

April 3, 2009

Sony Ericsson Open

N. DJOKOVIC/R. Federer

3-6, 6-2, 6-3

An interview with:

NOVAK DJOKOVIC

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. We're so used to seeing Roger keeping his emotions under control. What was your reaction when you saw him slam his racquet down?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Look, it's obvious frustration. I think he can answer better why he did it. I just tried to keep my focus. I was on a roll in this period of the match, so I just tried to continue on playing patiently and win the match.

Q. Were you pleased? Because you started a little shakily today. Took a wee bit of time to get into rhythm or confidence.

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: It did. We played quite a lot of the matches against each other. Mostly our matches were played on this surface, which is quite suitable to his game and my game, as well.

But I think -- I had the biggest success against him on hardcourts. I knew that, but I knew also that I was always starting the matches against him quite unpatiently [sic] and playing more than -- more aggressive than I needed to.

So that was the scenario in the first set today. Even though I served really well, high percentage of the first serve, I was quite nervous and making lots of unforced errors.

But then it changed. I was just playing smarter afterwards.

Q. Did you feel like in the second set there was a key game? I think it was 4-2, five breakpoints. Did you feel like that was the key to the match. Did you feel him unravel after that on the court?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Yeah, I felt it. I felt that I have a game -- even from the start of the match I felt I played well. But then in important moments, break balls, I just make some really uncharacteristic unforced errors.

As I said, later in the match it changed. I just waited more, being more patient and creating the opportunity to make a winner in the point and waiting for his unforced errors.

We kind of changed the roles. I think, yeah, on 3-2 second set it was a key game. Afterwards, I started playing much better.

Q. Is that a shock when you see a player like Roger Federer with his class and greatness give you just points on some of those forehands that he would never miss a few years ago?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Well, look, if you make him work - if you make anybody work on the court - it's normal that, you know, if he's not on the top of his level he starts making mistakes.

That's where you need to step it up and use the opportunity. That's what I did today: I returned really well and I always made him play another extra shot, which was important.

Q. Two days ago Roger said that he thought he had your game figured out. Do you think you surprised him a little today?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Well, I don't know. I just focused on my own game. We're pretty familiar with each other's game. I think there is no secrets. We played many times against each other, all the top players.

He tried to change the pace a lot on my backhand, and it was working in the first set. Then I started playing much better.

Q. He's been somewhat unpredictable lately. How does that change your attitude going into a match? Do you tend to want to sit back and see what he's doing, or go and play your game anyway?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Well, I needed to adjust, and that was really necessary after the first set. It was obvious that I wasn't doing something right, and that he wasn't playing anything special.

He just wasn't playing anything really special. He was just playing really wisely and changing the pace and playing a lot of short slices on my backhand.

That's where he opened up the opportunity to make, you know, offensive shot. That's what it did. Afterwards, I was the one who was changing a lot of pace and I was playing a lot of spins and just waiting patiently.

So you always need to adjust in the match. You know, even though you prepare the tactics before, sometimes it doesn't got the way you imagined or planned it to be. You just have to change it in the match.

Q. Did you sense his frustration even before he mangled the racquet? Did you sense that the frustration was mounting from him?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: No. I mean, look, Roger really hides his emotion really well, you know, so it wasn't -- I wasn't thinking about him and what he thinks in his head and the way he's playing. I just tried to focus on my game, because I know that I have enough quality to win against him.

I just need to play my game and be more aggressive and more patient in the certain moments. That was all.

Q. Just considering the conditions were quite gusty, did you feel like he was pressing more? You said you were the more patient player. Did you feel like you managed the conditions better than he did?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Well, I guess so. You know, it wasn't easy for both of us, that's for sure. You know, playing in the windy conditions it's never easy. Plus the sun getting straight to your visibility when you're tossing the ball to one side about 1:00, 2:00 p.m.

There are a lot of side factors, but it's the same for both of us. We can't pay attention too much on that. You just have to play your game and try to win.

Q. What about the chance to win this tournament after maybe a bit of a slow start on the season. Talk about that.

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: I play -- I think I play on a much higher level these days and I'm playing with more confidence and self-belief. Hopefully I can continue that in the upcoming match.

Q. Can you assess your chances against Del Potro or Andy? You've played them both.

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: I did. I love the last two times against Andy. It was close matches. All our matches were pretty close. But he drastically improved in the last year or so.

But whoever I play, I mean, it's going to be interesting to see who wins from both of them. Even they played a lot of close matches.

But it's a final. Everybody has a lot of motivation to win, and it's a big event. It's really unpredictable.

Q. Did you see Rafa's match the other night?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: I seen a little bit.

Q. Any thoughts on that?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Well, look, I think Juan Martin played really well and aggressive. He took his chances. He was -- he was brave in the moments he needed to be.

Q. Can you talk a little bit about coping being away from home for so long? Obviously you got your team here and other great Serbian players and the fans wherever you go. Is there anything about home that you miss, such as food, music...

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: That's for sure.

Q. What do you like to have, and do you get to have any on the road when you travel?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Now it's better with the food because my mother is here. I can have Serbian cuisine back in the hotel. But you always miss home, I think. You're traveling so much. There are many things.

I was born and grew up there, and I love to be there around my people speaking my language. It's all nostalgia [sic] for your country. But you have to get used to it. I got used to it.

I don't live that often in Belgrade as I do in Monte-Carlo. That's where I'm based now. This is just my life. This is what I've chosen to do.

Q. I think there are two Serbian restaurants in New York City. When you were at the US Open, did they invite you? Have you been there?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: No, actually not. I'll make sure I visit them.

Q. You talked about Andy's drastic improvement. Do you think it's a mental thing for him? Has he made changes in his game in terms of shot-making?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: I think many things combined. But physically-wise he's a much stronger and a lot of endurance out on the court. Even though he doesn't look like he's all boost up in him when he plays the match, he doesn't have that body language, but he's strong and has bigger muscles and runs all over the court. I get the feeling he can run a lot.

And he changes the pace a lot. Has is a smart, smart player who doesn't have any huge weapons, but again very solid from all the strokes.

Q. For a long time Roger Federer's forehand was considered the best shot he had, which is saying a lot. But you're not afraid to play him in long rallies to his forehand. You don't mind that forehand battle. Doesn't that change the psychology now when you play him?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: As I was saying before, it's all about adjustment throughout the match. He played really solid in the first set, but then he started to make a big amount of the unforced errors from that side.

So I tried to change pace and play fast and, then play a bit slower with the more spin. So more variety, as I can say, because he usually expects a ball on the backhand side, because that's where the players try to him.

But, you know, that's -- I think my game was all about today was I'm not giving him any consistency in one side so he can really be comfortable there.

So I think I played well.

Q. You've been No. 3 for almost two, three years. Do you feel like No. 2 is within reach?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: I don't think one match changes my ranking. But, yeah, there is a lot of time still in front. I'm still No. 3.

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