

BNP Paribas Open

Saturday, March 19, 2016

Novak Djokovic

Press Conference



N. DJOKOVIC/R. Nadal

7-6, 6-2

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. Do you ever amaze yourself at your ability to rise to the occasion at just the right time over and over again?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Well, I have been trained to do that (Smiling.) I work hard to be able to come up with the best game when it's the most needed.

Obviously today the first set was decided in one or two points; second set was very close. Midway through the second I broke his serve, and last three games I played very well.

So I'm just glad to overcome this challenge that is one of the greatest in sport, as always is playing against Rafa. I'm taking the positives out of today's performance and hoping that I can, you know, finish off this tournament tomorrow with another great performance.

Q. Just following on from that, does that level kick in with anybody and everybody that you play, as you were just saying, rising to that occasion, that you're trained to do that?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Well, it just depends because we are part of the individual sports, so every opponent that you play against is different. According to your opponent, you prepare a specific game plan and tactics that will work the best.

Obviously when you get on the court you adjust. You see what your opponent is doing good, what he's doing bad, and make sure you try to tackle his flows.

And then, you know, the result is not in your hands. You know, you can try to do your best, focus on yourself, and then figure out the best possible tactics and just try to be in the present moment and hope for the best.

Because other things are just unpredictable, so you just have to try to be in the moment.

Q. How different was the Rafa you played today

from the one you played in Qatar?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Yeah, he was better. Undoubtedly he prefers playing here comparing to Doha. Think these conditions played in his favor more because of the ball bounce and the speed of the court. And he loves playing in the courts where he has a very high bounce.

It's logical because it's the style of the game he possesses and rotation he puts on the balls, especially from forehand side. It's brutal to handle in these kind of courts.

So, yeah, he was trying to use that shot, move me around the court, and he did that at the beginning of the match. As I said, it could have gone either way, the first set, but I managed to stay composed and serve well in important moments and just believed that I can win.

Q. You have a completely different matchup tomorrow against Raonic. What are your thoughts on this match and also thoughts on how he's playing since January?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Yeah, Milos is probably playing the best tennis that he has ever played. I think looking at his performances this year, winning in Brisbane, playing semis of Australian Open, and then coming back off injury and playing already in finals here, it's quite impressive.

His serve was phenomenal before the start of this season, but this season it seems like he has improved even more, especially the second serve. He's going for it more. He's not giving you the same look.

That's a very strong weapon that -- an advantage that he possesses in his game that he obviously tries to leverage in the matches. I'm aware that it's gonna be very tough to return his serve, but if I manage to neutralize his serve, get many returns back in play, I think I have a good chance from the baseline.

I also need to have decent first-serve percentage in, because I don't want him to, you know, take the advantage of my second serves and, you know, start stepping in too much.

Yeah. I saw he's aggressive, trying to take the initiative

from the first shot off his serve, which is natural because his serve goes 140 miles and gives him a lot of easy shots.

Yeah, I will try to prepare myself tactically, analyze his game with my team. You know, we are playing finals, so I'll try to also use the experience that I have had playing in many Masters Series finals in this tournament, as well. If I'm not mistaken, he's going for his first.

But, you know, even though he hasn't played too many Masters finals, he's still very strong mentally. He's very calm on the court. He's very composed. He's showing, I would say, mental character virtues that are characteristic, I would say, for maybe some more experienced and older players.

So that's one of the impressive things about him.

Q. A few minutes ago Rafa said that it's basically impossible to play any better than you did in 2015. Everyone always talks about getting better. Do you feel there is a next level? Do you see yourself taking those little steps when you're at such a high level already?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: I feel always that I can improve, that I can play better. I guess each one of us, especially at the top, is very self-critical. Sometimes it's hard to be objective and it's hard to say, you know, how quick your ball goes because you're not feeling the same sensation maybe as your opponent or somebody that is watching the match courtside.

But as I said, I think that's one of the things that keeps me also going, you know, the fact that I know there is room for improvement, that there are always certain parts of the game that can go better.

You know, I try to motivate myself like that.

Q. When you talk about adapting, how does that process work during the course of a match? Is it something that you can describe? Is there a specific process? Is it something that's just instinctual and you see something, you react to it?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Well, I think partly it's instinctual and partly it's also the fact that you notice something that happens repetitively from your opponent, so if he sticks to a certain kind of pattern in his play that maybe you were not expecting, then of course you need to adjust to it and try to take him out of that comfort zone.

It's all about that.

Q. You said that there were one or two points that were really key. Could you go into those points

more in detail?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Well, he started the match better, as I said. We had a very long first set. It went over an hour and ten minutes, I think. It's not the first time. I know it's very physically demanding when I get to play Nadal.

I think I have had a couple of break points 4-3-up first set and didn't use that. He had his chances, as well. He had 5-4, set point.

So it was quite even coming into tiebreak. You know, tiebreak I was 5-2 up; came back to 5-All with some great defense and great points. Then I just served well and hung in there. You know, I made him play an extra shot.

So I think, you know, 5-All, 6-5, those points, you know, in the tiebreak, I mean, have decided a whole set, because more or less if you look at the first set it was quite even.

Q. You're turning 29 in a couple of months, but nobody younger than you has won a Masters title yet. Obviously Milos can do that if he wins tomorrow. Curious if you think it would be a big deal if this next generation could finally breakthrough or why it's taken so long.

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: I hope not. (Laughter.) Not yet.

Well, I mean, the fact that we have now Milos, Dimitrov, Tomic, that has been around a while already, Zverev, Coric, Kyrgios, it's good for tennis. It's good to see some new faces and players not only performing at a high level but winning big matches, as well.

These guys that I mentioned have won against some top players in big tournaments, and they deserve the respect and the attention. But in the other hand, you know -- of course have one big tournament like Masters Series or one major, but whether or not they can keep that consistency and level throughout the year, which is going to make them one of the top players, then that's something that I'd say is an ultimate challenge for all of the young players nowadays.

You have to play equally well on all surfaces to actually get in the mix of Top 2, 3, 4 players in the world.

So, yeah, certainly those guys can play very well for a tournament or two or two months, but can they play throughout the year at a very high level? That's a question mark.

But it certainly is good for tennis to have young players coming up and challenging the best.