

BNP Paribas Open

Friday, March 17, 2017

Elena Vesnina

Press Conference

E. VESNINA/K. Mladenovic

6-3, 6-4

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. That wasn't bad. You were seeing the ball huge today. Can you just talk about how you found that?

ELENA VESNINA: Yes, I was hitting quite clear today. I was feeling very comfortable in the court with my shots. Every time when I had kind of the opportunity to move her around, I was using that every time. I was not trying to play safe on some key moments. Everything was, like, going from me. You know, I was trying to take it from her, not giving her any time.

Because when Kiki is having time, she can run around with the forehand, create great angles and shots. Especially with the backhand, she can slice and dropshot. At the net she's one of the best players.

She's using this really smart. When she was down in the score, she was actually swinging and using this net game a lot.

Q. Talk about nights like this when your belief in your shots really just backs it up and you can really go for it.

ELENA VESNINA: Yeah, not every day you have nights like that when you're in semifinal of such a prestigious event and fighting for the final.

Yeah, of course, it's not easy, you know, to hold your nerve. But I'm really happy the way I handle it again. You know, I was very focused, I was very concentrate on every point. I was not thinking about the final.

I was just thinking particularly about every single game, every single shot, like, I need to build opportunity. I was really trying to be leading in the score, you know, because it's very important when you are up in the score and you're always behind, you know.

So Kiki was always trying to play her best tennis when she was behind on the score. It's not easy to come back from 5-Love and 5-1. It's not easy at all.

Even I know that at 5-4 it was big game for me on my serve. I was still, like, kind of telling myself that I'm still



ahead of this game. I'm still serving for the match. It's not like I'm down 4-5 in the final set.

All this kind of positive thinking and experience, as well. I was serving a lot of times for the match in doubles, for the finals, Grand Slam finals, championship finals, Olympic Games finals. So I kind of had this kind of pressure. Even in doubles it's still pressure when you're serving for the match and you need to close such a big match for you.

Q. How different is your mentality in those pressure moments now compared to maybe where your mind would maybe wander five years ago?

ELENA VESNINA: I think it's in much better place now than it was five years ago.

I definitely build some confidence. I definitely have some more consistency through the match, through the year, as well, you know.

I'm playing better and better every game. It's not a surprise for me, to be honest.

I'm not feeling, like, Oh, my God, I'm playing so great. Where it came from?

I knew I could play well. I know I have the game. I have the shots. I have the serve. I was just -- it was just about the consistency and using the right shots on the right moment. Don't panic, don't rush, you know, stay focused.

That's actually goal for me to play like this for the whole year. Because all the top 10 players, biggest players, that's their biggest weapon. They always staying cool on, like, tough moments. And they choosing, picking the right shots on the right moment. They don't -- and they don't giving anything.

So that was kind of my game plan, as well, for the offseason. I was trying to work on my mental part, to be strong on this kind of momentum. It's not easy, you know. It's easy to say, like, I'm working, I'm working. But when you're on the match, you can just lose the momentum and lose your rhythm and it's just gone.

Q. How do you work on that, though, in the offseason? Because you haven't got the match

practice. You haven't got that kind of pressure.

What do you do? Do you meditate? What?

ELENA VESNINA: By education, I'm a sports psychologist. I finished university. And I'm reading a lot of books about that. Not a lot of books, let's be honest. I read couple of books (smiling).

Big books, yeah. They were big books, yeah.

Yeah, I'm trying -- actually, it's great examples to read sometimes biography of the champions like Agassi. I'm waiting when they gonna translate Li Na biography in English and then Russian.

It's interesting to see on examples of other players, because they always saying -- it's very interesting to read the interview of the big champions, what they were feeling. Of course, they not gonna be 100% honest with you, but still, these kind of things, it's always helping you, you know.

As well, when you're talking with these champions in the locker room, as well, you know, some giving your advice, like Martina Navratilova. I know her for many years, and she was kind of always giving me some little advices in the locker room, trying to -- not help me, but kind of cheer me up, you know, in the tough moments.

Yeah, all these things it's coming with the years on the tour. I'm not the new person on the tour. I'm playing for many years. And I have couple -- many of the situations when I was down in the score, coming back, you know, had the tough seasons, you know.

So it's just matter of how you feel and how you believe in yourself, I think, same time.

Q. What hit home for you in the Agassi book?

ELENA VESNINA: What?

Q. Was there anything in the Andre Agassi book?

ELENA VESNINA: Yes.

Q. What hit home for you?

ELENA VESNINA: A lot of things. How he was working, how he was coming back after this bad moment in his life, when he was down in the ranking, divorced. I mean, all this, like, tough moments in your personal life.

He would still be able to, you know, kind of going on the court and enjoying what he was doing. You know, he was really -- he loved the sport so much. He loved tennis so much. Even he didn't, I think, like to practice much. In the book he was not saying, like, he was enjoying it that much.

Yeah, it's great example of the player who was on the

top and then, when the very bottom and everybody forget about him and nobody believe in him, and he was still doing the same things, same job, you know. And he, like, worked his way back, like, totally worked it out. You know, it's respect, you know, to this person.

