

Tennis Channel

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Martina Navratilova

Media Conference

ERIC ABNER: Thank you, everyone, for being on the call today. Before we get started, I want to put my contact info into the transcript. That is Eric Abner, I handle communications for Tennis Channel. My phone number is 310.314.9445. Email is EAbner@TennisChannel.com.

Just a few words before we open things up for questions. We could not be more excited about Tennis Channel's coverage of this year's Miami Open, which is a milestone for our network. We've shown most of this tournament live for years now. This is the first time we're going to be the exclusive broadcaster of the entire event, live coverage of everything from opening day through the end of championship weekend.

All matches at the Miami Open this year will be live on either Tennis Channel's network Linear Television or our streaming service Tennis Channel Plus. All matches will be available on-demand on Tennis Channel Plus at their conclusion.

We're live every day at the start of play. Most days the tournament is from 11 a.m. to whenever play stops at night, then we do encores all night long until the start of next day's play. Basically we are going to turn into a 24-hour Miami Open channel from Tuesday through April 4th.

Many of you know that last year we announced a new ATP rights agreement, in October. It's similar to our WTA deal. What that ultimately does is make Tennis Channel the exclusive TV home of both tours here in the U.S. Miami is going to be the first time that viewers at home are going to feel the impact of this arrangement. They can just leave it on Tennis Channel all the way through, they no longer have to switch to another network during championship weekend.

We're going to produce two matches a day from March 24th through March 30th, which will be available exclusively to 20 regional sports networks owned by our parent company Sinclair Broadcast Group. This means that viewers will be able to watch live tennis on Tennis Channel or flip over to their local RSN and choose from



other live matches. It also means there's going to be more Miami Open on U.S. television than ever before in the tournament's history. We're going to take this coverage model and replicate it at all the other events, Indian Wells, Cincinnati, Toronto. We're excited because Miami is the first time under this new agreement.

What's also a first is this year we have Martina Navratilova at the Miami Open booth for us on the tournament grounds.

I want to point out that Martina won the inaugural championship of this event and we're looking forward to some of that rubbing off on our first championship weekend in South Florida, too. Enjoy the Miami Open on Tennis Channel.

We'll start with question.

Q. Martina, the Miami Open, as you know, you've played in it, been here many times, it's known for its energy, known for the atmosphere, the vibe. How do you think it will be different and how does it affect players when a lot of the courts will have nobody there, just a couple of the highlights, marquee courts, will have an audience? In this particular venue, tennis has never been that quiet. How do you think that will change the atmosphere of the Miami Open? And could you just give your assessment of Sofia Kenin and Jen Brady.

MARTINA NAVRATILOVA: Well, the players have been getting used to this different atmosphere for a year, right, almost a year now. It will be a shock maybe to the people that are there, the spectators, the ushers. Probably won't be that many ushers either. But the players have been dealing with it.

It's such a more spacious area than Key Biscayne was. At least we played it once before, so you know what the layout is and everything. It will be really weird to have that much space and so few people at the same time. These days you want the space, so you can do the social distancing stuff. You could probably allow more people than what they are allowing. I'm not sure what the numbers exactly will be.

But it's just been different for everybody. Of course, you



saw the Australian Open, it was changing on a daily basis. You had some crowd, no crowd, empty out the stadium in the middle of the match, then the end of the tournament you had a big crowd, not normal, but a sizable crowd that could give you the energy.

The energy has been different. I was talking about it with some friends yesterday at dinner. Used to be you bring the energy to the court. At the US Open, for example, it's so difficult to get to the court. You use a lot of energy to get to the court, to get to the event. The hard part was getting to the court.

But then you get the energy, there's the crowd, right, when you're playing the match. Last year it was easy to get to the courts but you had to bring the energy yourself. It's going to be kind of that situation here as well.

