

US OPEN

Wednesday, August 30, 2023

New York, New York, USA

Novak Djokovic

Press Conference

N. DJOKOVIC/B. Zapata Miralles

6-4, 6-1, 6-1

THE MODERATOR: Straight sets. A crisp two hours. Assess your performance, how you felt you played.

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Does it have to be so cold here? Wow. It's like cryo chamber.

Sorry, you were asking?

THE MODERATOR: Three sets, a crisp two hours. Not much time on the court. Assess your performance, how you thought you performed.

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Well, yeah, not a great start like I had the other night, but it was also due to the conditions that were quite humid on the center court. I feel like, I said it, you know, after first-round match there's very little air, very little breeze you can feel on the court. I think it affected both of us.

He started off solid. We had some rallies. We kind of had to reach out for the towel basically after each one of those longer rallies, so it took a bit more time and effort. But, you know, one break was enough. Then after that, you know, second set I played really good. Beginning of the third, couple of close games, but last four games of the third I ended up really playing really well.

I'm pleased, you know, I'm pleased with the way I'm feeling, playing on the court. Can always be better, but first two rounds didn't spend too much time on the court and played very solid and hopefully I can keep building.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. Your next opponent is going to be your compatriot and you only played once before, Serbia Open last year on clay. Tell us a bit what it feels like to play a friend. Perhaps you may go a long way together. That was a tight match last year in Serbia.



NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Yes, it was, it was. I think he's playing one of his best tennis on hard court at the moment. He's in very good form. It's great for Serbian tennis that we have, you know, a matchup in the third round. So one Serbian is going to be definitely in the fourth round, which is always great for our tennis.

You know, he's one of the hardest workers on the tour. We follow each other, not just me and him, but, you know, players in the locker rooms, in the gym, you know, the amount of hours that one player puts or the other player puts in his time on the court, in the gym, and he's definitely one of the top hardest workers out there. Puts a lot of hours into care for his body and trying to build his form.

Eventually the results will come for a player like him because he's very, very dedicated and very nice guy. Very quiet. Just, you know, works hard and big fighter. You know, does his best.

Obviously clay, his favorite surface. But as I said, you know, he's improving, improving on hard court, no doubt. Here, slightly slower hard courts, balls, as well, so I think it's favorable to his game.

He's physically very fit, you know, so I must be ready for a physical battle.

Q. You were speaking about Laslo and he's had to persevere through a lot, more than anyone should have to. What does it say about his character that despite all of that he's continued pushing and had such a nice career so far?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Yes, he did have a lot of struggles with his family and private issues. You know, had to endure all of that. So it says a lot about his mental resilience.

He's, as I said, a very nice guy, very humble. Just very quiet, you know. Just goes about his things. You know, works as hard as anybody and tries his best.

You know, he's really dedicated to the game. You know, I really like him as a person and as a player, as well.

We, of course, know each other very well because we come from the same country. We practice, part of same



Davis Cup team, of course. So it's also great prior to Davis Cup, which is coming up right after US Open, that we are both in good form, because we have, you know, high hopes obviously for this year's Davis Cup. Hopefully we can do well as a team.

I wish him all the best except for the next match, I guess (smiling).

Q. You guys obviously are allowed to receive more coaching during the match than you could during most of your career. When we see you being vocal with your coach, are you looking for answers? We see it a lot in tennis, we don't see it in basketball. Are you looking for answers from them or is it just...

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Well, it's different in basketball because you can basically go to your coach or bench any time you want. We are not able to do that.

So we have to sometimes raise our voice in order for our team to hear us or for us to hear them, because otherwise, you know, we have to communicate with the signs or signals. You know, it's louder out on the court.

I would want to see, honestly, you know, a possibility of -- I'm actually supportive of the on-court coaching or headset communication, whatever ways of getting more coaching. I think it's good. I think it's good for the audience. It's good for player.

I understand that there are some, you know, opponents of this, you know, coaching rule that are saying, Yeah, you're a tennis player, individual athlete, so you have to figure things out by yourself.

