

Miami Open presented by Itaú

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Miami, Florida, USA

Victoria Azarenka

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. The women's field in Miami has been pretty strong. For the men, it's been a lot of withdrawals, a lot of top players not coming to Miami because they're saying it doesn't make sense from travel, prize money. Why do you think the women have stuck with this tournament and have still turned out in such good numbers to play Miami?

VICTORIA AZARENKA: Well, I don't really feel like I'm in a position to speak about other people, other people's choices, why they do or why they don't do certain things.

As a collective, I would say from WTA Tour, I think we are trying to use the opportunities to play. I think right now it's still very challenging times. I think some of the progressions in this pandemic are moving forward, but we still facing a lot of adversities, a lot of unknown scenarios moving forward. I feel like we're using those opportunities to play and to perform and build up from here.

For quite a long time, there was no tennis. I feel financially in the world that there is struggles right now. I think from my point, I'm trying to be also a bit understanding of the situation.

We all I think are very optimistic that sooner or later this is going to end and we're going to move forward. We need to continue to build our platform, to build our sport, to have consistency with our performances for players and for the business. I think that's really important to maintain that vision moving forward.

Q. Talk a little bit about the depth of women's tennis currently. This season, for instance, there's been 12 different winners in the first 13 tournaments.

VICTORIA AZARENKA: Yeah, I feel like the depth is growing. I will look a bit further in the last 10 years the depth and how strong the women's tennis is becoming. It's very visible because right from the first matches on, you have to be 100% ready. There are a lot of girls who are able to produce such a high level of tennis.

I think sometimes for some young players it's a bit more difficult to have the consistency. But on any given day you know it can be dangerous, and the level is going to be high. That sometimes is kind of like a battle that you have in front of you.

But overall the depth of the game, the quality and the level of the game is raising, especially physically.

Q. How are you feeling this week entering the tournament physically, mentally?

VICTORIA AZARENKA: I'm feeling excited to start this tournament. There was a bit of a challenging beginning of the year for me where I felt I was playing good, but I felt that I kind of wasn't prepared -- not prepared, but some things were kind of catching, like little injuries. I felt that I wasn't getting on the right track.

I took couple weeks off where I had tournaments planned to try to get back on the right track. It was a bit challenging where I felt a lot like I'm playing a bit of a catch-up game, trying to compensate for what I kind of lost a bit in Australia. It didn't felt that I was kind of making the right decisions.

After Doha, I took some time and I really put myself in a much better situation physically and mentally to be able to be here.

Q. I'm asking several top athletes in different sports the same question. What do you think is the most important trait for you, either mental or physical, that's allowed you to have a successful career? Anything that jumps out for you?

VICTORIA AZARENKA: Well, I will say that it really depends on what your weapons are. Some players are more talented physically. Some people are more talented with grit and hustle and making the wins possible.

For me, I feel that I've been blessed with pretty good tennis game, but you still have to put a lot of things together like physical, like mental. I think it's about elevating those weaknesses, that's what brings success, the whole package. I don't think there's one thing that makes you win



or one thing that makes you lose. I think it's a combination of things.

The most difficult part is to balance those and put them in the right tracks for all those things to work in the right way.

Q. You posted the video of Leo hitting a bunch of backhands. From your perspective, what is it like watching your son play tennis?

VICTORIA AZARENKA: It's really interesting because I think for all the parents, when they see their kids, it's like the mannerism they kind of copy from you. I feel like I'm a pretty self-aware person where I can notice some mannerisms are coming from me.

But watching him play tennis, I don't want to like step in and tell him what to do. That's why he has a coach, is kind of imagining dinosaurs that are playing tennis against him and stuff.

It's really interesting. For me the most amazing moment is he likes to play tennis, like he wants to go and hit some balls. He does not want to hit a backhand at all. Like I have to bribe him with things to hit backhands. It's really sad because I tell him he actually hits it so well. I say, Why you don't want to hit backhand? Your mom has really good backhand. Genetically you will have a good backhand (laughter). I make a joke like this.

He's sometimes just doesn't want to do that. It's really interesting because I want him to do as many sports as possible. Tennis he loves. His dad was asking him, What do you want to do when you grow up? He said, I want to be like mama. For me that was very heartwarming.

Just the thing as I said: as long as he loves playing, likes having fun, that's the most important for me.

Q. The WTA has done a good job in other tournaments as well of putting a couple different times a schedule already where there's multiple tournaments in cities back-to-back. How helpful do you think that can be in this time when travel is so difficult? Do you think it's something that could be done even more potentially?

VICTORIA AZARENKA: I think it is maybe in the pandemic kind of beneficial in one way, especially if we are not having crowd. If we do start to have a little bit of crowd somewhere, I would want our sport to remain global as it is and not really being in one region.

At this moment I think the most difficult part is that every part of the world have their own progression with pandemic. That's what makes it more difficult. So I think

once we're changing the continents and the seasons, we have to adapt to those places.

I think there are times of the year and places of the year that that could work, and others I think it would be a lot more difficult. Obviously from the business side of things, as well.

Q. I know you are improving your Spanish.

VICTORIA AZARENKA: Don't put me on the spot, okay? Do not put me on the spot. I am improving my Spanish, and I can read really well, and I hear, understand a lot more, but I freeze when I have to speak (laughter).

Q. I would like to ask you in Spanish.

VICTORIA AZARENKA: You can try. I'll do my best. I'm going to get nervous, I promise.

Q. (Question in Spanish.)

VICTORIA AZARENKA: How do I feel about being in Miami, winning three times?

Q. Yes.

VICTORIA AZARENKA: Yes, I got it (laughter).

(Answering in Spanish.)

I'm not going to speak any more because I'm going to embarrass myself. But I understood what you said, so that is progress.

I feel really good because I obviously spend a lot of time in Miami. I have a house here. For me, it was a drive, a car drive, to the bubble here. It was nice. But I always enjoyed playing Miami.

I would say that it does feel different playing in this stadium compared to the old facility. It almost feels like a new tournament a little bit for me.

Q. How do you speak to Leo, what languages do you want him to learn?

VICTORIA AZARENKA: I'm speaking only Russian to him. He knows both really well, Russian and English. I would love for him to speak Spanish. One of my best friends is speaking Spanish to him. My team are speaking French. I hope that he will manage those four languages pretty well soon.

Kind of going to Europe for the upcoming European

season, he'll spend a lot of time in France. I'm expecting his French to be a lot better that might happen by the end of the clay season (laughter).

Q. Recently a lot of younger female players have played with heavy topspin forehands like Ash Barty. Have you noticed that? Do you see women's tennis going in that direction more in the future?

VICTORIA AZARENKA: Not particularly. I would say the biggest development I see from a lot of young players is the explosive power that they're able to develop. I feel like that's kind of the next stage. I feel like if we look in the evolution of women's game from when Serena and Venus came on tour, they kind of raised that bar, physicality, more power. Now we have players like Naomi Osaka, who is raising bar even higher on that level.

I see a lot of young players who are developing the same explosive power. In that way I feel the progression of tennis is moving. Topspin not necessarily in a lot of players. I think that can seem that way with more of the explosive-ist players, that they're putting behind the ball.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

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