

Rolex Monte-Carlo Masters

Principality of Monaco

Wednesday, 14 April 2021

Novak Djokovic

Press Conference



N. DJOKOVIC/J. Sinner

6-4, 6-2

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. I remember you when you were 19, but I'd like to know if you remember yourself when you were 19. Were you better or worse than Jannik Sinner, even today Jannik didn't play his best?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Well, I don't like to compare myself to even my younger self, even more with somebody else. I think he's very talented player. He has established already himself at I feel like high level of the men's game, playing Masters finals, winning already a couple of tournaments, for his age.

I think what impresses me the most is his professionalism, his dedication to the everyday routines that he has to endure in order to play at such high level. I think this is why the consistency of his results is there.

For a young player like this, what we normally would see and expect is he got a couple of good weeks here and there, but the consistency is not there until the young player matures.

With him it's different. He really has a good mindset. He seems more mature for his age than the rest of the guys with the way he's playing and training. He's got a good tempo. From the baseline he makes the other guy feel he's got to run a lot.

I like his game. I think he has an all-around game. He can play equally well on all the surfaces, which he has proven.

Obviously there's always things to improve. But he's in good hands. Riccardo is someone that I know very well. He was my coach when I was younger, around his age. I definitely wish him all the best. I'm sure the bright future is ahead of him.

Q. You play Dan Evans next. I know you haven't

played him before. Do you have any thoughts on his game, what sort of test he might provide tomorrow?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Very smart player. You would think that with his game maybe the clay would suit him the least, but he's proving people wrong. I mean, he can play equally well on clay. He moves great. Very, very dynamic, explosive player. Great forehand, good serve. He comes to the net. He uses his slice very well.

The variety in his game I think is something that I would probably point out as something that makes him probably dangerous on any surface really.

I have never played him, as you pointed out. Obviously every time you face someone for the first time, probably I'm going to have to use a little bit more analysis of his game prior to tomorrow's match, talk to few people and my coach as well, try to prepare myself as best as I can.

Yeah, let's see what happens.

Q. You looked very solid today for a first match on clay and first match for a long time.

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Thank you.

Q. Is all the work paying? Explain a little bit how you felt today on court.

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: I felt good. I think 'solid' is a good word to describe the performance. Obviously I know I can always do better. I'm working towards playing even on a higher level than I did today.

I have to be satisfied considering I think I had a tough draw for the first round, playing Sinner, who is in form, who is striking the ball very well. I knew it was going to be a challenge. I walked into the court with the right intensity, right focus.

First maybe three, four games I was still feeling maybe not as comfortable hitting the ball. Then I started to work my way in the match. Yeah, just made him play, made him move. It's not easy playing someone that has not much to

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lose, young player like Sinner. His game style is such that he smacks the ball quite hard from both ends, so you got to kind of weather the storm and use the angles well.

Q. I would like to now how comfortable are you when your father gave interviews? Are you proud of him on those occasions or, Daddy, stop talking, please, like we used to do with our parents?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Well, look, I love my father. My father is greatest support that I had, especially in the early days. But obviously I can't affect what he says. I mean, it is what it is (smiling).

Everyone thinks with their own head. I mean, I have to accept it and respect it. My father is a very, very passionate man. He protects me and he loves me. I know that he does it with the purest and best intentions.

Maybe we all say or do things that maybe some other people get offended by that or something like that. I understand that.

I mean, look, I still stand by my father and whatever he's doing. We are family. Of course, I'm going to stay on his side and protect him. I can't always agree with everything he says.

Q. You have played your career with a certain calendar, a certain rhythm to the year, surface to surface. Things are different these days. With the normal gap you have, the French, then you go (indiscernible) before you get ready to play this tournament and Rome, work your way up to Paris. Having played the French Open in October, does it feel different, this buildup? How is your preparation also having had this long break since Australia and not the normal trip to the U.S., then on the hard courts before switching to the clay?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Well, everything is different in the last 15 months. I mean, everything that we are used to, we don't experience that kind of a calendar or schedule. There is a lot of adjustments to be made from all of us, part of the ecosystem in tennis.

I have a very good team of people around me. I know what needs to be done in order to prepare myself, to peak at the French Open, which is definitely the tournament where I want to play my best tennis on this surface.

But it's a long way. I want to try to do well here in Monaco, then Belgrade, home tournament, obviously something that excites me a lot.

Playing in front of no crowds and empty stadiums is something that obviously is strange, and hopefully just a temporary thing. We need crowds back on the stands. I'm sure that other sports, other performance people and athletes and entertainers, probably share the same opinion. The crowd give us so much energy. Also it adds to the motivation in a sense to what we do, the sport that we are a part of.

At the same time I try to take the positive side of it. We have this calm and kind of serenity on the stands and on the court. It just allows you to maybe focus on yourself a bit more, not have maybe as many distractions around that can happen. I try to focus on those positives and be optimistic and build my form.

I just started my clay court campaign, so it's a long way to Paris. Hopefully I'll be able to play consistently well and stay healthy. Then French, as I say, where I want to peak.

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