The players aren't expressive during a match. When there's a great point, they win an important point, you may get a fist pump, but not a c'mon. You actually have more energy for the actual match physically speaking, but emotionally speaking you're not getting anything back from the crowd. It's a bit of a wash. It's just different.

Again, the players have been going through that now for the better part of a year. They're kind of used to it at this point in time. I think we can see the end of the road where hopefully there will be a vaccine passport and people will be able to come in if they're vaccinated. We'll see larger and larger crowds throughout the year. Right now you just have to bring it.

Of course it's more difficult in a cavernous stadium. It will be harder to play on the main stadium. If you have a hundred people there, they disappear. If you have 20 people watching the outside courts, they're right there. At least you have your crew, your support team. Yeah, it's just different.

I think the tennis has been great, but it's just different even watching it on TV. They're putting the canned applause, et cetera, you know there's nobody there. But the tennis has been phenomenal. I think the players are just so happy to play, they create the energy themselves.

As for Sofia and Jennifer, couldn't have two completely physically looking players and tennis players than those two. But both pretty intense in the fact Sofia brings even more intensity with the way she plays. It's more not defensive, but it's neutral tennis. She does create opportunities. She's a great all-around player, such a good fighter. But she reacts a lot.

Jennifer, with her physicality, she has a big serve, big

forehand. Sofia had a huge breakthrough last year, did an amazing job. Now it's more the sophomore blues maybe a little bit, the pressure just changed completely for her, also players know how to play her better.

Jennifer is still kind of a newcomer. The rest of the tour is still trying to get the book on her. They both are great competitors, play completely different games. American tennis is looking good. The new generation is stepping up to the plate.

Jennifer has a great future. I think she definitely has the game to win majors. Obviously Sofia, because she's already done that.

Q. This question might bring back some memories. They've given Andy Murray a wild card. There are some people saying why is he taking wild cards, why does he keep playing, should be retiring. Some say he's earned the right to retire whenever he wants, how he wants. I'm wondering your feeling on that question, and also if you heard that when you were playing, how annoying it is?

MARTINA NAVRATILOVA: Of course, I heard that when I played when I was in my 40s. I came and got a wild card into Eastbourne, the French, and Wimbledon, won a couple matches. I kind of held my own there.

Really? You have a problem with Andy Murray playing? Absolutely he has earned it. Don't tell me there's a wild card you would have given him is a better player than Andy Murray. He's earned it. He loves it. He's giving back to the game as much as he's trying to give as much as he's gotten out of it. He clearly loves it. Why not? Where is the harm?

When it comes to making room for the new ones, they need to make room for themselves. Earn your way there. He's earned his way. He's paid the price, paid the dues. I think on the WTA Tour, the major winners get an automatic wild card if they wanted it. Men's tour doesn't have that rule. Still just earn your way. You got plenty of time. Andy, he's had plenty of time and Andy has put in the dues.

Q. Your transition to being part of the media and everything, talk a little bit about how that was. What was the hardest thing to adjust to?

MARTINA NAVRATILOVA: Just different timeframe for work. It's a longer day, but the intensity is different. For me, it's just been really, really easy in that you don't have to warm up, you don't have to stretch, really make a plan. You just talk about the match. You have to show up early

for hair and makeup. But the actual work has really been a pleasure. The matches kind of write themselves.

I have had some good help from people that have been in the business, like Bill Macatee, Brett Haber and Mary Carillo have really helped me to become a better broadcaster. Mary gave me great advice: always make them for you to want to say more than you talk too much. I know sometimes I get carried away. I've been told by the producers to cool down a little bit. For the most part I know the rhythm of the match, when to speak, when people really want to hear what you have to say.

Yeah, I'm getting good compliments from fans of the game. Whether they are experts or don't know that much, they feel they get something out of my commentary, so I'm happy about that because that's what I strive for. I kind of try to teach people a little bit, educate. I can see something maybe they don't see themselves. I don't want to be citing stats, they can look that stuff up on computer. I don't want to tell them stuff they wouldn't have found on Google.

