

US OPEN

Saturday, September 9, 2023

New York, New York, USA

Aryna Sabalenka

Press Conference

C. GAUFF/A. Sabalenka

2-6, 6-3, 6-2

THE MODERATOR: Obviously not the result you wanted, but congratulations on a great tournament. You have been great in this room. You leave as the No. 1 player in the world. So you had quite a run these last couple weeks.

ARYNA SABALENKA: Well, thank you so much, first of all. Yeah, there's some positive things I'm leaving this; some not really positive. But it's okay. It's a process. We're all learning. And I guess it's lesson for me I will learn and then come back stronger.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. Tough luck today, Aryna. Can you just talk through the match a little bit about where you felt that it began to turn? And after that dominating kind of first set did her defense and court coverage kind of start to shrink the court a little bit for you?

ARYNA SABALENKA: Well, I will say that in the first set I was dealing with my emotions quite good. I was focused on myself, not on the crowd or the way she move.

Yeah, I mean, definitely she was moving just unbelievable today. But then the second set I start probably overthinking, and because of that I start kind of like losing my power. Then she start moving better. I start missing a lot of easy shots.

I mean, the good news is that it's me against me. The bad one is that I'm still having these issues playing against myself, I would say (smiling).

But it's okay. I'll work harder so next time I'm not going to get even a little bit tired on court, and so I'll be better, yeah.

Q. I just want to make sure I'm clear. In your mind, some of the unforced errors on your part, particularly forehand, I mean, was that more you and your emotions, or was that more a physical thing that kind



of got away, or was that her defense that forced the unforced errors?

ARYNA SABALENKA: Well, I would definitely say that she was moving really well and defending really great, better than anybody else. So I always had to play like an extra ball.

It's a combination of everything. But I would say that today was more because of me. Like, that is, not the whole match, but, like, there was key moments in the second set which the one I lost, I mean, the moments I lost, and those moments helped her to turn around the game.

Afterwards, it was just, like, of course her unbelievable defending game. But, like, I would say that just because of that, like, key moments in the second set where it was more about me than her, I lost this match.

Q. You have had to play Coco today, but you also had to play about 24,000 other people. What was that like to be in that kind of environment? I imagine it was really hard, but can you explain what that felt like.

ARYNA SABALENKA: Well, I wouldn't say that I was playing against the crowd. I got a lot of support messages from people, from here, from New York, so I knew that they -- I mean, how can they support me more than her? Of course they're going to support her. She's 19 years old, playing the final of a Grand Slam. That's just unbelievable. She actually made history. I kind of, like, expected this. I mean, I didn't play against them.

I would say that sometimes this kind of, like, support can put a lot of pressure on the player whom they are supporting. And it's kind of like it was pressure on her in the beginning. It's just me, I didn't finish important points, meaning, like, I made these unforced errors there. Yeah, of course I gave them the energy. They start to be louder. She start to feeling a little bit better on court, so yeah.

Q. Congratulations on a great one. During the trophy ceremony you held your composure for the most part, and then you mentioned your family and you apologized and said you were sorry for the result. What did you feel that you were sorry about? And about your family and loved ones, how much have they helped? How did they help the most in turning



Aryna Sabalenka, the pro, to Aryna Sabalenka, the Grand Slam champion?

ARYNA SABALENKA: Well, without them, I wouldn't be here. They have been pushing themselves so hard so I would have this chance to become a tennis player.

I mean, I don't know what time is it there right now. It's probably night. For me, it's important to get good sleep for them, you know (smiling).

So they were awake, watching me. I mean, now they have to go to bed, but 100% they're not going to sleep well. So that's what I apologize for.

Yeah, I would say that my family did a good job. If not them, I wouldn't be here. I really appreciate for everything they did, yeah.

Q. Congratulations on what you have done for the sport. You said you were playing against yourself. What aspects are you playing against? Can you share some of the issues you have?

ARYNA SABALENKA: Yeah, I mean, sometimes I can get emotional. Today on the court, I was overthinking and I was missing quite, like, not easy balls, but the balls I shouldn't be missing.

Like, that's what I'm saying. I'm making a lot of winners and a lot of unforced errors. Today it was more about -- not more about, it was unforced errors was a lot in the second set, and that's where I get her believe that she can win this match. I get overemotional after the second set.

So, yeah, that's what I mean. Like me against me.

Q. When did you feel your thigh, or if that was your thigh that had the injury for the medical timeout, and how that maybe in the long rallies may have caused some of those errors for you? What did you say to her when you embraced her considering you hit in practice with her on the Wednesday before the tournament? And if her forehand has improved from the practice and the five times you played against her previously.

ARYNA SABALENKA: The injury, I would say, like, somewhere in the beginning of the third set, but it wasn't crazy one. It was just, like, super tight. So I felt so much pressure on my left adductor, so that's why I called for a physio, hoping that it's going to help and I hope I would start moving a little bit better.

About Coco, I mean, I would say that she improved her movement on the court more. She's definitely moving

better. That's I think what help her to win this tournament.

Q. You haven't wanted to talk about No. 1 too much while you were still in the tournament but now that the tournament is over, how you reflect on being No. 1 and how that maybe changes how you react to the end of this tournament knowing you still have this accomplishment?

ARYNA SABALENKA: Yeah, that's why probably, that's why I'm not super depressed right now. I'm definitely going to be. I'm definitely going for a drink tonight (smiling) if I'm allowed to say that. Yes, we are athletes, but sometimes we are drinking, but not much (smiling).

But becoming a World No. 1, it's a huge improvement, and achievement, actually. I'm really proud of myself that all those years I have been working so hard helped me to become World No. 1.

But, you know, like, for me it's more about end the year as World No. 1, not just like become World No. 1 and then next week you're second. It's good so that I can say I have been World No. 1, but I really would like to finish the year as World No. 1. That's why I'm, like, still positive, and I'm still motivated. (Laughter.)

Q. You have played the final in the year that this tournament is celebrating the 50th anniversary of equal pay. I don't know if you are aware of the huge debate that has arisen in my country, in Spain, after the kiss that the soccer federation president planted to one of the players on the celebration of women's soccer World Cup. This has highlighted salary, inequalities, also inequalities on power, so I would like to know your opinion on that if you have one. Overall, what role do you think that women's tennis can have or can play on leading, inspiring the improvements on equity, on other sports? Female sports, of course.

ARYNA SABALENKA: The only thing I can say is that I think women deserve to be paid the same as men, because we sacrifice a lot. We are working really hard. It's not like we are doing nothing and they paying us the same money.

I think, yeah, we deserve this, to be paid the same as mens. Yeah, the level probably different. Of course mens are stronger. Anyway, they're going to be stronger and better than us, but we're still putting a lot of work in, and I think we deserve to be paid the same. This is the only thing I can say right now.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports