

Miami Open presented by Itaú

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Miami, Florida, USA

Naomi Osaka

Press Conference



N. OSAKA/B. Bencic

4-6, 6-3, 6-4

THE MODERATOR: That was clearly a meaningful win for you. What are you thinking right now?

NAOMI OSAKA: Unprofessional answer and professional answer, what I'm honestly thinking now is like how to get Korean food Uber Eats to my place, because there is, like, nothing, like it's outside of the delivery range.

But then like if I'm thinking about the match, I'm very happy. I knew it was going to be tough today, so I'm glad that I was able to, I guess, pull through it. I know that I didn't serve it out on the first time, so I'm glad I was able to do it on the second time.

THE MODERATOR: Questions?

Q. I think there is a temptation probably among all of us and a lot of people to be, Okay, Naomi is winning, everything must be great, everything must be fine with her. Would you say like that's a fault among people to sort of look at you and other athletes in that way? I mean, seems like there is probably a lot going on that we don't see on the court, and just sort of curious what your thoughts are on that matter. Then also, you mentioned something I saw on television about trying not to be overwhelmed by your thoughts. What were those thoughts that you were trying not to be overwhelmed by?

NAOMI OSAKA: Yeah, to be honest, I have been thinking about this, but if I didn't say anything at French, I don't think anyone would have known about the things that I'm going through. To be honest, like, it's not new to me. Like I have been doing this for years, you know. It's just like that particular time I decided to speak on it.

So, yeah, like a lot of people have been telling me, You're back, and stuff like that. But to be honest, I don't feel like I left, if that makes sense. Like I have always been this player. Like I just didn't play the matches. There have been some situations where I have lost early but I have

played good matches the entire time.

I see like why nontennis watchers would kind of think that way, because I'm not ranked where they think I should be ranked and stuff like that. But I don't think there is a player in the world that wants to play me in the first round or stuff like that.

But, yeah, I think when I said on The Tennis Channel desk that I sometimes feel overwhelmed by my thoughts, in this particular case, it's because I haven't been in the finals in a while, or I guess in a big tournament like this in a while.

So I was just kind of thinking too much ahead. That's why I lost the first service game that I tried to serve out. But, yeah, I feel like it's just a matter of getting used to it and getting back into the groove of things.

Q. On Tennis Channel you also said something about coming back after Indian Wells and trying to reset from that. What was that reset process like in those days after? Are you surprised by yourself at all that you were able to get to a place where you were able to put a run like this together so soon after that moment?

NAOMI OSAKA: I would say yes and no. In a weird way, because I know I told you that I spoke to a therapist after. So like talking to her really helped me out. She kind of helped me see things from a different perspective.

I told her like -- I'm not going to tell you what I told her, but, you know, I just feel like there are things that can help me out and I never realized it before. Because I'm the type of person that wants to do everything by myself, and I don't like burdening people.

But, yeah, I would say I'm surprised by like how quickly it came together, but I have always wanted to do well in Miami. Like I have always thought that I had the game style for it.

It is a bit surprising that this is my first three-set match. I kind of expected to have to play like really like grindy matches. But I'm confident in myself as a player, yeah.

Q. Just back to the match overall, first set obviously

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you were down 4-1 and you lost that first set, but what is it in your thoughts? You just mentioned a three-set match, but what is it in your thoughts that you turned on the switch per se? The serve was working and backhand, forehand. What was it in terms of possibly turning on the switch?

NAOMI OSAKA: To be honest, I didn't think I turned on a switch today. I feel like -- I don't know. She was just playing really well. I think like in the second set I just told myself, like, Listen, if she beats you, like someone is going to have to carry you off the court in a stretcher, because you're going to fight for everything.

I think I just got opportunities and I was able to see them as opportunities. So I was able to push myself through it.

I'm honestly glad that this was such a tough match, because, I don't know, I feel like you need that learning experience, and I learned a lot from today.

I kind of want to watch video footage of her backhand returns, because they were so good today.

Q. Have you been struggling to find good food to eat, or is it just tonight you have been worried about it? Have you been doing other cool stuff in Miami since you have been here?

NAOMI OSAKA: Honestly I have been eating a lot of Haitian food, because I feel like you can only eat Haitian food in South Florida and New York.

But I don't know. I have just been really wanting to eat like the LA galbi, the marinated Korean beef ribs. I don't know why that specifically, but it's been in my head for a while.

But I would say like doing things in Miami, I like to go out, but I don't know why I still feel kind of like scared to like get close to people still because of COVID. I don't know. My worst nightmare would be to get to the final and then have to pull out because I'm sick or something like that. So I tend to like try to stay at home most of the time.

Q. If I'm not mistaken, your fastest serve today was 119 miles an hour. Is that some extra pop on your serve? Maybe, maybe not. If it is, to what do you attribute that?