It has been a great ride at the Tennis Channel, 14 years, love the working environment there. The people we have on the team, everybody is great. Nobody is stepping on anybody's toes. We're like, You talk. No, no, you talk. Nobody is a camera hog there or mic hog. It's just been a pleasure to be there.

Q. Regarding rankings, now we're starting to get players like Zverev saying these rankings are not fair. I've been producing, but I can't climb the rankings because they're freezing them. Is it time to move away from that? What could they do to make the rankings fair to everybody?

MARTINA NAVRATILOVA: How many tournaments they've played? Obviously the players have had, most of them, at least the top 50, have had the opportunity to play every single tournament there is, right? How many tournaments do they have on the calendar they could have played? If it's anywhere over 14, I would say close it out and forget the rest.

I'm not sure how many tournaments they've had since the closure. When did they start playing? It was in the summer before the Open.

Q. Cincinnati.

MARTINA NAVRATILOVA: How many actual tournaments do they have on the computer? Is it 10, 12? Once you get over 10, the rankings would be pretty true anyway. I like more volatility, I like the possibility of jumping, moving up in

the rankings a little bit more.

I agree with Sascha. It's too stagnant, perhaps not a true ranking. In my head I'm thinking, This player is ranked so-and-so. I look at the rankings, and they're not. It's almost a two-year rolling thing.

I agree, maybe they need to take another look at it and compare the two rankings. If you take the tournaments that people have played since August, see what that would come out to, compared to what it is now, try to find a happy medium somewhere there or cut it out and just make it whatever everybody has played. Everybody is in the same boat, so...

Q. Have you had a look at this 18-year-old Clara Tauson who won in Lyon last week? What you think of her game?

MARTINA NAVRATILOVA: I just seen her play a little bit. I watched the tournament, as I usually have the Tennis Channel on when I'm watching TV.

She's a good athlete, moves well. Doesn't seem to have any weaknesses. I haven't paid enough attention to say what she needs to work on. Technique is sound, nice serve. She moves well. She's not afraid. That's a big plus.

Ask me after I see her again, then I'll tell you.

Q. Historical question. In 1985, you win the inaugural International Players Championship in Delray Beach over Chrissie Evert 6-2, 6-4. What are your recollections of that victory?

MARTINA NAVRATILOVA: None (laughter). I remember losing to Chrissie in Boca, like 13 times I lost to her. I remember that match. I do not remember that winning match at all. Again, we played 80 times. I remember the losses more than the wins. But I do not remember it at all.

I remember playing at Key Biscayne, but because the tournament moved around before it settled in Key Biscayne, so I don't know. Sorry about that.

Q. Turning to the 2021 Miami Open, what are your observations of the tournament over the years, the evolution of the event? What are you looking forward to this particular year?

MARTINA NAVRATILOVA: Hopefully this year will be one of a kind in that we won't have much of a crowd and hopefully next year it will be back to normal, but at least we get to play. Last year this was the second tournament that

got canceled after Indian Wells. It's happening. Hopefully Indian Wells may still happen at the end of the year. We'll see about that. But the players, again, are happy they'll get the opportunity. At least now they have the lay of the land on the facility.

I think tennis-wise for me I would have preferred playing at Hard Rock than Key Biscayne for one reason and one reason only: it's less windy where we are now. It was always pretty swirly on the bay at Biscayne Bay. That way it's better tennis for the players and for the spectators.

As far as what to expect, again, the players have gone through it. This is a big space. But they all have to adjust to changing conditions, changing situations, protocols. At Australia it was changing practically on a daily basis. They're used to having to figure out what are the rules, how to make it work for themselves.

They can't wait for the crowd to be there. You don't know how much you have something until you miss it. Oh, my God, so different. I'm of course looking forward to seeing the crowd as well as the players.

