

Miami Open presented by Itaú

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Naomi Osaka

Press Conference



N. OSAKA/D. Collins

6-2, 6-1

THE MODERATOR: Obviously Danielle was struggling out there, but how did the match feel from your point of view?

NAOMI OSAKA: Yeah, for me, I feel like, I don't know, every press conference I kind of say the same thing, but just improving what I did the last match.

I think I was really good in my returns this match, so that's not something that I was able to say last year, so I think I am improving in that aspect, so I'm happy about it.

THE MODERATOR: Questions?

Q. Your returns, seemed like you had an aggressive return position, especially on her second serve, like a low crouch to try to get as many of her balls back. How much was that a focus to really be attacking?

NAOMI OSAKA: Honestly, I wasn't really sure when I started the match where I was going to position myself. Sometimes she does serve quite fast. I was thinking maybe I should step back a little bit.

The first couple of games when I was a bit more defensive, it didn't really work out to me. I just figured it would be better to take the risk of stepping in and see what happens, and I think my timing was quite good, so it worked out well.

Q. With making the semifinals now, I saw your Twitter post, all the happy emojis and stuff. What does that mean for you to make semis here? Especially after how Indian Wells ended, did you think you'd be able to have such a big result right away?

NAOMI OSAKA: Yeah, you know, I don't like to speak on things while I'm still in the tournament, but, you know, like after Australia, I was training really hard every day. I'm the type of person that never posts stuff, so, yeah, I have been training really hard every day.

I went to Indian Wells with the intention to do really well,

and then I didn't. But Wim told me, like, Listen, you're playing really well.

But it's hard to listen to someone tell you you're playing well without having the results to back it up. I'm glad that, you know, in a way I don't have a good ranking, because I'm able to play the matches that I need to play.

I feel like I'm the type of person that plays better with more matches, so actually having back-to-back matches benefits me a lot.

But, yeah, I wouldn't say I'm surprised with the result, but I'm more, I don't know, I feel like I'm becoming a better player, so I'm kind of intrigued on how I play, like, different opponents.

Q. Why don't you post training stuff? Do you ever feel like people don't think you're training when you don't post stuff? Do you feel that balance of keeping it low-key versus showing everyone that you're working? How do you try to find that?

NAOMI OSAKA: I think I like to keep my fans mad (smiling). But, no, I don't know. I just feel like, in a weird way, like at the end of my life, I would like to be known for more than a tennis player.

So if I'm constantly posting tennis things, it's just like, Oh, the tennis girl is posting tennis things.

I have this certain aesthetic on Instagram. I just like to post cool outfits and stuff. I know that's kind of weird.

I also feel like the tennis world is so small, people actually watch what you post, you know, and they actually discuss it. So like if I post training videos, I think people are going to see what I'm doing. I don't know. I'm kind of weird about that.

Q. You mean like other coaches or players?

NAOMI OSAKA: Yeah.

Q. Next opponent, Belinda Bencic, she's someone you have had tough matches against the last few, but you



actually played her really, really early, looking at your head-to-head, 2013, a 25K in Alabama, back when she was like one of the best juniors in the world and you were still just playing the first pro events. She was talking about that match earlier today, she remembers it. What do you remember about that moment in that match?

NAOMI OSAKA: This is going to sound really weird, but I remember like it was a late match, and I wasn't that experienced, so I only ate breakfast and didn't eat anything else the rest of the day.

I was just thinking to myself, wow, I'm kind of hungry. Should I be going into this match hungry? So I ate a couple of pineapples.

Q. Whole pineapples?

NAOMI OSAKA: No, no, no, like diced pineapples. My dad ran to the store and got like pineapples. This is so weird.

But, yeah, I remember like other players at the tournament talking about her, about how she was a really good junior. I don't know if she won Junior Wimbledon at this point.

Q. A few months later she won French/Wimbledon.

NAOMI OSAKA: Okay. Yeah, I just remember everyone talking about her that that's the really good junior girl.

Q. You didn't play juniors, so were you interested to play against one of the best '97s, like they say? She was in your age group at that time. Was it exciting to beat her in that match?

NAOMI OSAKA: I wouldn't say it was exciting, but it was kind of interesting, because I remember being like one of the youngest at the tournaments all the time. So it was cool to see another young player. Back then she was already really professional, like she had a lot of stuff going on that I couldn't even comprehend.

So I was, like, Oh, maybe I should be a bit more like her or something.

