

BNP Paribas Open

Tuesday, March 14, 2017

Roger Federer

Press Conference

R. FEDERER/S. Johnson

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THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. Expectation for the next match? How do you feel?

ROGER FEDERER: About? Just in general?

Q. Yes.

ROGER FEDERER: Very excited. I said it at the press conference in the beginning. That's why I came here, play against guys like Rafa. Now we have it.

I'm going to be excited now. Better be excited now. Otherwise I came for the wrong reasons.

Q. On that match, are you more relaxed than you would be for the average Federer-Nadal match because you just had this huge win? Are things sort of making this one seem...

ROGER FEDERER: Everyone felt different against Rafa, because sometimes you come in and you're extremely tired. Sometimes it was, like you said, maybe you just lost three in a row, and you play often in quick succession at one point, as well.

I mean, Australia helps me a little bit, but, you know, at the end of the day, I'm still in the comeback. And I try to see it really as another opportunity to build upon something for the rest of the season. So regardless of Australia, winning or losing, I'm going to try to go out there and try to play free again. I think it's really important.

I'm really happy that I got my energy back, because in Dubai I was actually still quite tired. I feel like tomorrow if I move well, you know, I will definitely have a chance against Rafa.

Q. Do you sense the anticipation from the fans for this match, their appreciation of your rivalry when this happens?

ROGER FEDERER: Well, I mean, I haven't read any of the press on the West Coast, or here for that matter. So, no, I can't quite know how excited they are, because usually you sense it through the press.



I mean, when I came here, you guys asked me mostly about how I still felt about Australia. I mean, the wave was still going on from Australia. It was not all about other stuff. It was pretty much still Australia.

That's why I think it's good that we play again right here in the States. I think it's a great thing for tennis, and it's exciting for Rafa and me.

It's a tough draw, but, you know, rankings are not the priority for both of us. From that standpoint, if it happens fourth round or finals -- finals would be good. But anything else but a finals, it almost doesn't matter which round it would be.

Q. Two things. Pete Sampras always used to say that Andre just helped him lift his game up. Is that a factor or process with Rafa? And also, this afternoon, Rafa sort of explained your game and its core essence. Could you take a minute and just capture the essence of Rafa's game for you as a whole?

ROGER FEDERER: Yeah. I mean, I think he's a player with a lot of possibilities. You know, he can play really deep in the court and really in the court, too, now. He's really become a player that can do both. That's -- we don't have that many guys on the tour that can actually do that.

So that's always an option for him, Plan A, Plan B, depending on how he wants to start the match. Or he can even have variation by doing it on the deuce side and not on the ad, for instance, or vice versa, because he's so comfortable in, on, and back.

Which is very difficult, I can tell you that, because I have tried to play from back. And it's a totally different game and geometry from way back there. So that's one thing.

I think he -- for a typical clay-court player, which he is not, he can actually volley very well. He reads the game really well going forward. He closes the net down very well. He rarely misses serve-and-volleys or anything like that kind that we used to see from some of the great clay-court players in the back that would feel so uncomfortable at net. And Rafa is not like that. That's why he's also had success in doubles.

Then because of his spin and lefty, mental and physical ability, he's raised the bar for tennis players, you know.

Yeah, and he can out-tough you, if need to be and just make shots. That's another asset for him that he's always got in the bag somewhere.

And the first question was?

Q. Does he help you raise your level in a way, the challenge of it?

ROGER FEDERER: I mean, sometimes, you know. I don't think he's a classic player who actually lifts my game. I have had that maybe against Novak or Murray or Roddick or Hewitt, other guys, you know, where I play more of a normal ball.

You know, he falls into a category that plays very -- with so much topspin that you never really play normal balls. But naturally, because it has been finals, that's where usually you play your best. He has definitely also made me play some of my best tennis against him.

Q. Taking you back to today's match, it seemed like at the end of both sets you were a little more pumped. Was there any frustration with the way you were playing or the way the match was unfolding?