Right now they're just happy to be playing and making money and training and practicing, able to put that to work in the matches. I think practice, not knowing when the next tournament will be, that would have been hard last year. At least now it will be good to play, yeah.

Q. A quick assessment of Coco Gauff?

MARTINA NAVRATILOVA: She's still struggling with her serve. It's so inconsistent. I think the toss goes off, she has to adjust to that. She seems to have settled (indiscernible) double-fault-itis. At the Australian Open she served great. Now it's just creeping back in again. Just some technical things she needs to work on vis-à-vis the serve, as well as her forehand. But she knows that.

She's 16, be 17 soon. Is she 17 yet? I'm not sure. This is her last year where it's still limited playing-wise. Maybe she didn't suffer as much from the COVID restrictions as other players because she couldn't have played that many tournaments anyway.

She's just such a fierce competitor. I hope she learns to channel that emotion so she doesn't exhaust herself. I feel her because I used to be very emotional on the court. I learned to harness it and control it and use it to my advantage. Because when you're young, you have that much more energy, so you don't have to worry about spending it. Long-term, she's so in it that maybe she runs out sometimes a little bit.

But nice problem, too much emotion. You can always control it. That's not to say it's getting in the way, but I feel like she's using a lot of energy that she could save for the match sometimes.

But technically she's got to work on that forehand and get it a little more pace. The ball is rolling a little too much. Fantastic athlete, she moves great, she has a nose for the ball, she moves forward very well, just as well as she does side to side. Transition game she can improve a little bit. But at the net, she likes to be there. I'm looking forward to seeing her, I know she's going serve-volleying here somewhere. She's got the goods for it. Her game, there is no limit. I'm looking forward to seeing her evolve and improve.

Q. A question about wild cards. Kim Clijsters was expected to play, and now she's announced she's not. As someone who did come back late in your career, what is your assessment on what she did last year? What could she do when she does come back in 2021? And about the wild cards for the Miami Open, extremely global between (indiscernible) some really great juniors, players from the Philippines and the Czech Republic, Egypt. Who could you see make a big jump?

MARTINA NAVRATILOVA: You're audio was breaking up, but I think I got most of it.

The sport has become much more international, so are the wild cards. It's nice to see that we are very democratic when it comes to giving them out. So it's a great opportunity for the youngsters to match up with the pros, then see where they stand with their games. You never know till you get on the court with a top hundred player, where exactly you stand.

But I have seen all of those players play. Sherifa I saw in Australia, great story. Kostaki has been around, some injuries, but she's coming back. The Czech girl, I don't know at all. Looking forward to watching them.

As far as Kim, what the future will bring, you never know. You may have potential. You see the potential in somebody. There's so many aspects that go into making a champion, you never know how much they will evolve, and where is the final plateau. You make kind of big jumps when you're younger. It comes in big spurts, the improvement. Then you kind of get to a level, and you can only tweak it a little bit, but you don't have another big jump. You don't know when that last big jump is, so it's hard to predict.

As far as Kim is concerned, I only saw her play two games.

She looked great, moving the ball around. But when you get older, it's harder. She has been away from the game for a long time. What is she, 38? I have to Google her age, but it's somewhere around there.

As I say, everything slows down as you get older except deterioration. It takes longer to get ready for everything, it takes longer for the legs to start moving to the ball. It's not so much that you lose the speed, you lose a little bit, but for me, I literally had to make myself run for the ball. It's like, Oh, dropshot, I better run. There's that delay that didn't used to be there when I was in my 20s. For somebody that depends on their speed as much as Kim Clijsters does, it may take her a little bit to get that instinctual reaction back when she's playing a match.

Also when you do get injured, it takes longer to recover. That becomes a problem. So I hope that she gets the most out of her body, that the body doesn't keep her back from achieving her best, wherever that is at the moment. I hope she gets to play. It's really bad times for her when she tries to make a comeback, when the pandemic hits, and you can't function normally. It's tricky. But I hope she makes it back.

