

Miami Open presented by Itaú

Friday, March 26, 2021

Miami, Florida, USA

Piotr Sierzputowski

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Thank you for joining. This is the 2020 Coach of the Year press conference, a little bit delayed due to COVID. Questions, please.

Q. What are you most proud of in achieving the Coach of the Year award, working with Iga and seeing her achieve so much in such a quick amount of time?

PIOTR SIERZPUTOWSKI: You know, like for me, I wouldn't call it quick, but overall I'm really proud of development we did for the last four-and-a-half years, so I'm really proud of her that she's still looking for improvements and we can work on everyday basis.

Even this year, what is funny we came to Australia to play Australian Open, and after the tournament we sit together, and I was really excited that I can implement some new stuff with her, which makes me really, really happy right now, because it's not like we are at the end of our road. I feel like we have much more to improve. I feel there is a lot of things which works, you know, when we do this together.

So I'm pretty happy and I'm pretty excited to work with her for next season.

Q. Is she a pretty eager pupil to work with, someone who is eager to learn, accepts your feedback with an open mind?

PIOTR SIERZPUTOWSKI: You know, it's not exactly the way you said. I would love it to be like that, but as every player I think on the tour you have to have really huge self-confidence. Because if not, it's individual sport so you have to go to the court and take the points you have to take.

So I feel like there is a lot of discussion, but what I'm happy about right now is that we have these discussions. We don't have, you know, blaming each other or saying somebody, I don't trust you.

Like there is a huge improvement in communication right now. I think she's getting more mature. So I feel we can work on different stuff than at the time when she was

junior. Right now we can work on tactical, we can work on energy management, we can work on even that how she see the player on the other side, not only herself on the court. So she's much more aware.

She's getting to the point I feel like, I hope, in two, three years where she will get to her maximum limit of the knowledge she can get, and then it's gonna be a chess play, like we will have to move her I believe from one place to another. I feel like this going to be the best part of her lifetime.

We will see. I hope she gonna enjoy it, but right now she's learning everything really fast.

Q. Was it a surprise to you to see her make the run that she did at Roland Garros last fall, putting together two great weeks match by match?

PIOTR SIERZPUTOWSKI: You know, I was surprised maybe not with how did she play but how consistent she was, like every match. Because before Roland Garros she didn't felt good, she didn't felt confident. She was like struggling a little bit with the game, especially after the Rome first-round loss which, like, clay is her favorite surface. I don't think like she's, you know, like better on the clay, but she thinks that way. So always when players think and she's confident about it, it's much better.

So it was really difficult for us. She was a little bit struggling. Before the tournament, we set our goals like we are going just to have fun.

So it was something which surprised me that she was able to relax even at that point when she knew that she's already a favorite. Not like underdog going for big match with some big players, but she was the player who was in charge.

So, yeah, that was pretty exciting for me and pretty surprising, because I didn't expect that she can handle these emotions so well and so good and be so consistent for 13 days in a row, because she played doubles.

So even I saw some, let's say, movement going down, up-and-downs, but of course I was surprised.



Q. Seems like you're enjoying the experience of working with her, and certainly from watching Iga out on court and having had the chance to interview her in these Zoom sessions a few times that she's enjoying playing match by match and learning to become a better professional. Thank you very much for your time and best of luck to you. I appreciate it.

PIOTR SIERZPUTOWSKI: Thank you.

Q. I'm writing about topspin forehands. There are a lot of players who are hitting with them now: Iga obviously and Ash Barty, Sakkari. Wondering what you make of that and whether you think that's kind of a trend that will continue in women's tennis?

PIOTR SIERZPUTOWSKI: You know, like, I feel it's really personal. It doesn't matter if one player can play flat, one player can play with a topspin. It doesn't seem it as a trend. I would call it more like personality reasons that you play that way, not another way. Same with Jennifer Brady. For example, she plays a great topspin forehand. I love it.

Of course I'm a huge fan of it, which makes it much easier to work with Iga who is the kind of player who is putting what I love about tennis. So for me, these kind of shots are going to develop more I think in a few years, but it's not going to be something that everybody gonna change. Because I feel like there is huge space for players who are playing flat, and they can play as good as everybody else who play topspin. I feel like you have to have the weapons, and you have to pick your way to develop them.

It's the way of Iga, it's the way of many, many other players, but of course they are not in the majority of the players right now. But overall I feel like it's the way it's gonna be for many, many years in front of us.

Q. After Iga lost to Halep in Australia, she said that Simona has a lot of options and she doesn't have that, which is interesting to me because she's obviously a very complete player with a lot of different assets in her game. Curious, how do you see that and how her game will develop to the point where she knows how to use her different shots in different scenarios.

PIOTR SIERZPUTOWSKI: I feel like it comes with the experience, because overall she has all the tools to play at this level. And even that match was kind of match you can win, you could win. But she went like with a good analyst after the match, and we sat together and said to ourselves that, Okay, it was possible to win, but she went different way that I would expect, for example, from the player.

And she closed her margins to really small chances. Like you have to play really, really great tennis to win that way she wanted to win. So she put a lot of pressure on herself.

It was great that she found the way to fight in third set, but overall, I think there have been different parts in this match to turn it over on Iga's side.