Q. What couldn't you comprehend?

NAOMI OSAKA: Oh, like, she was warming up properly and stuff. I don't know. It was back when she was like had adidas and stuff, so I think she had a sponsor. I was, like, Oh, that's kind of cool. She has that already.

When I was younger I was looking at her, Konjuh, and

Ostapenko and Kasatkina, and I thought it was all really cool we were all the same age, so I hope in some way we kind of uplifted each other.

Q. Do remember the match at all? She was saying she was amazed how hard you hit the ball at that age.

NAOMI OSAKA: Honestly, when I was that young, I don't think I like had strategy. It was all like instinct, and I still kind of play that way sometimes, much to Wim's horror.

But, yeah. I don't know. When I was 15, I suddenly discovered that I was able to hit my serve hard, so I'm not sure if that match was around that age, but yeah, there was a time in my life that I was just hitting everything as hard as I could.

Q. What's made her difficult in this phase of your career? 2019, I think you played three times and she beat you each time. You were playing well against most everybody else at that point. What do you have to do to get a better result in the next match?

NAOMI OSAKA: I remember playing her Indian Wells and Madrid. Did I play her more than that?

Q. US Open.

NAOMI OSAKA: Really? Oh, shit. Which year?

Q. 2019. You beat Coco, and then...

NAOMI OSAKA: Not my Sacai outfit. Yep, I remember it now.

Yeah, for me, it's so weird, I don't know if I should say this, but whatever, I just feel like I get really emotional when I play people around my age or younger. I don't know if it's like this thing that I want to be better than them, but I just automatically put a lot of pressure on myself.

So I kind of acknowledged that after I lost to Coco that one year. I'm just like, you know what? I'm at an age there is going to be a bunch of young, really good players, and I have to respect them and know that they are here for a reason. I was once in their shoes.

I think like my mentality was a very big part in my losses back then. Hopefully it will be better, because I feel like I have kind of worked through it, so hopefully tomorrow, not tomorrow, whenever the match is, Thursday, it will be more about tennis.

Yeah, she's a really good tennis player. She won the gold in Tokyo, which I really wanted to win. Yeah, I mean, she's

clearly, you know, ranked where she is for a reason.

(Naomi's answers to questions in Japanese.)

NAOMI OSAKA: Yeah, when I was younger I never played anyone my age. I always played, like if I was 10, I'd play the 18s or something like that. My dad always thought that it was better to play the older people. I think it worked out really good for me, because I used to play like older girls or when I was 12 I used to play like the woman's circuit. It's not the pro circuit but kind of like professional-ish people, that, like, maybe they want to practice before they play a 25K, that type of circuit.

So, yeah, I always like thought it was really good that my dad had that mentality, because I feel like I got really strong in that aspect, because I was always playing against people that either hit harder or were just stronger in general.

Honestly, it's a bit weird. Whenever I practice, I kind of return like this in the same way that I played my match, but it's kind of hard, because I know how my hitting partner, how he serves exactly, so like when I play other people, I kind of have to figure out like what is the most ideal position. I felt like to play against her today, like my usual stance was good, but like the return is definitely something I have been working on in the offseason.

But I also need a lot of guts to return like that, because it's quite far in the court. I think I'm quite exposed if I don't hit it perfectly. So, yeah.

I think like for me, like every match that I play I want to get better at something, and every tournament I play I want to get better at something. So let's say my last tournament in Indian Wells, I felt like I wasn't doing a lot of things properly. I'm glad that Indian Wells and Miami are quite close, so that I always have that memory with me.

And my first match against Ashta, Astra, her serves were quite good and I felt like I wasn't being aggressive enough. So I tried to like fix that when I was playing against Kerber.

When I was playing against Kerber, I thought maybe I wasn't serving that well. So I tried to fix that against Alison. So it keeps going in this pattern.

My returns, I think I really try to focus on them specifically. This match today, because she was a good returner, so I think there is like this moment where you have pressure on you, so you try to like hyper-focus on one thing that you know is going to get you through the match.

So there is like this stew called legume. It's like legume.

It's like a vegetable stew. Sometimes they put crab legs in it. Sometimes they put beef in it. It's based on vegetables. It's pretty good.

I don't know if you like goat, if you've ever tried goat. They have like taso-kabrit, which is like fried goat. It's not like battered, but -- it's not the healthiest but it tastes really good.

What else? They have like stewed chicken, the sauce is really nice. I can talk about this for a very long time. But, yeah, I think anything you get is going to be good. They have like fried snapper. But the plantains are good. You should eat the plantains with everything. Plantains, yeah, they are really good.

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