Q. I was hoping you could shed a little bit of light on how champions manage the latter stages of their careers. Obviously you've touched on Andy Murray coming back and his right to be back with the wild card, Clijsters a bit now. I'm particularly interested in your assessment of Federer at 39 as he has been eyeing different tournaments. And as it relates to the Miami Open where he won't be, what is the value of a Federer or maybe a Nadal, Andy Murray, too, appearing in some of these key 1000 level events that remain in the U.S. in terms of expanding the audience for tennis in the U.S.?

MARTINA NAVRATILOVA: That's a lot of questions. Trying to organize it in my head.

Yes, I retired at 38. I played doubles five years later. It's really not the same as to what these players are doing. I never had a long layoff while I was still competing. I wish I had taken some longer breaks in between to kind of recharge my battery. I think I played too much and never had a real break until I retired at 38. So I never had to deal with this stuff. Even when I had my knee surgery, I was only out about six weeks, and it was over Christmas. I missed the Australian Open, that's all.

It's different for Roger particularly. As you get older, it takes longer to get up to the same level. If I had three weeks off when I was 26 years old, I was training, start practicing again, I hit the ground running right away at the

next tournament. When you do the same thing at 36, it just takes longer to get that feel back.

Although with the racquet strings, it's a little bit easier, those racquets are more forgiving. But everybody is hitting the ball harder. The body, it takes longer to get the body going rather than the feel for the ball. That's easier to get these days. It just takes longer when you're older.

It's going to be rough for Roger because if this was 10 years ago and he missed a year of playing because of knee surgery, it would be much easier. It's going to be tricky for him no matter what.

Again, with these protocols changing, you have your routine, right? Well, there goes the routine. There is no such thing as a routine now. Everything is different so you have to make big adjustments. It's easier for the lesser players who didn't have such a I don't want to say entourage but team around them, complications, et cetera. They haven't been doing it that long, so it's easier to adjust.

At the Australian Open, they redid the Rod Laver stadium, underneath it they reconfigured it last year or two years ago. When they got there, people that had been there, coming there all their lives, were completely lost. I was still getting lost a week later in the bowels of the stadium. There is a wall now where there was a hallway. Where there was a room, now there's a wall. It was complicated. I couldn't get used to it.

People that have been there for the first time, they got the lay of the land immediately because there was no adjusting to do. People that have been doing it a long time, it's more difficult to reconfigure it and completely reset.

Again, when you get older, it gets more complicated. Yeah, it's hard for all the top players.

What they bring to the tournaments, I mean, as the MasterCard thing is: That's priceless. You can't put a tag on it. You can't quantify that. It's an amazing amount they bring to the sport, bring new fans in, et cetera.

Roger, Rafa, they've been doing it for decades now. You know they're towards the end of their career, particularly Roger. Rafa we may have for three, four, five years, who knows. The way he's going at it, maybe 10. We know the better part of their career is behind them, so you cherish a lot more every time you see them play.

For the casual fan or for the tennis fan, like I said, it's priceless to see them in action. And you have to throw Serena into that mix, as well. These superstars, what they bring to the sport, I'm not talking about Novak yet because

he's younger than these guys, so he probably has a little bit longer road ahead of him, probably if his body holds up. With Roger, Rafa and Serena, you really just cherish those moments.

Q. Question about Naomi Osaka, sort of emerging as the dominant player in the women's game, though she has yet to prove herself on the clay and grass. What is it going to take for her to do that? Do you think she will? Who might be her biggest rivals over the years, keep her from coming what she might become, which is a double-digit slam winner?

MARTINA NAVRATILOVA: The potential is there, no doubt about it. As for not winning, she hasn't won on the clay or the grass, I'm sorry, but the surfaces are much more similar than they used to be. Grass is slower, clay is faster, the balls are faster. You don't have to make nearly as much of an adjustment as you need to. And the clay, the adjustments come in terms of movement.