So, yeah, we came back, we practiced, like we went to Adelaide and we implement just a little bit of what I wanted to show her, and the result was really good in Adelaide. So I feel like she is starting to understanding the tools which she already have, but she's not 100% confident on the court when she plays the match.

So she has to get experience, and of course we have to improve it all the time, because if you're not improving, everybody gonna get ahead of you. So I feel like it's really important for us.

Q. Sorry for the basic question, but I'm wondering if you could just kind of discuss your pathway into becoming a pro tennis coach and from there kind of how you initially linked up with Iga as a teenager.

PIOTR SIERZPUTOWSKI: I was coaching since I was 14, because I have younger sister, six years' difference, which made me her hitting partner, somebody who can hit with on the weekends, and all the players around her wanted to have somebody similar to me.

So they ask me, of course, as a side job. I was playing tennis. I was in the school. So it was just getting some money for me for just few lessons a week.

So I started pretty early. When I was 18 I already was working in the club, and I decided that I have to finish my career, because, you know, as everybody knows, tennis certain level is expensive because you have to travel, so all the efforts from my parents had been put into my sister.

So I started to help her. When I moved to different city, she moved with me. I started working in Warsaw in the club where I met eventually Iga after few years working there. So I was working with players mostly under 14 years old. I had like No. 5 in Tennis Europe at this time, so the girl was playing pretty good. We started when she was 10.

There was a situation like Iga finished corporation with her coach, I don't want to go into the details, but they finished and my boss came to me and asked if I can help them. Because it was just in the middle of the season after Roland Garros 2016, and he said to me, like, Okay, let's just help them. Let's see what's gonna happen with it.

I said I feel like I'm not ready for it because I don't have experience about going to the transition tour, let's say, to WTA because Iga was already at the stage that she made a quarterfinal Roland Garros Junior, so it's not big step like it's not far away to go to the WTA. You have to take those steps to be there.

He said, Okay. We'll be looking for a coach. We'll put you on the team as second coach who can travel, can help, can be on the court and hit with her. But I was hitting too weak (smiling). I cannot say like -- I was just too weak on the court, and we have been hitting. But I found some good hitting partners.

She tried in the meantime few coaches, but she said she liked what I was doing. She liked what we have been doing through the season, so she decided like -- you know, it was really smooth.

But they decided, Iga and her father, that I gonna stay with hem for the next preseason and we gonna see. And it stayed until right now. So that's the way how we started our corporation.

Q. You're one of the younger pairings of coach and player. I'm curious, it's not common on the WTA Tour to have a coach be working with a player since she was a junior through winning a Grand Slam and then to continue forward together. So what has that kind of journey been like for you kind of alongside this whole, yeah, four, five years together?

PIOTR SIERZPUTOWSKI: Yeah, you know, the journey I think is something not everybody can get, you know. Like the experience I got, it's something which you cannot buy.

I met so many people on the tour, and even on ITF tour. You know, it's something -- there is no other way to learn. I feel like it gave me a lot of confidence about what I do. It gave me a lot of insight what everybody else is doing.

I feel I'm really developing as a coach. I feel, like you said, there is not a huge gap in the age between me and Iga. It's nine years.

So I cannot be for her as a role model for everything. That's why I need in a team people who knows what they are doing. That's why I'm trying to organize the team as best as I can. I don't have to be a psychologist. I can hire him. I can advise Iga to get one. The same with fitness coach, physio. Everything is there, and everything is set up.

I think I'm like how do you call it, I'm the dumbest person in

the team. But I feel like I created the team. So, you know, it was my idea. It was somehow my thinking of it, how it should look, how it should work, and it's working.

So I'm really happy about it, because I think this is one of the most important parts of have tennis coach in the tennis teams on the tour.

Q. I think I saw in December or November like on social media, either yours or Iga's, something involving a motorcycle?

PIOTR SIERZPUTOWSKI: Yeah, it was.

Q. What was that?

PIOTR SIERZPUTOWSKI: Last year, because it was 2020, Australian Open, and she was after an injury, so she had like lack of confidence. She said to me, I know I'm not playing good enough.

I said, Okay, if you're gonna do fourth round, you have to buy me one of these. She said, Okay, okay. If I do, I'm gonna do this.

Yeah, she did a fourth round. Of course she lost after tough match with Kontaveit. But I was pretty happy. That was the first tournament for her on the tour after injury. Didn't feel confident. She wasn't top 20 as she is right now in the world, but she was like around 100. So it's different story.

Yeah, there was COVID time, so she wasn't able to finish the, let's say, the contract, so she did it after the season.

Q. Related to the Coach of the Year award, what does that mean to you? This is the third year for the WTA having this award. Sascha Bajin won it the first year with Naomi. Craig Tyzzer last year with Barty. What's does that mean for you to have it voted on by your fellow coaches?

PIOTR SIERZPUTOWSKI: You know, for me it's huge. I feel really, really happy about it. I feel like maybe our result was really good, but I feel like of course it's Iga's result, not mine.

But I'm pretty happy that people see us as our teamwork and it's really making me like excited about the future. But I feel like, you know, it's a great opportunity to learn even more because of that, because it means that we are example to some other people too, that coaches really see it that we do a good job which makes us much more confident about it.

