V. AZARENKA/S. Kuznetsova

6-3, 2-6, 7-5

An interview with:

VICTORIA AZARENKA

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. Did you get a little shaky on both sides out there at the end?

VICTORIA AZARENKA: Yeah, you know, when it was a match point Svetlana played great. She was more active and more aggressive, and I just went a little bit back and I wasn't that aggressive, which I should have done.

Q. How big a deal is it to you to get through a match of such importance against such an experienced player and to prove that you can win like that?

VICTORIA AZARENKA: It feels great that all the work I been doing is paying off. I was just trying to play every point from the beginning to the end.

Second set didn't go so well for me, but I was still hanging in there and just play every point no matter what.

Q. Do you feel like there's really no pressure on you because all the talk is about the Williams sisters, and here you make it to the end without much attention?

VICTORIA AZARENKA: I don't actually really care about that. I mean, obviously they are two great champions that everybody should talk about them. For me, it doesn't really matter. I'm not paying too much attention.

Q. Do you like coming in as an underdog? You don't really have any pressure. You have nothing to lose.

VICTORIA AZARENKA: I actually pretty much never have much pressure. I just go and play. No matter who I play or which match, it's match by match. Every match is important.

Q. Can you talk about the match your played against Serena where you withdrew and what that was like for you and what was happening?

VICTORIA AZARENKA: Well, I got very sick before the match. It was just kind of a bad luck, because I played really good against her. First set I won. I played very good.

Just in the second set I had no more energy. I couldn't keep up anymore, so that's pretty much what happened.

Q. Have you revisited that a lot in your mind, or no?

VICTORIA AZARENKA: No, it's just something that you have to think a little bit and let it go, not to get stuck on that.

Q. At the same time, the conditions today, it's still quite hot. It was a long match. How pleasing is it for you to be been able to deal with those conditions?

VICTORIA AZARENKA: Well, it was, you know, really, really tough, but I was preparing myself that it's going to be that tough and a long match. I have to stay in there. But the last points and the last games was really, really tough to even walk there.

But I'm just so happy that I found energy and that like fighting moment, that I had to fight, you know, no matter what. That was kind of adrenaline, I would say, on the last games. Not so much energy.

Q. You played her three times before. Did you do something different to your game today? Is it simply the result of all the hard work you've been putting in? Did you go out with a different game plan?

VICTORIA AZARENKA: No, I pretty much had the same game plan as I did before. I just was just able to play that game plan better, and to play it longer and to keep up with it. So that was the

main difference, I would say.

Q. What was going through your mind when you lost the first match point and then you lose the game on the double fault? What was the thought process at that point?

VICTORIA AZARENKA: I just thought that no matter what, I have to keep going. It's 5-All. I'm not down. So it's just 5-All. I have to keep going. I mean, she played good on match points, so it's not something that I lost.

Of course, double fault was a little bit disappointing. I just told myself that I have to keep going and fighting for every point.

Q. Where does this achievement rank in your list of personal achievements in your mind? How big is that for you compared to everything else you've done in your career?

VICTORIA AZARENKA: It's really big, because it's first final in such a big tournament for me. It's the biggest moment, I would say, in my career.

Q. You've had a lot of success in other competitions. Did you every think at 19 you would be in a top tier final?

VICTORIA AZARENKA: I always thought that I want to be there. I would never think that I would. I just think that I really want to be there.

But I never think that, yeah, of course I'm gonna be there. I just thought that I really want it. I guess my really wanting it happened now.

Q. Just to look at your final, we don't know who it'll be yet. Just look at each player individually. First Serena. What is it like trying to play against Serena Williams?

VICTORIA AZARENKA: I would be happy to play Serena, because I love the way she plays and the way she is. She's a great champion. I just would really like to play against her, to have another chance to play against her, because in Australia we couldn't finish.

And Venus is also a great player. I played her once. She pretty much killed me in the Olympics. But I really would like to play each one of them, because they are great champions. For me it would be an honor.

Q. How important is your conditioning when you play almost three hours in this match? Did you work extra hard for this tournament?

VICTORIA AZARENKA: Yeah, I worked very hard before Indian Wells, also. I had two weeks no tournaments, and I worked really, really hard there. So that also helped me with the pre-season and these two weeks, which helped me a lot with my condition to keep up with these matches.

