

Miami Open presented by Itaú

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Miami, Florida, USA

Naomi Osaka

Press Conference



N. OSAKA/A. Kerber

6-2, 6-3

THE MODERATOR: Another great day at the office for you. What are your initial reflections on the match?

NAOMI OSAKA: I think initial reflections, for me, honestly this whole year I have been trying to like do really well on service returns and also my own serves, so I think the last time I played her, I don't know if it was Wimbledon or Singapore, but I just remember not being too confident on the returns.

So this time I think I did pretty well. I was trying to attack her second serves and not hesitate that well, so maybe that was, I don't want to say the key, but really important.

Q. What does this win mean for you just in terms of confidence and where you're at now? You two I think have the most Grand Slam titles of anybody in the draw, you played each other this early, and obviously had a few losses against her in the last few matches, so what does it mean for you to get a win like this at this point in your year?

NAOMI OSAKA: Yeah, it is a confidence booster, but I didn't go into the match not confident, if that makes sense. For me, it kind of just shows all the hard work that I have been doing throughout the year. And for me, I was really glad I was able to come through in two sets. I know the scoreline might have looked like I was cruising, but I was really like focused every point.

So I'm really glad that I have come to this point in my career where I can say that, you know, I'm really like glad with how I played. I think mentally too, as well, just being able to stay like kind of neutral the entire match, it was really cool.

Q. This is the first time you beat her since you had that big win over her at the US Open in 2017.

NAOMI OSAKA: Man, she did not like me after that (smiling).

Q. Why do you say that?

NAOMI OSAKA: Oh, just because she made sure to beat me down like every other match after that.

Q. What do you remember of that match? That was a big breakthrough for you and she was defending champ there. What do you remember about that moment a few years ago now?

NAOMI OSAKA: Yeah, honestly, I don't remember much. I just remember feeling like she might be a bit nervous and stressed out, and like now I can understand that feeling, but just remembering -- I was still kind of new to the tour, so I was just thinking, like, I definitely have an opportunity, so if I have chances, I have to take them.

It was my first time playing her, as well, so I was just thinking in my head the entire time, like, I have nothing to lose. I have played against players now that have that same mentality, so I know how dangerous it is.

Q. You do a little tap with your feet about four or five times before you serve. Is that intentional or just trying to find a rhythm?

NAOMI OSAKA: It's intentional but also not, because I don't even know how many times. When you threw out the number, I was, like, Okay.

Honestly, for me it's more of a routine, so just like something for me to know like I do this before I serve, you know. Just like I think just moving my feet before I serve like gets my body kind of warm to like explode up, if that makes sense.

Yeah, I think that's the reason why I do it, but now it's more of a habit.

Q. Obviously after the match you mentioned how great it was to have your mom there. You even called her out on her attending the Miami Open, one of the few matches she attended. What did it mean to you? And obviously your close friend was in attendance also.



NAOMI OSAKA: Yeah, for me it definitely means a lot. I think the crowd here is very warm, and I also see Haitian flags sometimes, so I'm really grateful on that.

I don't know. For me, I have told a lot of people, like growing up, my mom wasn't really there because always had to work, because tennis isn't a cheap sport, you know. So just to be able to get to this point in my career and for her to just kind of be watching over me, and I'm sure like to have a kid and to have this dream that your kid is going to be a Grand Slam winner is not a lot of parents can say that they have achieved that.

So just to have her be there and just to be having fun, I'm sure she's having a lot of fun. Yeah, it means a lot to me.

Q. My question is a little bit of departure from tennis. As you know, Miami has a huge Haitian community. I just wanted to see if you can talk a little bit about your philanthropic work with Play Academy and goals in Haiti what's coming up. Also, do you spend a little bit of time in Little Haiti while you are in Miami? There is a very good restaurant called Naomi's, which has been there for...

NAOMI OSAKA: Oh, for real?

Q. So I just wanted to know more about your relationship with Haiti and Miami and the community.

NAOMI OSAKA: What do you get there at the restaurant?

Q. Well, I'm vegan, so they have various options, like...

NAOMI OSAKA: But it's a Haitian restaurant?

Q. It is a Haitian restaurant.

NAOMI OSAKA: Oh, nice. I'll go there.

Yeah, I mean, for me, I have always like watched my parents give back. They have a school in Haiti, and like recently over the years they have been developing it so it's bigger and bigger, and now they have four tennis courts and they are building a track.