Well, you have to figure them out anyway, even if the coach comes in, say, in a set break or whatever, and you talk, you still have to have to play yourself, right? There is no substitution.

So it's quite different, you know, than basketball. It's really not comparable.

But yeah, I'm actually happy that we are able now to freely communicate rather than hiding from a chair umpire or supervisor like we did for many years. So it's good. I'm supportive of that.

Q. A little while ago Iga Swiatek was in here and she said that when she watches you and Carlos play, she's most impressed with the fight, the never-give-up approach. Coco Gauff said she most admires how even when you're losing, you and Carlos, you stay positive. When you think of those two players, Iga and

Coco, what do you think of most about what they bring to their games and the way they play?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Well, Iga has been dominating the women's game last couple of years, multiple Grand Slam winner. I love her, you know, devotion, dedication.

Also, you know, maybe she's too humble to say, too modest to say, but she's got a great fighting spirit, no doubt. She's a warrior, goes out there and, you know, doesn't give a single game. Actually she has probably the most bagels of anyone in women's tennis the last few years.

It speaks about how seriously and professionally she's taking every single point and game on the court. So that's very admirable. I really like that kind of champion spirit and mindset.

And Coco is on the rise. I think, you know, she's yet to win a Grand Slam, but played in the finals. She's still young, but now Brad Gilbert on her side with the great experience of coaching some of the greats, I think things are coming together for her. She played really good tennis in Cincinnati and also she's been playing well here. She's got the home support, of course, which is always welcome and needed.

Physically she seems to be very fit. She's striking the ball very well. You know, I think she broke to the kind of top of the women's game quite early. Some years ago I think she was like 16, 17, when she played fourth round of Wimbledon.

But it still takes some time, a few years for things to come together where you feel that you are complete as a player, that you are ready to win slams and dominate the game.

I think she's coming very close to that stage and that level. So I'm sure that she has very high hopes for US Open and she should, because she's playing really well.

Q. You have been on tour for 20 years, which is remarkable. The world, particularly the media world, has changed a lot during that time. Everything from television to newspapers to social media, et cetera. Curious how you, as an athlete, experience those changes both in like what your perspective is on the coverage of tennis during that time and your career as a No. 1 and...

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Well, my mindset has always been to really adapt to the change and to the pace of life.

Of course maintaining the right balance I think is a key of



understanding who you are and keeping the authenticity in today's world, that's probably even more needed and respected than it ever was, I think. Because there's, you know, so much going on, there's tons of informations that are coming to you through social media, through Internet, television, you know, any digital communication tool that you can think of. You have thousands of information that you have to process every single day.

So that's a lot. You know, I mean, when I was starting professional tennis career, it was completely different. So I think it's something that you can't really stop or, you know, the more you resist it, I guess, the worse it is. So you have to kind of find individual formula that really works for you.

I feel like it's important to embrace the change, the evolution of humankind, of society, you know, of where things are going, and try to use that as a tool for your professional career, your branding, your marketing, your PR, your communication to your fans, the charity. Whatever you're looking for in whatever ways you want to communicate to the world, I think nowadays it's better than ever. Because, you know, all it takes is a photo and one or two phrases and, you know, millions of people around the world can see it instantly, which is amazing, if you think about that.

But at the same time it's important to find a balance, especially for an athlete. You know, athletes are, especially the athletes in global sports, football, basketball, soccer, tennis, you know, golf, these sports are, you know, followed around the world, and whatever you say, however you behave is monitored and analyzed and judged, positive or negative way, by millions of people.

So, you know, if an athlete is not really paying too much attention on mental side of things, you know, it can really hurt you. The comments and everything, right? So mental health is important. I think it's equally as important as physical health.

I'm really glad that there has been more talks about that, more conversations in the last few years. Really glad to hear that. I think we have to collectively pay more attention to that so that we also help each other and athletes and us as a whole ecosystem to thrive and use this evolution as an advantage rather than something that can take us down.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports