

# US OPEN

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New York, New York, USA

## Aryna Sabalenka

### Press Conference



A. SABALENKA/D. Kasatkina

6-1, 6-3

**THE MODERATOR:** Aryna, congratulations on everything on and off the court. At this particular point in the tournament, as we enter the quarterfinals, are you satisfied with your game as it stands right now?

**ARYNA SABALENKA:** I mean, yeah, I think I'm playing great tennis. But there is always things to improve. There is always things to keep building and keep getting better with every match you playing.

But I'm definitely happy with the level I play right now.

**THE MODERATOR:** Questions.

**Q. How did you find out about world No. 1? Did you find out last night? In the morning? What was your reaction?**

**ARYNA SABALENKA:** I find out this morning. I just opened my phone and I was just like, Guys, I have match today, I have things to take care of. Thank you so much for all the support, for all the messages. I didn't ask for any of the messages because I was trying to stay focused on the game, don't let this news distract me. I answered everybody only now.

But, yeah, it was nice morning to wake up.

**Q. On the match today, what did you do to stay focused?**

**ARYNA SABALENKA:** Nothing really. I was just like stick to the plan on the game. I was just thinking about what I have to do to win this match. I was just trying to stay focused on myself, on my game, don't think about the rest of the things.

I'm really happy that it worked well. I'm really happy that I was able to stay focused from the beginning till the end and I was able to finish this match in two sets.

**Q. You were telling me you went to sleep? You didn't watch the match? Ostapenko was 3-0.**

**ARYNA SABALENKA:** Okay, I lied (laughter). Got me.

**Q. Did you stay up?**

**ARYNA SABALENKA:** I was about to go to sleep in the second set, but it was really interesting to watch. Okay, I'm going to watch, like, first couple of games just to see the situation. I watched them. I was just like, No, I'm not going to watch it till the end. I went to bed.

But I was really curious, like, what's going on there. But I push myself so hard to don't watch the score, just go to bed. I know if I would see the result yesterday, would be really tough to sleep. I was just like, No, I have match tomorrow, I have to focus on that, doesn't matter.

But, I mean, to be honest, I didn't want her to lose. I was watching that match and I was just like, C'mon, win it. I was really not like sure, but after some of the upsets, I thought she's probably going to make it to the final. I was just thinking I'm going to do everything I can possible and impossible to reach the final and decide everything on court.

So I was like, I was sad, but at the same time I have to be happy because it's not like she just fell. All year I've been playing well. I put her kind of like under pressure. I was just like sad and happy at the same time.

I didn't want to become world No. 1 like this. I want a battle for this.

**Q. You mentioned that on court, that you were sad about it in terms of not getting to play her. Can you talk about what it has been like for you to chase down Iga. You said after the Australian Open that it's a big reason why you didn't dip, because you had this goal. What does she occupy in your space in terms of your career right now?**

**ARYNA SABALENKA:** I mean, she's great. She's unbelievable. She been world No. 1 for long time, most of the weeks I think.



I really happy that we have Iga on tour, someone who motivate like me, especially like me, to keep pushing, keep trying, keep improving myself.

I think that's the real sport, you know? When you kind of push yourself to the limits and you trying to get better. I think it's a normal process when, like, someone change another one in the position in the ranking.

I feel like it's great that we kind of, like, playing great this year, we kind of pushing each other. I really hope we'll keep doing that and we'll keep facing each other in the very last stages of the tournaments, we'll battle against each other.

This is what sport is.

**Q. I wanted to ask you about your first memory or idea of world No. 1. When did that thought dawn on you? What were your thoughts? Did you at any point along the way lose hope that you would ever get there?**

**ARYNA SABALENKA:** Maybe last year when I was struggling a lot, I kind of lost this feeling.

But I don't remember actually the moment when I was thinking like, Oh, probably I can be world No. 1. Maybe like in 2018 when I break through top 30 I think. I start thinking like, Maybe I can get to the top 10. It was just step by step.

I was, like, first goal was to entry the top hundred, the second one top 50, top 30, top 10, top 5. I don't know like when, few years ago I start thinking, Okay, maybe I have chance to become world No. 1.

I knew it was really like a lot work should have been done for that. I wasn't mentally ready for that because if you world No. 1, you have to be consistently on the tournaments. You cannot, like, play like this.

So, yeah, maybe like few years ago. I don't really know the answer on this question, to be honest.

**Q. Ons was happy for you becoming No. 1. She was saying you deserve it so much. Besides hearing that, what has been the best message you've received becoming the 29th world No. 1 in WTA history?**

**ARYNA SABALENKA:** Yeah, very nice from Ons. After her tough loss, she gave me five. She was still upset, but she still come to me and congratulate me. I love this girl. She's amazing. I think she's the best.

I mean, I got a lot of messages, a lot of support from a lot

of people, players. The funniest one was from Djokovic because he also became world No. 1, will become world No. 1, after US Open. Someone mentioned us with this funny sunglasses from the US Open. He just send me like, Smile if you will become world No. 1 soon. It was the funniest one, I would say.

**Q. The match that led to that happening, Jelena being able to handle Iga, did you have any chance to watch that match or you were going to sleep and focusing on your own?**

**ARYNA SABALENKA:** Yeah, I watched till the beginning of the third set. I mean, Jelena definitely played some unbelievable tennis in the second set, little bit in the first set, and in the third set.

I honestly think that Iga was kind of, I don't know, I felt she was a little bit tight and nervous, like too much in that match. I think if they would play, I don't know, like the pretournament or they going to play next week or whatever, I think Iga has everything to beat Jelena.

But definitely Jelena put her under pressure. She played great tennis. But I think it was like combination of both Jelena play well, Iga was a little bit nervous. Yeah, I'm definitely sure that it wasn't the best match from Iga. Let's say like that.

**Q. You had a long time to think about becoming No. 1. Have you thought about how you're going to celebrate this?**

**ARYNA SABALENKA:** I'm focusing on US Open. I don't want to celebrate anything before the end of the US Open. So I just want to focus on this tournament more than on world No. 1.

**Q. When you were thinking about it, did you have an idea?**

**ARYNA SABALENKA:** No, not really, to be honest. Maybe I will eat pizza or burger (laughter). Always about the food. I mean, I like to eat. Sorry, guys. It is how it is.

**Q. You play Zheng Qinwen. I don't think you ever faced her before.**

**ARYNA SABALENKA:** Never.

**Q. She has a heavy forehand, in the same category as you. I'm not saying it's as big, but it's there. What is the challenge of playing her? How do you put all of this No. 1 stuff aside and focus on the mission?**

**ARYNA SABALENKA:** I mean, we practiced with her couple of times. She's playing really great tennis. As you said, forehand is really heavy. I would say backhand, as well. Serving well. Moving well.

It's like for her nothing to lose, so she's playing at her best. She played great tennis against Ons. I haven't watched her previous matches, but, yeah, she's playing great tennis right now.

I mean, the trickiest part that she's moving well, playing some heavy shots. I have to be physically and mentally ready that it's going to be some winners against me on that match.

I just have to focus on myself more than on her, on my game. I know if I'll bring my tennis there, I have chance to win this match.

About the world No. 1, it's not change anything. Yes, I was No. 2, now I'm No. 1. It's great. Of course, it's like a great achievement. It's one of the goals. It's great to say that, yeah, I've been world No. 1. But it's not changing anything.

You still have to bring your best tennis. Even sometimes players have nothing to lose against you, they're playing their best tennis, so sometimes it's even tougher.

I'm not focusing on that. It's ranking in sport. Anybody can beat anybody. I'm trying to focus on myself and improve myself more, doing everything to bring my best tennis on each match.

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