

# Miami Open presented by Itaú

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Miami, Florida, USA

## Maria Sakkari

Press Conference



M. SAKKARI/N. Osaka

6-0, 6-4

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

**Q. That was quite exciting, I'm sure, for you. Would you consider this afternoon to be two of the best sets of tennis you have put together in a single match?**

MARIA SAKKARI: I don't think tennis-wise it was like the best tennis I have ever played in my life. I think I executed our strategy with Tom, you know, really well. I just did what I had to do. I'm not gonna tell you what (smiling).

But I think what we discussed before the match was, I just did it most of the match except, you know, maybe a couple of games where, you know, things didn't go right. But overall I think it was the execution of the strategy.

**Q. After saving six match points against Jessie Pegula and going on to win that match, did that suggest anything is possible for you? You know, did it give you extra confidence coming into today's match against Naomi?**

MARIA SAKKARI: Yeah, of course winning a match from six match points down gives you a lot of confidence. As I told you and everyone in our previous press conference, these wins, it gave me a lot of confidence. I don't know how it works for other players, but it normally gives me a lot of confidence.

Coming into that match I was feeling great with my tennis, and I think I just, you know, really enjoyed myself out there.

**Q. I have read someplace that you feel like you kind of had a little bit of an overhaul when you were in the 14-day quarantine in Australia. Can you talk a little bit about -- I assume that was mental, or your approach to the game? Can you give us a little insight into that?**

MARIA SAKKARI: Yeah, of course. I mean, being stuck in a room for two weeks, it's never a nice thing, you know, because you cannot properly work out. You don't get to hit

any balls. Of course I was working out maximum I could, but it's not the same thing.

So as I mentioned already before, I felt like I lost my identity and my game. It took me a little bit of time, you know, to build that again.

I just put the hours before coming here, different way of practicing, and I think we can all see the result that, you know, it's just that it's myself again on court.

**Q. Can you talk a little bit about obviously your mom didn't play quite to your level, but she was up there. Is that something hard to follow? A lot of players find that kind of difficult. Or is it a boost for you? How do you deal with that?**

MARIA SAKKARI: I never felt like, you know, it's just I want to break my mom's record, not at all. I admire her for what she achieved and for the person she is and what she has given me and my siblings all these years. Not only her but of course both of my parents.

You know, to get back to your question, it's a huge thing for me having a person in my family that really felt the way I feel on court and, you know, she was a great player. I love her opponents at that time come up to me and they were, like, You know, your mom was a tough one out there.

I'm really super proud of her and very happy, you know, that I'm her daughter (smiling).

**Q. What was your frame of mind after getting off that great lead and then falling behind 4-1 in the second set? You obviously dug out of that. What was in your head at that point at 4-1?**

MARIA SAKKARI: I just, you know, just had a little bit of time in the changeover and thought about, focused on the strategy again. I think I lost that a little bit in the beginning of the second set. So focusing on my strategy was the key.

I knew that if I can break her back, then, you know, I can serve clever and I can serve the right way to just come back and win the second set, as well.



**Q. Over recent years, a number of people that have been around in tennis for quite a while have had a lot of incredibly positive things to say about you and where they think you can really progress in the game. Does that add pressure, or is that something that you see as a positive? Somebody you know well and a good friend of mine, Mark Petchey, was even treating today saying irrespective of what happens in this match, Maria is destined for top 5.**

MARIA SAKKARI: Petch is a person that I have spent time with and we used to work together. He's actually a guy that I really respect and I get along with. He has seen a lot of tennis. We all know that. I mean, I want to thank him, because I don't follow Twitter a lot during my tournaments. So thanks for his nice words.

Yeah, to answer your question, I just get the positive feedback from, you know, all the -- I don't know if you're referring to former players and tennis specialists. It's just that I always believed in myself, and I know that every player has different timing on breaking through. So I just stick to that. Who knows where I can get?

**Q. Obviously Greece has not produced that many players in the history of the sport, but one of your predecessors, Eleni Daniilidou, made a mark in tennis. I think you're the first Greek woman to reach the semifinals of this event since she did it about 16 years ago. Your thoughts on something like that?**

MARIA SAKKARI: I didn't know that. You know, there is a lot of respect from my side to Eleni, and I think there is a lot of respect from her side to my side. We get along really well, and she was a great player and great champion.

So for me, you know, I looked up to her when I was young. You know, her results were like very, very good for a Greek tennis player because, as you said, we don't have a tradition in Greece. So there is a lot of respect from my side to her side.

It's just that I really hope I can do as well as she did and maybe better. I'm sure she will be happy for me.

**Q. Seems like you had good strategy against Naomi today, and you executed it quite well. I know that you cannot reveal that strategy you had. But if you can a little bit, can you talk? And also, what kind of a mindset did you have coming into today's match playing against a player who hasn't lost almost a year?**

MARIA SAKKARI: With all my respect, I'm not going to reveal the strategy, not even a little bit (smiling). You

know, there is a lot of respect from my side to her side. She's a great champion, and I think, you know, I mean, what she has done the last three years is unreal.

I was super positive, and I believed in myself before entering the match. And I knew that I can do it, because I already did it once.

Yeah, I know I didn't answer your full question, but that's all I can say (smiling).

**Q. All the work that you and Tom did after Dubai to kind of re-find your identity, as it were, did you feel this entire tournament you have been playing the exact way you want to play, or do you feel was there a moment during the last week and a half where something clicked?**

MARIA SAKKARI: I think it's not like I have been playing different tennis to, let's say, Abu Dhabi or Ostrava. I'm talking about these two tournaments because I had good results there, as well.

It's just the fact that I think -- I don't know if I was telling you last time that we have been working on some like different way of approaching the match. I'm warming up longer, warming up almost for one hour before the match, even though conditions are brutal here, but it helps me.

I watch videos of my players, of the opponents that I'm gonna play since, you know -- so we are trying different things. It works really well. But it's not something that tennis-wise that I'm doing differently than I have been doing before.

**Q. Do you feel like in terms of how you have kind of moved your game to be more aggressive, because we definitely saw that today, we saw it with Pegula, but today with the returning, the serve, forehand, it was all working, do you feel like that style of play is now natural to you to play this aggressively all the time, or does it still take a conscious effort for you to do it?**

MARIA SAKKARI: No, I think it became natural. Of course it took a lot of time and a lot of hours to feel that way, but, you know, having Tom always reminding, you know, myself that I have to be aggressive and stay aggressive and not becoming like a passive player helps me a lot.

It's just that it clicked. One day it clicked, and all the hours, you know, so actually showed the actual result on court.

**Q. Would you say this is probably the biggest win of your career so far?**

MARIA SAKKARI: Yeah, I would say that it's for sure one of the biggest ones. I think also beating Serena was equally big, but, you know, beating her after 23 matches in a row without losing, it was a big thing, of course. Yeah, for sure it's one of the biggest wins of my career.

**Q. I'm curious about your relationship with Stefanos. Are you very close with him? Do you talk with him on a daily basis? What is your relationship with him like?**

MARIA SAKKARI: Oh, I haven't seen him actually this week at all. I don't know where he has been, but I haven't seen him. I have only seen him playing on TV.

But, yeah, we are very close. We are looking forward playing I think the Olympics together. I think he's proud of me. I'm very proud of him. I look after him, because he's a great -- he's a joke of an athlete and a joke of a player. We have a great relationship and our families are very close. I think we are making Greece proud.

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