I don't see Naomi being that confident with her sliding. But then Andre Agassi won the French Open without sliding. It can be done. But it just makes life easier when you slide and you're comfortable with timing with your strokes. There's no doubt that she has the game to win both on the clay and the grass. I think she's still learning when to pull the trigger on the clay. Grass, there is no reason for her not to dominate on grass, as well. The kick serve is great for grass. It's magnified by bad bounces, the kick. Her big shots pay off better on grass than the other surfaces, other than maybe a fast court like was in Australia this year.

The sky's the limit. It's just a matter of putting in the time and getting more instinctual on the surface, that's all. Especially grass, because you only have that one tournament. I think maybe she needs to get on the grass during the year, not just before Wimbledon, to get more comfortable with it, so it's like coming home.

We used to have two grass court seasons, in Australia and at Wimbledon in Europe. You had like two months on the surface, so six weeks. Now they have two to three weeks on it. It shows up. They're not that comfortable on it. She just needs the mileage on it. Game-wise there's not that much of an adjustment to make.

Q. Do you have thoughts or feelings on Serena's performance in Australia? A lot of people remarked she looked a lot more fit. She ran into the wall that was Naomi Osaka. Do you have feelings about her chances of catching Margaret in the next 52 weeks? Have they changed at all based on what you saw in Australia?

MARTINA NAVRATILOVA: I mean, Serena has not looked as good as that and still lost, let's put it that way. For me she moved better than she had in years. Clearly was fitter. But Naomi was just a better player on the day.

Certainly Serena had chances. When Serena was up 2-Love, she a breakpoint for double break, didn't get it. Then Naomi breaks back. Literally the turning point of the match came at 2-Love in the first set. It usually doesn't happen, but it happened then. She might have won that match and probably would have won the final.

That's the best she's played and still lost. Maybe that would be harder for her. She did not play badly, just Naomi played the big points a little bit better. That also comes with age. When you get older, you know the points more, you know those turning points, you know what all can go wrong. It can kind of tie you down a little bit. The younger ones are more free at swinging at the ball. No matter what you tell yourself, you tighten up a little bit and the game doesn't flow as much.

But Serena looked great. For me, this is the best she played without winning. On the grass, that will be more user-friendly for her. When she lost in those finals against Halep, Kerber, you felt she didn't play her best tennis. Or even Osaka at the Open, she didn't play her best tennis.

This time in Australia she played pretty well. That's when it's maybe more difficult to accept actually. It's like, Okay, close to my best is not good enough. The other players start getting a little more confident against Serena. You feel it. It kind of ticks you off. They're playing their best tennis against you, they always have, but now they have a little more belief that they can actually win. That goes a long way.

Can she break Margaret's record? I'm sure she can tie it. If she wins Wimbledon, the US Open is six weeks later, anything is possible. If I was her, I would be begging them at the US Open to make the court a little bit faster, make it pay off a little bit more for the serve and the big groundies.

Does she have it in her? I believe so. I'm not going to write her off until she quits. I think she can do it.

Q. If you could project and look at tennis on the other side of the pandemic, what would be the best way forward to grow the game, either a combined ATP and WTA, or more combined events like Miami, Indian Wells, Madrid? Also you were known as a shot-maker, had an answer for anyplace you were on the court. Among the players today, who strikes you as a creative or imaginative player?

MARTINA NAVRATILOVA: I'll take the second question first.

I think Coco Gauff seems to be comfortable anywhere on the court. She's got great footwork, really quick to the ball, is not afraid of any awkward shot. But I think also she practices it. That's where that comes from.

Jennifer Brady, as well, very creative. I think she could get to the net even more than she does. But I always think that for the most part (laughter). But she's good at the net. A lot of players don't want to come to the net because they're not comfortable hitting volleys, but she is.