It's really nice to see like those kids be able to walk in there, and if they want to play tennis they can play tennis. If they want to work out or like run, then they can do that. My dad is really good at making people run, I know from experience.

But, yeah, just amazing to like I guess watch like someone give back, and then you know that you can also do that, if

that makes sense, because my parents, they always like sent money back to Haiti whenever they could, and for me I know I can also do that but at a larger scale. So just to be able to provide that is really cool for me.

My dad sends me pictures of the kids sometimes or videos of them saying Happy Birthday, Naomi, or something like that. It really lifts my spirits.

Play Academy is this fund-ish, we would say, that I have with Nike that they give grants to schools for them to be able to provide equipment or whatever kids need in order to stay in sports.

Q. How much do you sort of feel like you're slipping back into a childhood environment when you are at this tournament, especially now that it's up closer to where you grew up than when it was at Key Biscayne? Do you ever go to the courts you used to hit on as a kid, or houses you used to live in, anything like that, and revisit those memories that way? What is that feeling of being back home like for you?

NAOMI OSAKA: I would say like for me I haven't gone back to my old courts this year, just mainly it's kind of far for me with where I'm staying right now.

But I feel a lot of memories, weirdly enough, just driving up to this site, because when you go on the freeway the Hard Rock Stadium is kind of iconic in a way.

But for me, the path I took, I don't know if this hotel is still there, but it was a pink hotel, El Palacio, I don't know if it's still there, it used to be next to this horse stable, and I always just remember smelling the horses whenever I passed by.

Yeah, I would say it's definitely better to play at a place where you have a lot of memories. For me, I feel like I could do well here, you know. I have always played well at places that I feel is home, like Tokyo, New York, and I want to do really well here, so hopefully I have that opportunity.

Q. Do you stay like at a house that your family still owns here, or are you at a hotel or something?

NAOMI OSAKA: I love my mom, but like I'm not going to stay with her. No shade though.

(Naomi's answers to questions in Japanese.)

NAOMI OSAKA: Yeah. Honestly, weirdly enough, like I definitely came into this match knowing it was going to be very difficult, and I knew that I had to fight for every point because she's the type of player that I think on the outside

she might show it, but she is fighting for everything. I feel like if I gave her the opportunity she would claw her way back. But weirdly enough, I was watching Tennis Channel the other day, right? I don't know like what night or whatever, but they had the draw up. I was like, Oh, no. I accidentally saw the draw. This is before I played Astra. So I was like, Dang, I have to play Kerber if I win this next round.

But then I think Caroline Wozniacki was commentating, and they were like, Oh, who do you think is going to make it out of this section? She's, like, I think Kerber and Fernandez are going to play each other. I was, like, Oh, me and Muchova aren't right here. So I was kind of thinking about it in my head a lot during when I was playing just now.

Yeah, I don't know if that was the reason the score was why it was today, but I don't know. I don't really say I had like a vendetta, but I was like, Hmm, I know I was kind of underachieving these last couple of months, but I still feel like I'm a pretty good player. Because Wozniacki said it kind of confidently that Kerber was going to be going through. I don't know. But anyways, yeah, that's my story. Sorry.

Yeah, I think for me, I have been working on my serve a lot with Wim, because apparently before I didn't put my two feet together, so he's been telling me to be like very balanced and put my two feet together.

And I hit with Nick in LA, and I was watching his like form from very close up, and he does like this slide thing and then he puts his two feet together and helps him explode more. I have been really focusing on that part of my technique. I think it's working out pretty well, because I think I have a better rhythm now than I did before, especially like with the wind and stuff.

Yeah, I think it's going well. I'm also working on my second serve, so hopefully I will get the miles per hour up, and then I will be unbreakable or I'll try my best to be (smiling).

Yeah, for me, I always thought my backhand could be a weapon, but I always play a bit safe on it, like I always try to go crosscourt and stuff like that, like I never try to do too much, unlike on my forehand, I feel like there is endless possibilities.

But I think after I played Amanda and I saw like how she was going down the line and crosscourt and she was basically like attacking from that side, as well, I thought I wanted to be like that too, so I have been like just practicing being more comfortable going down the line on my backhand and not letting people be, like, for my

backhand not to be predictable. So I think it's working out quite well.

Honestly, I'm not aware if there is like different branches of therapists. Like I'm not sure how much a therapist differs from a sports psychologist. But I think maybe a sports psychologist is solely for sports-related things. But the person I'm talking to is labeled as a therapist, so I'm not sure if like the methods are different. But, yeah, that's basically it (smiling).

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