

Miami Open presented by Itaú

Thursday, March 24, 2022

Miami, Florida, USA

Heather Watson

Press Conference



H. WATSON/E. Svitolina

4-6, 6-3, 7-6

THE MODERATOR: (Question off mic.)

HEATHER WATSON: Another long battle against a really tough opponent that I have played quite a few times now. Yeah, just really happy to get the win, especially in such tough conditions with the heat and the wind and being 7-6 in the third, because I have lost a few of those recently.

Happy to get over the line.

Q. It seems like you have this knack, just when it's tailing down a little bit, your ranking, you find a moment of inspiration. I think you're back up to the fringes of the top 100 now. Is that something you think about?

HEATHER WATSON: Yeah, it is (smiling). Because my ranking has dropped, one of my goals this week was to get back into main-draw Grand Slam ranking.

Yeah, I feel like the COVID years weren't good for me. I didn't do very well in them. I wasn't enjoying my tennis.

Yeah, I feel like since my preseason, I think I said this in Australia maybe, but I've just felt in a really good place, found my love for it again, been working really hard, and got back into really good shape.

So I lost a few tight ones at the beginning of the year, but I felt like just my fighting spirit has now, yeah, I'm now on the winning end of it. I have gained some confidence.

Q. When you talk about enjoying, when you are enjoying it, what do you enjoy about this whole life? And when you're not enjoying it, what do you not enjoy?

HEATHER WATSON: When I enjoy it, I enjoy the fans and playing in front of big crowds on the big courts against big players. That, for me, is the most exciting, fun part of tennis.

For sure, my least-favorite part is losing (smiling). Then, yeah, I think I struggled with COVID because there wasn't any fans, and that's a massive part of me.

Q. Did you realize how massive it was before it got taken away?

HEATHER WATSON: I didn't realize until it happened, yeah. So now I really value it and appreciate it.

Q. I think you said recently that you were spending a lot of time in the Northwest. Is that almost becoming sort of a permanent base for you? Is it Bolton you're training at?

HEATHER WATSON: Yes.

Q. Has that helped maybe kind of being in a kind of fresh sort of environment?

HEATHER WATSON: Yeah, I think so. They have been so welcoming to me up there, the coaches, fitness coaches, Steve Fathers and Howard Green. They are such good people.

The atmosphere there reminds me a lot of IMG. It's sort of like an academy. There is lots of young players there. I hit with young girls and young boys. It's more of a squad vibe than individual. I think that worked better for me personally.

Yeah, I'm not home a lot, but when I am home, that's where I am. I haven't spent much time in London at all.

Q. Just on the match today, I was just wondering how Elina seemed to you and what it's been as sort of a neutral person being around her and other sort of Ukrainians, what is obviously a very difficult time?

HEATHER WATSON: Yeah, I really feel for Elina. I can see she's not her normal self. I get on with her really well. We practice sometimes, and I have asked her to play doubles a few times. It hasn't happened.

She's such a nice girl, and I can just see -- I mean, I



haven't spoken to her in depth about it. I haven't seen her until today pretty much.

Yeah, she must just have so much on her mind. I think it's amazing that she's out here still competing.

Q. My colleagues will tell you that I know nothing about football, but should I be asking you about Stockport County?

HEATHER WATSON: Yeah. Courtney's signed with Stockport County now, so Naomi Broady will be very happy.

Q. Is that going to have any vacation effect?

HEATHER WATSON: Yeah, it will probably be better. It will be closer to Bolton.

Q. That's good news?

HEATHER WATSON: Yeah, because we have been staying in Blackpool, and yeah, it's about a 45-minute drive from there, but it will be closer in Stockport.

Q. Is he chuffed?

HEATHER WATSON: Yeah. Yeah, he's happy. As long as he's playing, he's happy.

Q. Fed Cup, or the Billie Jean King Cup as it's now called, is it right that you decided just to take a step back this time? How tough was that? Because you have been such a stalwart for the team.

HEATHER WATSON: Yeah, it was a really tough decision to make, but I made it this time because I wanted to put myself first. Where my ranking is, it's dropped a lot. I probably wouldn't play.

And also, playing in Fed Cup would take away the week after for me because of my ranking, because I'd be in quallies of the tournaments the week after. Like I said, because my ranking has dropped, I really wanted to play that week and get some points towards my ranking.

So it was a tough decision, but I thought it was the right one this time.

Q. Obviously the big news this week was about Ash Barty stepping away relatively unexpectedly. What were your reactions to that? Do you understand why a player like her would make that choice in this world?

HEATHER WATSON: I think it's a sad day for tennis,

because she's such an incredible player. I'm certain she would have gone on to win many, many more Grand Slams. She was by far the best player.

But for her, I'm really happy for her. It's not easy. I mean, she's still so young, but, you know, it's not always about just doing what everybody thinks you should do. It's her life, it's her path, so as long as she's happy, I totally respect her decision.

Q. So you were saying you think she'd have won a bunch more Grand Slams. Now that she's out of the picture, where do you think the top of the sport is? Who is going to win those Grand Slams now?

HEATHER WATSON: God, the woman's game is so wide open. There is new Grand Slam winners all the time, and I think that's a really positive, exciting thing. It's dramatic.

So I don't know, but I would say, just off the top of my head, I'm sure Swiatek will win a few more slams. She's playing great at the moment.

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