Both of these American players are great shot makers, throw in the dropshots, et cetera. I think the game has more variety these days than it did 10 years ago or 15 years ago, so that's great to see.

Tennis, make it better after the pandemic? Look, we've been going the right direction, making it more international. I would love to see the Women's Tennis Association and the ATP come together as one body, kind of pull together, particularly at the majors.

For example, tennis players have no rights to their likeness at these tournaments. I'm doing a documentary, I want to use some footage of me playing Wimbledon, I have to pay through the teeth for my own stuff. We have no rights to our likenesses. You sign it away when you sign the entry to these tournaments.

The only way to get some of that, some equitable solution to that, is to pull together. The rules should be really uniform as far as how much time between points, et cetera. I think we still can make some improvements on that.

The combined events, initially I was against them because we always get the short end of the stick, women. Guys get more airtime on TV, they get more airtime on the big courts, et cetera. If everything is equitable, the crowd really enjoys having both men and women for these tournaments. You're just creating bigger events throughout the year. That's good for the sport.

Now you can watch anybody play. Tennis Channel, we do tennis 24/7. You can always find your player on TV, which was never the case. I think TV is really the key to growing the sport and bringing it to the corners of the world that cannot have tournaments, you cannot have live tennis that you can go to, but you can catch it on TV. I think that's great you have so much more accessibility to the players.

Q. While back you spoke about it being an issue of your not having a coach for six years, but you also

said it was a great decision hiring Renée Richards. Can you talk about what she brought to your game briefly, why that was a great decision for you?

MARTINA NAVRATILOVA: Well, I played by instinct. I wasn't really taught how to play points. I don't remember a coach telling me, You need to come in on that, don't hit this. Pretty much the only instruction I had from my father as to how to play points was to not dropshot off the serve (laughter). If I ever did that, I would kind of look at him, if it worked, not look at him when it didn't work.

I've learned on my own how to play the points, but also I had a limited game in that I didn't have a topspin backhand. I could only slice the backhand. Managed to win two Wimbledons that way, but I really wasn't thinking that much about constructing points, et cetera. I just totally played by instinct.

What Renée brought to my game was technique. She taught me how to hit a topspin backhand, improve my serve as well, start hitting forehand down the line. I was pulling it cross-court because of my grip. So we tweaked that a little bit.

Most of all what she brought was constructing the points, how to set up the points, where you know four shots later you're going to hit a backhand volley to the open court because you hit the forehand deep, you did the cross-court short, then you come in down the line, then you put the volley away. It was just really opening my eyes how to construct a point. So, yeah, she was a great tennis mind.

Q. You also were giving some great insights about Serena. You've been quoted as saying in the conversation about history and the greatest, if you did just majors, it's Serena, but if you used other criteria, it would be yourself or Steffi or perhaps Margaret. Could you amplify that a little bit. I know it's very difficult to compare over eras, but it's fascinating.

MARTINA NAVRATILOVA: That's why you can't. Even the ranking system, you say this one was No. 1 for so many weeks, this one was No. 1 for that many weeks. Even the rankings when I was playing, they're fiddling with it, trying to figure out the best ranking system. You can't compare because you're not comparing apples to apples.

As far as the eras are concerned, we had a completely different setup then. When Chris and I were playing, we played 18, 20 tournaments a year, supporting the tour. The tour was the main thing. It wasn't the majors. Wimbledon we played and the US Open, but the French and Australian Open we didn't go there because the tour was more important than those events.



I mean, I remember when Virginia Wade was thinking about helping me back in '87. She said to me, You need to just concentrate on Wimbledon and the US Open and forget the rest of the tournaments. You want to know when to peak.

I'm like, What are you talking about? I thought I was supposed to be peaking all year. I don't understand that concept.

It turned into that, where the players were only just really concentrating on the majors, and the tournaments were a warmup. For Chris, myself, Billie Jean, Rosie, everybody that played every week, it was important. I didn't differentiate that much between playing the French Open, if at all, to playing on the tour. It was just another tournament.