ROGER FEDERER: Not really. I was actually quite happy I was able to protect my serve. I had two little moments where I got into a bit of trouble but was able to -- I think at the end I didn't have to save any break points at all. You know, over 12 service games, you're always going to maybe be in trouble at some stage. So if those were my trouble games, I think I did exceptionally well.

I just thought Stevey served very well. Had chances in the first set to maybe get into better rallies. And if I would have done better there, I could have broken earlier.

In the second set, I think he was serving almost 90% at one point. That's why I changed my position on the return. I don't know if you saw it, but I was trying to mix it up a bit.

And important was going into the breaker, like you said, with energy, with the right mindset, focusing on the serve, and making sure that I don't play too many stupid stuff, even though I did miss two shots that I should never miss, and almost cost me going into the third maybe.

I was very happy how I played because I thought he played a really good match.

Q. Could there still be psychologically maybe a different feel to play Rafa that early compared to playing him in a semifinal or final?

ROGER FEDERER: Yeah. It will feel different. It's going to be more difficult for both of us just to rip winners into the corner. That's normal.

If you play at the early matches, you see usually the top guys not chase the lines so much. You know, you give yourself some margins for error, really. That's what it is.

So I think the match will be played a bit different. Then again, this is a hard court, I know, but it plays very different to Australia. We have different balls, different grit of court.

Yeah, because it's early in the tournament, I think we both don't quite yet know to 100% how everything feels.

So there is a bit of the unknown, which, I mean, is exciting maybe for the fans or you guys to see how we're going to try to figure that part out. And then it's a best of three set match. This is more of a sprint than a marathon, not like in Australia.

Q. We hear so much about what motivates young players these days, whether first Masters Series 1000 or winning first Grand Slam. If you strip it all back, what is the primary thing that motivates you these days? Is it the comeback story? The one-on-one out there on big stadium courts or is it a rivalry with someone like a Rafa Nadal?

ROGER FEDERER: I think a bit of everything, like the three things you said. Could be playing sometimes for history and could be playing in certain places in certain countries. Yeah, you name it.

I think I draw motivation from all aspects. In the beginning, it might be very much just playing on center court or playing against a top-10 player. Or ranking. Very simple, because the rankings are so cool in tennis because they change every week and you are trying to calculate as a young player.

I think later on things change a bit, and almost become a bit more enjoyable. Whereas, in the beginning, everything is such a hype and so new that you're freaking out and you can't control yourself.

Q. You touched on the dimensions, the court, and difference from here to Australia and the physical aspect of playing Rafa and all that. But over the years, has your mental approach changed or adjusted as you go into matches against him? If

so, how?

ROGER FEDERER: It's definitely changed. I think I go back to the other question. Sometimes you play him in a spell that maybe is not good for you. I have had the same against Murray. I lost a few on the trot and it's just hard to break the code, if you like, when that happens.

And then when you don't play for a while, sometimes you -- I don't know -- you relax or some things also change in his game or your game and then it matches up better.

So I definitely see things a bit more relaxed these days. I mean, look, I have always tried hard and tried my very best. And then of course it changes, quite honestly, if you play him on clay or not, because that's where you know he's the favorite, regardless of who your opponent is.

Yeah, then you know it's up to you, not up to him, because you know what he's going to bring.

Q. Many of your fans cite an appreciation for the pure aesthetic quality of your game. Do aesthetics play a role in how you think about your game? Does it matter or do you care at all about that?

ROGER FEDERER: Not really. I don't move around the court to please (laughter). I don't hit shots so, like, every other shot is, Oh, my God, they have not seen a shot like this. I do believe that if you play tough and hard and good, that the great shots will come.

That's what I had to tell myself early on in my career because I was a shotmaker. I tried to please the crowd too often, and then you end up losing points. Or people just don't care if you did that on Court 5 except for maybe the 15 people that were actually watching. (Laughter.)

It's only on the big court where there is slow-mo and cameras and everything like that that it actually gets captured and replayed. Then it's actually maybe worth it to pull off a great shot.

But these days, you know, I try to win. And then by winning it gives me another opportunity to do better the next match. Yeah, that's it.