaches that point? I mean two matches in a day, or can it get to become a challenge a different way?**

VICTORIA AZARENKA: I'm not really sure I understand your question.

**Q. I'll try again. What do you need for the rain to be a challenge? On a day like today, it seems like it was fine. You guys are used to deal with those conditions, but how bad does it need to be for it to become a challenge for tennis players?**

VICTORIA AZARENKA: Well, I think it is a very challenge because it makes it impossible to play. I think other sports with the rain you can deal with it and still keep going, but with tennis it's like it makes it kind of impossible.

So I don't think that the challenge is how bad of a rain. What I'm saying is when it rains a little bit and you have to go back and forth, it's probably more challenging than



when it's a long break and it's just pissing outside, and now I'm kind of, like, okay, I have a couple of hours.

But in terms of scheduling, I think that is a very important topic that we need to solve is to make tennis a bit more -- I'm talking not about the weather, but the late matches. The late nights are really difficult on players, and I think that we should be looking maybe having not cut-off time, but reasonable time that fans are also respected and not sitting there waiting until the midnight.

And doubling up, I think for players we practice a lot. We work hard to be able to sustain two matches in a day.

So if you ask me would I rather play until midnight or come back next day and play two matches, I probably would pick two matches because you can't substitute a good night's sleep. For recovery for athletes it is vital.

**Q. I think with today's win you're the winningest player at the WTA 1000 level of all time?**

VICTORIA AZARENKA: Oh, yeah? Wow.

**Q. I'm curious, with all of the success at the 1000 level and the titles you have won and the big matches that you have played, does any run of yours or any specific one kind of stand out when you think about just playing at that level?**

VICTORIA AZARENKA: Well, I think that stat clearly says that I love to play big events. You know, even with Grand Slams in Australia I think I reached 150 matches or something like that. So I do love a big stage.

A specific run? I have terrible memory since I became a mom, but one of those runs in Cincinnati in 2021 was pretty amazing for me. Coming back after a long break -- everybody had a long break, but I had a longer break, and I was at the point where I didn't know if I was going to play really again.

I had a pretty big beat-down by Venus the tournament before that, so I wasn't discouraged, but I was, like, oh, my God. I have lost four or five matches in a row, and it never really happened in my career before.

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That was a pretty remarkable run to kind of resurge from there and continue to play on tour and continue to challenge top players and still kind of hunting for those big titles.

**Q. Switching gears, the organizers here will have a message ready in the event that you face Kalinina at the next round. They will have a message prepared to tell the crowd about the whole handshake thing. So my question is two-part. First of all, in light of what happened in Washington, what's your reaction in knowing that there will be that kind of message? And, two, are you surprised that a year and a half later we're just finding a sort of a reasonable compromise on that?**

VICTORIA AZARENKA: So tired of talking about this. So I would hope that finally maybe the statement will be stop talking about this. But if I am playing Kalinina, I don't know. I have shaken hands with her when we played in Adelaide this year. I don't know.

I feel like the very clear message is a personal choice of Ukrainian athletes to do that. That's not the standard practice. That's not something I would be doing, but I'm not in a position to judge.

I respect somebody's decision, but it is not -- yeah, I don't think it's a standard practice in sports. And as I said I don't know how many times now, I will respect and accept the choice of the other player.

**Q. But do you feel like how it happened in Washington was maybe a better way to move forward because apparently the reactions from the crowd were better than in other tournaments?**

VICTORIA AZARENKA: Yeah. I mean, I think if that helps the crowds to understand the situation, that's probably a good educational process. I don't know.

As I said, I don't feel like handshakes are life-changing solutions. It doesn't seem like that to me, but as I said, I will respect other people's choices.

**Q. Just talking about the 1000s, to most casual fans or tennis fans they know the Grand Slams. They understand how difficult they are to win, how important they are. But with the 1000s being that next tier, what is it that makes them difficult?**

VICTORIA AZARENKA: First of all, I watched your Netflix explanation of the WTA Tour, and I've got to say, it was pretty interesting to listen because I was, like, how much can you -- it was like you need to explain it to a real

beginner, like the real person who has never ever ever seen that. I could see the challenge that you had to face there.

**Q. I'm turning it over to you.**

VICTORIA AZARENKA: I mean, the 1000s, I feel like WTA and ATP itself, I'm not sure that they are too distinguished from Grand Slams really. Especially people who kind of understand tennis. There's a tour.

I think the fact that we have different organizations just confusing people, but we're all doing the same thing. It's pretty much same rules, a little bit there and there. Somebody is to feel like they're different.

But I think the more simple we can make the events and just to kind of explain to people this is all part of the same ranking system, it's all part of the same race to the final, and not to really make too much of a difference because 1000s now are growing.

We still need to grow them higher. The events are getting bigger draws. Starting next year there's going to be more events that have bigger draws, two-week events.

I think we should make it ten Grand Slams a year because it's quite challenging, but I do feel that there is a lot in tennis that needs to be simplified, specifically schedule.

I've been talking about it for a time, but as a fan as the marketing perspective of tennis, you never know when anybody is playing. It's impossible to promote it. It's tough for tournaments. It's tough for players.

So I work really hard with my colleagues to find a solution where it is better for everybody. Maybe something that we can talk about it shortening the tennis matches where you can have predictable slots, add a little bit more spice and drama to a shorter event where you have kind of every point matter.

So, yeah, I feel like there should be space and also willingness to look and see, okay, how can we actually grow the sport and how we can attract people and crowds and especially young kids too to come and watch tennis. I'm not sure only Netflix show will do that (laughing).

**Q. Follow up on that then. Just in terms of thinking about out-of-the-box solutions to how the sport is kind of packaged from a marketing perspective, obviously there's tradition that drives a lot of this sport, and those two things kind of come head-to-head sometimes. As somebody who sounds like you want to look at options to kind of change things, how do you**



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**negotiate that against the idea of, well, tennis is best of three sets, it's best of five sets, it's two week -- you know, whatever it is, all of these sorts of things, tie-breaks, we want to play forever, all that?**

VICTORIA AZARENKA: I mean, you have to look at the market. You have to look at viewership. You have to look at where the directions of other sports, other leagues are going and just kind of be --

You don't want to change tennis to not be tennis, but doubles, for example, in Wimbledon has changed from five sets to -- why were they playing five sets? Times are changing. Physicality of sport is changing.

If we're talking about having quality events, if you shorten matches, players are healthier to play more. You have more rivalries. There is benefit.

We just sometimes have people who are, first of all, don't participate in tennis, don't play any more for a long, long time, and I think it is the balance.

I don't have all the answers, but I think that it's worth looking and compromising and trying. Some things can fail, but you can go back, but to try and see.

We see, I don't know, UTS, how exciting it is for young kids to come and show. I'm not saying let's do UTS on the tour, but let's look at some options because some of the meetings we had with the Grand Slam, the best idea they came up with to add more drama is to have women play out of five sets. I'm sorry. That was just the dumbest thing I've heard.

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