Q. That sounds a lot like you.

ELENA VESNINA: Nothing to compare it to, great champion like Agassi.

Q. A year ago you lost first round...

ELENA VESNINA: Quallies.

Q. And made Charleston final and stuff. Can you talk about that journey, about being a bit forgotten last season?

ELENA VESNINA: Yeah, that was a big turnaround now for me from first round of qually and now being in the final. This is a dream.

I hope it's a great example for other players, you know, that everything can happen if you're believe in yourself, you know that you have the game, you know.

And even when nothing is going your way and you're losing in the first round of qualification, what can be worse? For the tennis players, I think it's the worst result you can get, first round. You know, doesn't matter singles, qualifying, or main draw.

Don't put yourself down and keep building these wins. Because last year, actually, I played a lot of tournaments from the quallies and it helps me. I was playing from the beginning against not top 50 players. I was playing against players outside of the top 100, same ranking as mine.

And I was getting these wins, like, it was hard, you know, not easy, without confidence, but still win is the win.

I was going through the qualification. Then I won the first round in main draw. Then in Miami I had great round against Venus. I pulled, like, great tennis in that moment when I really need that. Then I lost 7-6 in the third to Konta. I know she's a top-10 player now.

These kind of things give you belief that you're almost there. Your ranking is not there, but your game is there. I think this is the most important, thinking about your game, not about your points. I'm going to be 71 or 65 or 27 or something.

It doesn't really matter. I think the most important thing is when you're No. 1 in the world. I think that's amazing, you know.

Everything else is just, you know, you have -- I said

before, you have to enjoy what you're doing. You have to appreciate what you have.

Q. You're into the final, obviously. Do you remember the first time you came here?

ELENA VESNINA: Yes.

Q. What was it like?

ELENA VESNINA: I actually remember it so good.

Q. Really?

ELENA VESNINA: Yes. I was 16 years old, and it was my first time in America, like, ever. I came here, my ranking was around 250. I didn't get in into the qualify. I didn't know how to enter into the tournament, first of all. I entered, but I didn't know where to check the entry list. I was totally kid who came here. I didn't get in.

But when I just got here, I looked outside, I was like, Oh, my God, I want to live here (smiling).

I was staying with a really nice old lady in her house. She had, like, two cars, one was convertible, had the garden with oranges, with grapefruits, you know. Everything was just so beautiful here.

The tournament, the facilities, I saw so many courts, I think, first time in my life, you know, having gym, you know, player lounge, locker rooms, everything on such a high level.

It was first time I saw it, I was, like, Whoa, I really, really want to play this tournament. I was dreaming just to get here, to be honest, next year, just to play here. I was thinking I want to play well in singles, but the result was not here. In doubles I won three times title here, and singles it was just not going this way.

So finally, this year, after all these years, yeah, I'm in the final (smiling).

Q. Can you talk about potentially the two opponents, what kind of games they would bring against you?

ELENA VESNINA: Potentially it can be Russian final. Svetlana, we played I think few times against each other, three, four times. I beat her once, but then she beat me last, I think, time on clay.

She obviously liked playing here with the balls flying and jumping quite high. She's using her forehand -- like, powerful forehand topspin here a lot. Brings a lot of points.

What I saw in couple of matches against -- I mean, Svetlana was playing -- she was serving really well in

key moments. It's going to be very difficult match, you know, when you're playing against kind of the -- from the same country. You know, it's never easy, but I'm going to just enjoy.

Doesn't matter if it's going to be Pliskova or Kuznetsova. Pliskova No. 3 in the world. She's definitely having amazing season. She improve so much. I think she's one of the few players on the tour who improved, like, in two years a lot. Like, Pliskova say two years ago and now, totally different player.

And she's in semifinal, of course. It's gonna be not easy match for both of them. Doesn't matter who I'm going to play. For me, gonna be very difficult match. One is No. 3 and one is No. 7. Both top-10 players.

It's not easy, but I hope I can play good tennis in the final. I hope I can enjoy it and hope I can show the best tennis as well in the final.

Q. Can you just, on that, with Pliskova and her improvement, can you go into that a little bit? Like Karolina from two years ago, like how different of a player is she now?

ELENA VESNINA: She start working a lot, working on her fitness, on her footwork.

I think the thing that actually change in her game, she start bending her knees. It's not easy with the height she has. You know, she's a very tall girl.

She really improve in her movement on the court. And I think she start to defend better, defending, you know, on the baseline.

She's working well with her new coach, David, and I mean, we know that he was coaching Petra and Petra was doing really well with him.

And, yeah, she's definitely improving, I think, every time what I see her. You know, two, three years ago, she was very relaxed, not working much on the court, you know. But good thing about Karolina, she didn't change at all. Since I saw her first time and now, she didn't change at all.

Q. Her personality?

ELENA VESNINA: Personality. She's, like, quiet and cool girl. She's really funny girl at the same time. Yeah.