

BNP Paribas Open

Wednesday, March 15, 2017

Roger Federer

Press Conference



R. FEDERER/R. Nadal

6-2, 6-3

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. You lost the first point in something like 13 of 17 games, and then you won 8 of those games.

ROGER FEDERER: I don't understand.

Q. 13 games?

ROGER FEDERER: Matches or games?

Q. Games today.

ROGER FEDERER: Yeah.

Q. Out of 17, you lost the first point.

ROGER FEDERER: Got it. Now I understand what you're talking about. That's how it felt, as well (smiling).

Q. When that happened, did you feel tight or relaxed?

ROGER FEDERER: Not relaxed. But I felt like that's a bad start, even though on some of them I don't think I played poorly. I think Rafa picked a side which I served on again, stuff like that.

But that's something I need to do better, you know, that's for sure. Because going down Love-15 on your serve is not something you want to do all the time.

Going down 15-Love on his serve, that's something that's -- that's not a problem. You just move on and you wish you could have won the point, but you can only try your best.

On your serve, I feel like 15-Love lead can be quite critical, you know, down the stretch in the game.

Q. You mentioned in the on-court interview that you noticed maybe Rafa's footwork was off a little bit today, and you definitely were playing aggressive, taking time away from him. Did you notice that early on? Did that affect your strategy at all?

ROGER FEDERER: No. I mean, for me, it was all about coming out and trying to play the way I did in Australia. I didn't think it was going to be that possible,

to be quite honest, because the court is more jumpy here or more rough, let's say, so it's hard to put the ball away.

I have seen, as well, like against Johnson yesterday, when you serve well and stay on the offensive and you press, you can actually play some really good, aggressive tennis here.

It's hard to dig your way out of defense, because the ball doesn't skid on you as an attacker, and I think I did well again today. You know, I said yesterday it was more a sprint than a marathon. So getting in the lead was crucial, and then staying on the offense and pressing was the goal for me.

Once I got the break in the second set, obviously you had to be very careful you didn't get down double break. And I was able to hold my serve, and he couldn't find a way how to get into my service games more frequently. Next thing you know, it's all over. It was a really good performance by me, I thought.

Q. It seems it was an easy match. Can you explain?

ROGER FEDERER: Physically it was easy, because we didn't have many long rallies. It wasn't quite intense. It wasn't three-and-a-half hours like in Melbourne, but we knew that going in.

If you look at most of the matches, like Kyrgios against Djokovic or you name it, there is not that many long rallies unless both players really want it. When one guy doesn't want to have long rallies, you know, you can bail out with big serves, big shots.

And I think Rafa knew that he had to do some of that, too. It wasn't enough just to putting the ball in play. That's why the points stayed short.

So for me it was physically a good match. Also, looking ahead, it's always good saving energy, conserving energy for the rest of the tournament, but also for the rest of the season and for your life, because every step more you take on court has an effect down the road, I believe (smiling).

Q. You had a lot of matches against Rafa but not many consecutive wins. Now you're three straight.

Getting that sort of achievement at 35, does it surprise you or what's it mean to you having this hot streak and this rivalry that's been tough for you?

ROGER FEDERER: Yeah, exactly. It's a nice feeling to win the last three. I can tell you that.

But most importantly, I won Australia. That was big for me. On the comeback, I look back at that and think that was one of the coolest things I ever experienced in my career.

Basel was special, too, for many reasons, because I used to be ballboy there. I never played Rafa prior to that finals.

Then now, here, after the Australian hype, you know, to play here in America right away, all of them are very special.

I mean, all the matches that we have played are unique in many ways for both of us, winning or losing. So I take it. Obviously can't celebrate too long this time around. I have to get back to work in a couple of days.

Q. Besides the court difference, what do you think were the big difference, like, between today and in Australian Open?

ROGER FEDERER: I don't think we had quite the rhythm that we had in Australia, but we knew that going in. And I think he, especially from the baseline, he didn't control the ball as well as he did in Australia.

I actually surprised myself by the control I had on the baseline because, against Steve Johnson, I really struggled to control the ball.

So I thought it was going to be even more crazy against Rafa with his spin and his lefty hook and everything. It was going to be much tougher.

Because in practice this morning I hardly made any returns. I didn't know what was going on. I thought it was going to be rough.

But then I came into the match and I warmed up with Rafa. In those five minutes, I was like, whew, I'm feeling pretty good and the spin is not bothering me so much. So I wondered why that is. And that stayed like this during the match, as well.

Q. Fans love all of your shots, but I think they particularly love your backhand. Could you give us a few free-form thoughts about your backhand, how it's evolved over the years, how you have worked on it, especially recently? Did you do a lot of video work Ivan, avoiding the net, being

aggressive? Talk about that.

ROGER FEDERER: I think with the bigger racquet, head size, and definitely having an easier time to come over the return, especially, and then stay aggressive throughout the rally, as well.

Clearly because it has more power, I have to be careful, you know, how I manage that because the ball flies out of the racquet faster than with my previous racquet, before '14, that I had for a few years there.

So for me, I think it was the work that I had in November/December. It's weird, you know, but you just feel like it's paying off, you know. Because I hit so many balls at practice, you go much more rhythm, rhythm, rhythm, and eventually you play points and sets and you realize all that rhythm, you almost don't need it.

Because look at the rallies today. There was hardly any normal rallies against Steve Johnson. One is a slice, one is a huge topspin, one is a block return.

You never play ten backhand to backhand shots, but in practice you practice those a ton and eventually they are engrained in the system and you feel way better.

I think the backhand and putting -- has gotten better because I have been able to put so many hours onto the racquet now. And really, since this year, I feel super comfortable with the racquet, and I think I have also gained confidence stepping into it.