Q. When you think about all the work that you've put in, what was going through your mine when you got the last point and were able to celebrate?

VICTORIA AZARENKA: It was just like I would say a relief I finally finished, because it was such a long match. And with the hot conditions, your mind is just kind of melting. You don't know what to do.

But it was more of a relief, you know, it is finally over, and a lot of happiness.

Q. Do you have any idea what the reaction back home is going to be like for your victory?

VICTORIA AZARENKA: I mean, I know that they're all happy. Everybody was watching, my family just was crying, all of them. I'm sure a lot of people were watching. A lot of people are following my results there.

Q. You had a lot of shots that looked like you just hit them too hard. Was it difficult for you to sort of stay calm and not get swept up in the excitement and the emotion of the match?

VICTORIA AZARENKA: You know, it was the most important thing for me to do to stay there. Because once I go down with myself, Svetlana is going to come and she's just gonna put more pressure on me.

So I just have to stay tough on every point and every moment.

Q. Do you have any ideas of what you're going to do between now and the final?

VICTORIA AZARENKA: Well, right now, I don't know. I'm gonna go back to the hotel and maybe go somewhere for dinner. Tomorrow I just have another practice, a little bit of rest, and get ready for the final.

Q. Can you talk about the circumstances of when you came to the

States? I think you're sponsored or you have a family of an NHL player this helps you out. How did that come to be?

VICTORIA AZARENKA: Well, it's a...

Q. Family friend?

VICTORIA AZARENKA: Yeah, it's a -- okay, it's a long story. But my mom is good friends with Nikolai's wife. His name is Nikolai Khabibulin. My mom kind of introduced me to them.

They invited me to come to the States to try to practice here, and that's pretty much how it is. It's like my second family right now.

Q. And you came because there wasn't enough competition where you are? You wanted to come practice in the States?

VICTORIA AZARENKA: Yeah, I needed something more because I was practicing in Spain before that, and I was not many players for me to practice with.

I think I needed a better coach, so I just tried the coach here. I been working with him since then.

Q. When was that that you came to the States? It's in Scottsdale, right?

VICTORIA AZARENKA: 2005, summer.

Q. How much has their involvement helped you grow as a player?

VICTORIA AZARENKA: It was a big part of it. They were a huge part of my career. I mean, they helped me a little bit with money and everything at the beginning. Even now they help me with everything I need. I live with them in Arizona. Especially Nicolai, he's like a mentor to me.

Q. Did it help that he's been a professional athlete too? Even though it's a different sport, he can give you some guidance and support?

VICTORIA AZARENKA: Yeah, definitely. I talk to him about anything. Like if I need something, like my emotions or whatever, he always tells me what to do or how to handle the situations.

Whenever I need to, he's always there.

Q. How to handle people like us?

VICTORIA AZARENKA: I mean, you guys are nice. There's not much of a handle.

Q. No, but has he helped you with that, too?

VICTORIA AZARENKA: Yeah. I mean, we also went through the rookie hours with the WTA Tour. They help us a little bit. But, yeah, he helps me a lot, too.

Q. Are they here?

VICTORIA AZARENKA: No. He's still playing. They're about to make the playoffs.

Q. When you think about playing in the final, do you get the sense that you're on the brink of something special for you in your career?

VICTORIA AZARENKA: You know, right now I'm just thinking that it's another match. If I'm going to get too excited, I won't be able to play.

Q. When you talk about getting excited, how important are matches like this to help you deal with nerves and the pressure that comes with playing on a big stage?

VICTORIA AZARENKA: I just think it's all kind of an experience for me. It's a new thing that I gonna be introduced to, how to handle, how to be there. So I don't really know how to do it right now because I never had that.

I'll try my best to understand and know what to do on that final.

Q. Did you feel at the end of the match that you had more energy than her, that she was a little more fatigued?

VICTORIA AZARENKA: I don't know. I was so tired that I cannot say.

Q. Which players did you admire coming up? Who are some players that you liked to watch?

VICTORIA AZARENKA: Women or men?

Q. Yeah, either one.

VICTORIA AZARENKA: Well, men, I love watching Nadal and Federer. I think they're the best players I ever seen in my life.

And, I mean, Serena and Venus I admire a lot because they are great champions. I think they are the best players in the world right now.

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