

Miami Open presented by Itaú

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Miami, Florida, USA

Novak Djokovic

Press Conference



N. DJOKOVIC/G. Dimitrov

6-2, 6-3

THE MODERATOR: Let's start with questions.

Q. We had an opportunity to speak to Grigor Dimitrov a few minutes ago. He said you wear confidence like stain on your shirt. It's beautiful to see. Only a few athletes on earth possess that quality. How do you react to a statement like that from someone you respect so much?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Very grateful to hear something coming from someone that I really respect as a player, but even more than a player, as a person, someone that I consider a friend, a guy that I really love spending time with off the court, as well.

Bulgaria and Serbia are neighboring countries. We share a lot of I guess tradition and culture, and a lot of things in common. Language is quite similar. Yeah, he's been around the tour for many years. It's a great compliment to receive that from him.

Just, yeah, as I say, very grateful obviously to be able to share the court with him once again. Hopefully we can have, yeah, a few more battles before we retire. We've been playing for quite a long time.

Q. Something very specific and something very broad. The specific thing is you mentioned the other day serve, serve, serve. Was that something you were focused on the last couple months in order to get that to a certain level, to improve that? 87%, whatever you said the other day, is kind of ridiculous.

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Yeah.

Q. Then also just very broad, you're on the verge of a hundred. I realize there's another match to play, but even getting this close to it. Where is that in your head, if at all?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: I wouldn't say particularly we paid so

much attention to the serve prior to this tournament that it needed to be worked on separately from all the other shots in order to get it to a desired level.

I think I've been serving pretty well this year. Maybe some other elements in my game haven't been working particularly well. But serve was solid. I mean, this is whole different level of serving, obviously.

I mean, I did not expect myself to top the serving performance of last match, where I had 83%, and I had 87% today. I missed I think five or six serves in the whole match. So that's really amazing, amazing standard, really high standard.

It helps I think the court is playing pretty quick here, comparing to... Well, I haven't played six years. Six years ago I remember it was much slower. So it does really work great when you have a big serve and you get the free points off that first serve.

I mean, at times in last couple matches -- I must say was joking with Tim Henman in the post-match interview that now I know how it feels like to be Isner or Opelka, just make most of your first serves. Maybe not as many aces as these guys, but...

But yeah, it does help tremendously. It just releases that unnecessary pressure from all the other shots in your game. Then you can kind of put more pressure on the return games on your opponent.

Obviously I'm a baseline player. Most of my career return and backhand is probably the shots that have been talked about the most when it comes to my game and success. Maybe the serve has been a bit underrated.

But I always liked my serve, particularly when it comes to accuracy and precision. That's what I was looking for. I was never really looking to ramp up the miles per hour on the serve. I mean, it's great if you can serve 130-miles-an-hour serve, but I'd rather serve 120 miles an hour and hit the line and hit the perfect spot in the box because that's what either wins you a point or gives you an easy first shot in the rally.



So yeah, I mean, we did work on the serve - don't get me wrong - but we did not only work on that. We actually paid more attention to some other shots in the game with Andy.

Serve is very fluent [sic] this tournament, I must say. It's also great to know that I was able to serve that well and that consistent in a conditions like today that were really tricky with wind swirling on the court, changing directions. He was struggling obviously with his first-serve percentage because of that.

Yeah, I guess I'm managing that shot really well in my game.

Q. Is the hundred matches in your head?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Hundred matches was long time ago, my friend (smiling).

Yeah, of course it is. It is. Ever since I won my 99th, which was the Olympic Games in Paris, I've been playing with the prospect of winning the special hundred titles.

I played finals of Shanghai. I was close there. Semifinals of Australia. Then been trying to find that necessary and much-needed level of tennis that will put me in a position to fight for a trophy, a big trophy.

That's what I've been doing this week, to be honest. I've been very happy with the way I prepared for the tournament, the way I've been playing. I haven't dropped a set.

It's a great opportunity. Let's see what happens in two days.

Q. I wanted to ask you about playing in front of Lionel Messi. Did you talk to him after? I know you know each other a little bit. What's your relationship with him? I think you said it was the first time you played in front of him.

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Yeah, it was the first time I've played in front of him. I've watched him play a few times. I think finals of World Cup, I watched when he won with Argentina. I think I watched him last year once. I think it was with L.A. with Inter Miami.

Obviously thrilled to have his whole family. I did see him after the match. Came by the locker room. So we spent some time talking and exchanged gifts.

Q. What were the gifts?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: You'll see. You'll see the photos.

It's huge honor. I mean, he's such a great athlete, not just a football player. His impact on the world of sport in the last 20 years has been immense. To have him watch me live obviously brings me great, great joy and excitement, and also a bit of pressure, to be honest (smiling).

I was rated by one of his sons today as 8 out of 10, which is pretty good. He with a serious face told me I have to make 10 out of 10 next match. So I have quite a bit of pressure from Messi's son there. Yeah, we joked around.

It was nice to meet with his whole family. It was very touching moment for me because it's one thing that he comes, but then bringing his whole family, his kids, his wife. As a young father myself, I know what that means. It's different when you bring the whole family. I was very touched by that and his willingness to spend some time after.

I value that time with him. It's a wonderful moment for me and for this tournament and tennis in general for him to be here.

Q. Talk about looking ahead to Fritz and this kid Mensik. You played 10-0 against Taylor. Mensik, big serve. Talk about the matchups.

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Well, whoever I face on Sunday, I'm going to have to return well because the serving from both of these guys this tournament has been also very big, like my serving performance. But these guys have more miles per hour, as well. Just big, precise serves. Big game, both of these guys.

Taylor, fantastic match against Berrettini last night. As you say, he's getting better, and I agree with that. He's moving better than he was before. That impacts positively his game.

He's obviously an American playing an American tournament, big support. So yeah, I guess for both of them it's going to be the first Miami finals. For me, not my first.

But I look forward to it. As I said in my previous answer, I really wanted to find the best game that I can play from myself in this tournament, which I did, and putting myself in a great position to win the title. Against both players I have positive score, head-to-head, which doesn't necessarily win the match on Sunday, but it's good to know that.

I'm going to focus on my game. I know what I need to do tactically against both of the guys. But my goal is to be able to play on a high level as I have, particularly in the last

couple matches. That's going to put me in a very good position.

Thank you.

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