Obviously you have to take it on the rise, and for that you need good footwork, because if the footwork is not right, you won't be on top of the ball.

So I think all my coaches throughout my career have told me to go more for the backhand, but I used to shank more. So maybe deep down I didn't always believe that I had it in the most important moments. But I think that's changing little by little, which I'm very happy about.

Q. Just what's the evolution on the racquet since '14? Any other change?

ROGER FEDERER: Let me just be clear. I have to be sure. I think -- well, I changed it in the 97-square-inch in '14. In '13, I was testing when I had back problems which started here.

Was testing racquets through the clay court season after taking wildcards after losing early, I think, in Wimbledon when I played Gstaad and Hamburg. That was a different kind of 97-square-inch racquet I was trying with Wilson. But the problem with the back issues was still not 100% clear.

And I came to Cincinnati, was practicing still with, you know, with the bigger racquet head size all the way two days before the -- two days before the first round in Cincinnati.

And then I pulled the plug on the big racquet and just said, You know what? First I need to figure out my back. I played the rest of the season with the 90 till the end of the year.

And then I got back into testing, tested a different kind of racquet again, which was even better than the one I was testing in the summer, and then I started basically in -- I guess I played Brisbane in Australia, and then I made the semis I think and lost to Rafa in Australia.

So that's when it started. Then paint got put on the racquet eventually after the year, because the first one wasn't sold, so you can't put any color on it, yeah, that's...

Q. No change since then?

ROGER FEDERER: No. It's a bit of a different paint now, black to what I had before. That plays slightly different, but not much.

Q. A couple years ago Pat Rafter said Nick Kyrgios was the best talent he had seen since you. He's Australian so he might be biased. Do you see any similarities in the freakish talent that you have and some of the talent that he's got?

ROGER FEDERER: I don't know. That's really up to others to judge. You know, what are we talking about? When we were both 17 or 19? That's the question. You know...

Q. He's 21. You won your first major, what, 20?

ROGER FEDERER: I was 22 when I won my first major. He's still got time (smiling).

I don't want to say I was a late-bloomer. I don't think I was, per se, but the problem was that I had other guys like Lleyton and Safin and Roddick all before me who were my age.

So I think that really helped me to elevate my game and draw motivation from those guys that I didn't want to lag behind those guys. That was good for me, because that gave me power to work harder at myself.

I see what Pat is saying. I think both our games need a bit more time, you know, especially on the mental side and on the physical side.

Just bringing it day to day, everyday practice, all that stuff doesn't come as natural for maybe Nick and myself than for the others, where I thought, you know,

whether you're fully grown or they knew exactly what they needed to do in practice, or, you know, tactically, technically they are all very sound already.

I feel like Nick and me, we have a lot of options, so it's hard for us to always pick the right one, and maybe there are some similarities more than anywhere.

Q. Can you talk about the way Nick is playing? He has at least two wins over Novak, but do you see any kind of parallels of facing him the next round to maybe when you faced Pete at Wimbledon several years ago?

ROGER FEDERER: Similarities? Jeez, I don't know. It's not Wimbledon here. And we have played before already. I played Pete one time that time. That was my first time on Centre Court. So I think there was much more at stake really than what's now.

And I think he's more established than I was back then already, or I felt, at least, because he was already beating -- he's already beaten great players for a while now. I don't think I was doing that great as he was, you know. I didn't have that big of a game, you know, per se, with the serve and everything.

So I don't see that much, to be quite honest.

But I'm very impressed him taking out Novak, back-to-back weeks, on Novak's best surface. I hope it's going to lead to something great for Nick that he realizes, you know, if he puts his head down and focuses that he can bring it, you know, day in and day out, week in and week out.

That's maybe going to take a bit more time, but just that he can run through tournaments, that's why he can win tournaments, because when it matters the most against the best and in finals, he's there. Eventually he will need that, but that's a great quality to have already now.

Q. It's been almost a couple of years since you last played Nick and on the one occasion. What are your thoughts going into tomorrow's match or the next day's match about coming up against him again?

ROGER FEDERER: I'm happy it's not on the birthday of my boys, because I miss being with them. I had to waste a match point and lose that match. I was like, What a waste. I always go to Madrid. That's how I felt.

I'm happy my family is here. It's not anybody's birthday, and I could just focus on playing tennis. I'm playing in more normal conditions, because Madrid plays very different, super fast. I had my chances. I think I was even up a set and a break even, if I'm not mistaken.

But, you know, I'm looking forward to it. I don't know what to tell you. He's a great player, he played great again today. He played good against Zverev, as well. He had a good Acapulco.

So it's really going to be interesting if we play day or night. I don't know how that plays into the matchup. Of course I'd like to get him back.

Q. You keep saying that you're on the comeback.

ROGER FEDERER: Till April.

Q. What's missing that you...

ROGER FEDERER: Time. I'm playing through different continents. I played in Australia, played in the Middle East. Now I'm playing here.

And once this is done, to me, completely, the comeback is complete by April. That's how I saw it in November, and I will stick to that.

But nothing's changed. Just because I won Australia -- I'm definitely ahead of schedule. I have had no setbacks. This is a tough surface for the body, because you can change direction on a dime. So this is the ultimate test, if you like, playing here in Indian Wells and Miami.

I'm very pleased how my body has pulled up, and it's great to see that I'm playing as well as I am. I didn't expect it, because I was tired still in Dubai. I think that had something to do definitely with Australia still and healing the injury that I had.

I got the energy back and the spark is back in my legs and in my game. I'm playing good, so I'm very happy.