

# Rolex Monte-Carlo Masters

Principality of Monaco

Sunday, 11 April 2021

## Novak Djokovic

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

**Q. You obviously haven't played since Australia, which is not a typical schedule for you. Is there any specific adjustment you feel you need to make, whether mentally, physically, to feel prepared for the clay season?**

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Well, not in particular. I have had some periods in my career where I didn't play a tournament for maybe couple months, then came back. So, I mean, I don't think there is anything special I have to do in terms of preparation in order for me to feel my best on the court.

I've been training quite a lot on clay. Actually ever since I pulled out from Miami, I was hitting on clay. Here in Monte-Carlo actually where I reside with the family, it was convenient and feels great.

I feel physically prepared. Mentally I missed tennis last couple months that I haven't been competing. I look forward to my first match.

It's unfortunate we don't have a crowd, but it's a common thing nowadays. Hopefully we'll be seeing crowd very, very soon in big tournaments in Europe.

**Q. Were you surprised at all by the news that Toni Nadal is coaching Felix? Have you ever imagined Marian Vajda coaching someone else on tour while you're still playing?**

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Hard to imagine at this moment that Marian would be coaching someone else while I'm still playing. But, look, Rafa and Toni are not traveling and working together for few years now already. Toni was probably looking for a new challenge.

It honestly did not surprise me too much. I know Felix has spent quite a bit of time in the last couple years in Rafa's academy training and getting an advice and mentorship from Toni when he was there. Toni probably was excited to explore a new project, a new so to say adventure on the tour with one of the best young tennis players in the world

at the moment.

Felix is a great guy. He's someone that has hard-working ethics, which is something that is very important for Toni. I wish them all the best. It's nice to see Toni on the tour. Obviously he's had his mark with Rafa for so many years. I feel like he can only bring positives to Felix's game and mindset.

**Q. As you said, you live here. It's your everyday training camp, if I can say. How is it to see the club almost as it is in your everyday life, different from the tournament usually? Will you feel different when you enter the court for your first match?**

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Well, it's definitely going to be a different feeling. This club usually in a normal conditions when we have the crowd allowed to come to the tournament is transformed a lot. Right now you don't see that transformation so much.

Usually there's a lot of courts that are being transformed into a village or something like that because there is not much space, so they have to use some of the courts for sponsor tents and stuff like this.

Right now, as you don't have crowd, sponsor people allowed, there's more court, so it's better for training, for practice. In a normal circumstances, it's always tricky to get courts for a lot of players, one hour there, an hour here. A lot of players have to share at the beginning of the tournament.

Right now I see most of the players are playing one-on-one without needing to share because there's plenty of room.

The positive thing about it, I was actually training with Tsitsipas today, and we spoke about it with Medvedev that it's kind of nice to see that it's nice to play at home in a way, because you sleep at home in your apartment, which we allowed to do this tournament, which is great.

You play the tournament at the club where you usually come to train. You still spend time outdoors walking around the club, which you don't have normally opportunity



to do because there's so many people, it's just impossible to walk around. Now you can actually go and check out some training sessions from other players or matches, just be outdoor on the fresh air, which is something that we are grateful for because nowadays with all the bubble and safe environment and restrictions that we have to be part of on the tour, it's actually nice you get to have some fresh air.

**Q. I'd like to ask, since you said you have been practicing always there, if you had the chance to practice with Jannik Sinner who could possibly be your opponent, which will be your first round? Have you seen him playing recently on TV or so?**

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: I have practiced a lot with Jannik in the previous years. I haven't trained with him a lot in the last year and a half because we were just not at the same place at the same time. He's always traveling for tournaments.

But before that, in that period of two, three years, when he was a junior coming up, we trained a lot actually in Piatti's academy, here in Monaco, both hard courts, clay courts. So I have seen his development, so to say, his trajectory, his road to where he is at the moment.

It's really impressive. He's very, very nice person. He's working really hard. He's devoted. He's got all the goods that he needs in order to become a champion. He's in a right way. He's surrounded with very good people from tennis coach, fitness coach, physio. I know all these people from a long time. Riccardo was my coach the first years of my professional career. He's in good hands.

Let's see. Obviously there is a lot of the achievements that I'm sure he wants to achieve in his career as he's pointing out. He's very ambitious. Playing finals of Miami was obviously highlight of his career so far. But I think he has been very consistent player actually. He's always playing at least quarters or semis of the 250s or 500s.

He has been very impressive. It seems like he's not satisfied with what he has achieved so far. He wants to do more, which is great to see there's the hunger in him.

We never faced each other in official match, so it would be definitely great to play him on clay, and let's see what happens.

**Q. You said that you're now able to stay at home this week, which is a unique situation. Can you expand a little bit on the restrictions, what you're able and not able to do in this case?**

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Well, they're constantly changing the

rules. ATP has put forward the protocol that we have to follow in all the tournaments, regardless of the so to say regulations of the local authorities and the governments. We are in so-called safe environment. I wouldn't call it a bubble because it's not really a bubble, but it is a safe environment, so to say, where they reduce I guess the risk of transmission of the virus as much as possible. I guess all the players would not -- that large a number, you wouldn't reach a large number of players infected that would affect greatly the tour and the weeks to follow this specific week and tournament.

But it's great that us who are residents here have a chance to sleep at home, for sure. We have that housing option. But you have to be in the bubble and basically stay at home and come back, come to the tennis. I think they have an hour allowance of exercise outdoors where you can walk outside, but not to the crowded areas.

I'm not exactly sure, let's say, of every detail of that rule. What I've told you is what I know. I just kind of got into the bubble, into the safe environment - sorry - today. It doesn't change much for me anyway since I decided not to go into the safe environment earlier. I just did it today because I wanted to be free and kind of go around and not have the restrictions.

But from today anyway I'm in the tournament mode. Most of the time I'll be spending on the courts.

**Q. Medvedev just said one of the reasons why he doesn't like clay is because he gets dirty and the ball bounces irregular. Most players play from the baseline, not as much serve and volley. Is playing well on clay as much about kind of the mental side and acceptance as well as the technical aspects between clay and hard courts?**

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Yes, you're right. I think clay requires a lot of adjustments. Yes, the ball bounces irregular. It's quite unpredictable at times. If the courts are not in a perfect state, which is normal, if you have rain, wind, different conditions that can affect the condition of the court, then obviously mentally you just have to stay out there. I will use this term 'grind' mentally and physically more than any other surface, I would say.

It can be very frustrating at times because sometimes you just feel like maybe you can't make a winner, you can't make an easy point with your serve like you usually do on the other surfaces. So it requires a tactical and definitely technical adjustment. The positioning on the court has to vary all the time.

A lot of guys, including myself, who usually attacks the

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

return on other faster surfaces, on clay I would probably be more optional there, maybe mix it up, go back from deep in the court, send a looping topspin, then try to get into the rally. It's a very strategic surface that requires a lot of strategic thinking and tactical adjustment, so to say.

Yes, you do get dirty (laughter). It's necessary, I guess, in order to have success on this surface.

**Q. I'm wondering what you're thinking about Roland Garros pushing back the tournament for a week. Is it mattering for your schedule? Do you think it was the right move? What are your thoughts?**

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: It's hard to say, I mean, whether it was a right move or not. I'm not in the French Federation or the French government to understand what is going on in Paris, what are the reasons for that.

Obviously these are the things that we just have to accept and kind of move on, hoping that the tournament will be played in the end of the day. That's what we want.

Last year was also quite specific because they moved it to October. It was cold, it was the first time that we got to play French Open in those particular conditions. This time it's going to be moved only for a week.

As I understood, one of the main reasons is because there might be a loosening of the restrictions so that the crowd allowance percentage will grow. Hopefully that will happen.

Every time you move any tournament for a week, I mean, particularly a Grand Slam, it messes up with the calendar and the schedule. That's going to be a big challenge for ATP. Every time you make that kind of a call, you have to see how that impacts the entire tour.

It affects many tournaments and many weeks, not just in that particular week, but also what's coming up between French and Wimbledon, the first week of grass courts.

It's tough to say what is right, what is wrong. From Grand Slam, from their perspective, it was obviously right call because they're thinking about themselves. Then the ATP Tour, their tournaments are going to suffer because of that. It's hard to say what is right, what is wrong.

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