Wimbledon, yes, that was more special. US Open, yes. At any point I couldn't have told you how many majors I had won unless I thought about it and counted because it wasn't in the DNA of the comparisons at that time. That's why the measuring stick is just different, the opportunity, et cetera.

If I was playing now, I would be playing a different style. I would be playing like Roger Federer, running around the backhand, ripping the forehand, coming in more selectively, still trying to find a way to the net but doing it differently, and scheduling myself completely differently.

I played doubles in every tournament I played but two I think in my career. I never kind of let down a little bit. Virginia Wade gave me good advice, I just had no idea how right she was. I thought she was crazy telling me, You just need to learn how to peak.

I'm like, What are you talking about?

For me peaking meant that I would be fresh for Wimbledon. But then I played Eastbourne the week before. Played 11 matches in six days, finished the finals on a Saturday, then play on Tuesday in Wimbledon. It's just different times. That's all.

Q. We've seen this tradition in women's tennis that goes on of incredible voices for moving forward, social justice, obviously you and Billie, many others. For the American-based players, Naomi, Serena, Coco, Venus, Anisimova, it goes on. It's far less so with the American men players, I won't go down names. There's a real difference in the approach. Could you talk about that a little bit, why that might be.

MARTINA NAVRATILOVA: Well, I don't know how much of that has to do with male privilege, but perhaps a little bit would be there. Women have always been the underdogs. Even though we're the majority, we had to fight for our seat at the table, whether it's at work, at school, or on the athletic field. I think maybe that's why we're just switched on to that much more.

You see it with awareness and voice that Naomi Osaka and Coco Gauff bring to the table at such a young age. I think it's just phenomenal. We have to fight for more. I'm not putting men down for this, but it's just a fact, they're in positions of power, they don't have to beg for a seat at the table, they get it automatically. Maybe a lot of that is embedded in that.

Because of the social injustice, women are much more attune to it. Therefore, they're willing to take a chance and speak out about it. A lot of the players are willing to do that, but there's many that don't want to rock the boat, guys particularly. Who can forget Michael Jordan's speech, republicans buy sneakers, too. It comes back to that.

I'm thrilled that the women players are leading the way still. We passed the torch to good hands.

Q. We haven't talked about Ash Barty, who is the defending champion here. I wanted to ask you what you think about her. I think a good way to end is who do you see as the leading contenders to win on the women's and men's side? Who are a few of the players that you think have a really good shot to win this tournament?

MARTINA NAVRATILOVA: Yeah, on the women's, Ash was hamstrung by geography. She couldn't train with her coach, he was in another state. Rather than to come half prepared for the event, she chose not to play, which I think was the right choice. She looked pretty sharp in Australia, but not as sharp as the players that had played more matches. There's no substitute for that.

Now, she played in Australia, although she didn't play Dubai and Doha again. I don't know how much has to do with any quarantine situation. Once she leaves, she can't get back into the country, et cetera. It's complicated. I think now when she's on the road, who knows when she'll get back home.

You have to give the nod to Osaka, winning Australia, having played those matches. And the court speed is medium-fast. That's allows her power to pay off more. Ash likes to run around the backhand more. The faster court doesn't give her that time to really do that. That's why I think she's done better on the slow surfaces, the way

she plays. The slice stays low, she has more time to run around the backhand, set up her points.

You have to go with Osaka.

On the men's side, who is going to beat Novak Djokovic on the hard courts? That may be the toughest. After Rafa on clay, that's the toughest out in tennis, hard courts and Novak Djokovic. He is just a wall that hits the ball back harder, so yeah.

You have to go with those two. I'm not going to go out an a limb because those two players have played the best tennis these last 12 months.

ERIC ABNER: Thanks, everyone, for joining us. Thanks, Martina, for the time.

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