

# Miami Open presented by Itaú

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## Alexei Popyrin

Press Conference



D. MEDVEDEV/A. Popyrin

7-6, 6-7, 6-4

**Q. Which positive things do you take from the Miami Open? You have played amazing tennis. You have had an amazing first quarter of the year, first ATP Tour tournament. Which positive things do you take from this first quarter and Miami Open?**

ALEXEI POPYRIN: That I battled the world No. 2 to cramps and, you know, he served it out really well and all that. All that just proves from when I last played him in, I think it was last year Aussie Open, he wiped me off the court completely. Yeah, and I think now my level shows battle in the first set, had opportunities in the first set. Had opportunities in the second set. Got the opportunities in the second set. Third set it could go either way. You know, he played well and then served it out really well.

I think I will take positives from this match knowing that I'm at the level of a guy who is world No. 2. Yeah, you know, I haven't had many chances to play guys who are up there ranked as high as him, so definitely take a lot of positives from this match.

**Q. As the match progressed, what were you thinking? When you saved those three match points in the second set and pushed the match to a final set, what were your thoughts at those stages?**

ALEXEI POPYRIN: I completely forgot about the three match points until you just said that (smiling).

No, now I remember how the points went on. I hit a flat wide, I hit a nice slider wide, and I don't remember what happened on the third match point, but, you know, I think I served it out pretty well in those match points.

You know, I just tried to keep my focus. But, you know, I don't remember them so they didn't really take a big toll on me.

What was your second question?

**Q. Your thoughts going on in those stages and pushing it into a third set. It was so tight and then he started to cramp.**

ALEXEI POPYRIN: Yeah, I tried to keep level headed. That's been my goal for the whole year, just to keep level headed and I did that, especially being down a break, not having many opportunities to break his serve, having zero breakpoints up until I broke him. I played four really great points to break him, and then the next game go Love-40 down and come out of that one.

From then on, the confidence flows, you know. He's a great player, so at 5-All, he hits four first serves in in the corner. That's a bit tricky, but I just tried to keep focused and hold my serve and try to get into that tiebreak.

I know this year I have had a pretty good record in tiebreaks, and I think I have played them enough that I know how to play them when the situation arises. You know, I tried to learn from the mistakes I did in the first tiebreak against him and capitalized in the second-set tiebreak.

The third set, like I said, could go any way. It could any way. It could have went my way but it went his way unfortunately today, even though he cramped, but he served it out really well.

**Q. How important is the fact that you have had some pretty solid practice sessions with him? Daniil made comment about that yesterday, that you'd have had some really good practice periods. When you're in those situations with him, are you conversing to him in English or Russian?**

ALEXEI POPYRIN: Russian. I converse to him in Russian. It was kind of a mix, sort of a mix. I speak English to his coach, Russian to him. Sometimes English to him.

And definitely the practice sessions with him, they did help out a little bit. But I will tell you this: In preseason I didn't win a game against him (smiling). In any of the practice sets that we did, we worked on a lot and then we played some games at the end. It was 5-Love in the first session



and 5-Love in the second session.

I really couldn't, I didn't know what to do, but, you know, when I came out today, a match and practice match is two completely different things. How a person plays in a practice match and how a person plays in a real match, completely different things.

I knew that there would be a little bit of pressure on him and of course there is pressure on me also. Yeah, and, you know, I just tried to play my game, focus on the tactics that we put in place with my team, and, you know, I think I implemented them really well.

**Q. If you had to change anything from today's match, would there be anything? What would it be besides the end result?**

ALEXEI POPYRIN: I think, yeah, I'd change a few things. I think in that tiebreak in the first set I ended up playing his game a little bit more than I was playing my game. You know, I went back to rallies with him, hitting the ball quite soft, and, you know, not really playing my aggressive kind of game which got me to the tiebreak.

In that tense situation, I fell into the trap of playing his game, and you don't beat him when you play his game. He's the best at his game. Rallies from the baseline, try change of direction here and there, and that stuff doesn't work against him.

And also, when I saw him cramping a little bit, he was struggling a bit on the game that he broke me. I didn't make a first serve in that whole game. Thinking back on it now, you know, and after talking with my team about it, you know, could have put a slider wide, a kick serve wide and made him run to the other corner and that would have been sufficient I think.

But I tried to go for the serve that was working for me throughout the whole match. But, you know, I think in these situations I've got to be a little bit smarter, read the situation and, yeah, but that just comes with experience. It's experience, and you know damn well that next time when that situation comes, I'm not gonna do what I did today. Yeah, I think it will be a different result.

**Q. Wondering what you two said to each other at the net after the match.**

ALEXEI POPYRIN: I just asked him if he was okay. I saw he couldn't walk a little bit. I saw he couldn't walk at all, but he was bombing down 120-mile-an-hour serves. You know, I have cramped before, and I know that -- I haven't cramped in that certain area, but I know when I cramp it's

kind of hard for me to push off.

But, you know, he was definitely struggling out there. And, you know, just props to him that he was able to serve it out. Once we got into rallies I kind of took advantage off it, but he made all his first serves and he was serving them down and served it out really well.

**Q. What's the overriding feeling following this match? Is it a case of just total disappointment, or is it a case of feeling really encouraged, taking the world No. 2 to the brink?**

ALEXEI POPYRIN: It's encouraging. We said with my coach before the match that this is a perfect test to test where my level is at right now. You know, the guy is the best in the world right now, one of the best. Well, No. 2 in the world, obviously. So, you know, it's a perfect way to test where my level is right now.

For me to take him to three, for me to practically make him cramp and stay out there and me feel healthy and him struggling on court, you know that just shows where my level's at. A few more experiences like this, who knows how far I can go?

**Q. What's the plan now? Straight back to Europe, to France and get on the clay? What's your clay schedule?**

ALEXEI POPYRIN: Well, I start off playing Monte-Carlo and from then on I don't know which tournament I'll play. We'll have to see where I get into main draw in the 250s, I'll go play there.

Probably Barcelona, is looking Monte-Carlo, Barcelona, and then a 250 after that and preparation for French Open. You know, it's all up in the air depending on how I play in certain places, and schedule can change.

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