NAOMI OSAKA: Honestly I feel like I hit harder when I was younger. I remember for some reason just like constantly looking at the radar when I was younger, like trying to go like 123, 124, 125. But now I'm just like chilling, if that makes sense. If it's an ace, it's an ace. I don't think an extra two miles is going to hurt anything.

But, yeah, I would say I wasn't really consciously thinking about trying to serve hard or not. I think that's just naturally what happens for me.

Q. A few days ago when you came in over here and you had the headphones on and you were asked what you were listening to, you said you weren't listening to anything. Can I ask why you wear the headphones then?

NAOMI OSAKA: Because it gives me an excuse to like not interact with someone if I don't want to (smiling). I don't know. It's like -- okay. This sounds bad. But, okay, I'm walking down the halls, right? I don't really know a lot of people, so I either tend to look on the ground, or if I look forward, I have to put my headphones on so that -- I don't know. Like it's just like this barrier thing that I do.

It's also like a comfort thing for me, because I actually do listen to music when I'm walking around. For me, for some reason, it sets a tone. Like I have a play list that's called Sad. I don't know why, but it's a bunch of songs that the melodies are kind of slow and it makes me kind of -- I wouldn't say moody, but I think music kind of affects my mood a little bit.

Q. What's on the Sad playlist?

NAOMI OSAKA: A lot of Juice WRLD. Wim has been recommending me some songs. Let me look at it. I'm sorry.

There is this guy that he recommended me. His name is Jamiroquai. Sorry. Yeah, there is this really good song called Virtual Insanity. Wim played it in the car and I was like, Oh, that's really good.

Q. I had a question about after the first set the cameras zoomed to you. You were having a moment to yourself where you closed your eyes and did a real deep breath. What exactly was going through your mind there? Were you visualizing what's going to happen next, or what were you thinking after that first set when you were in that moment?

NAOMI OSAKA: I mean, I was thinking like I have been in this position with her before, because I have played her multiple times. But I felt like all those times I have kind of been panicked, you know, so I was just telling myself, like, This is a really good chance to like show yourself how much you have matured, I guess. Just like try not to repeat the mistakes that you have made before.

Yeah, just know that there is people out there that was

cheering for you, and they didn't have to like buy tickets to watch your match but they are here, so you've got to try your best at the very least.

Q. At the end of the match, when you had that moment with your face in a towel, was that happiness, was it relief? What emotions were you feeling at that very moment during those two or three minutes?

NAOMI OSAKA: Yeah, I would say definitely happiness. I think the semis meant a lot to me. Like warming up I was so nervous. I felt like I wasn't moving my feet that great.

You know, I wanted to go into this tournament and test myself, and I feel like she was probably the best opponent in the world for that. I didn't have good memories playing against her.

So, you know, I'm glad that I was able to get through, and I think -- it wasn't really relief, but it was definitely happiness.

Q. Your two possible final opponents. Iga I know you're friendly with, and she's obviously playing really well, about to get to No. 1. What would it be like to play her? And Pegula, I think you guys played in Rome which was a tough match for you.

NAOMI OSAKA: Yeah.

Q. If you can talk about each of those experiences, what they'd be like?

NAOMI OSAKA: Yeah, I remember playing Iga in Toronto when she was first coming up, and my immediate thought was, Wow, this girl is really athletic. She's sliding all around the place.

Yeah, I think it's really amazing to see how far she's come. She's just so motivated. I know when I won Indian Wells I was just like really dead, and then they made me play Serena in the first round. I was like, Whoa, dude.

It's just incredible to see she's still in this tournament and still fighting, and she's going to be No. 1 soon or already. It's really cool. I think the WTA is definitely doing its thing.

And also Pegula, I played her in Rome. I think she's an incredible player. I have never seen her get angry, which I think is the coolest thing ever. Just to see someone like work day in and day out, like with that dedication, is definitely really cool. So I'm going to be watching the match with everyone else.

Q. (Off mic.)

NAOMI OSAKA: Yikes, so I got really emotional for some reason. I think I just had a lot of pressure on me because I wanted to do well on the clay.

So, yeah, I was stressing myself out. I knew that I have a chance in the first set, but for some reason like I did something wrong, and then it just went super fast from there. I know I lost the second set quite easily.

Q. You have probably answered this, Ash Barty's retirement, bad for tennis, maybe good for you? I'm sure your thoughts aren't like that. Generally what do you think about women's tennis going forward?

NAOMI OSAKA: Yeah, I mean, to be honest, like I don't really think it's good for me, like I don't know. For me, she's like someone I really respected and admired. I really love tell there is no one that could say anything negative about her. All the players really loved her. I thought that was really cool.

To me, I thought she was the most ideal No. 1. She was consistent week in and week out. You never really know what's going on behind the scenes, so I'm sure that kind of dedication took a toll on her.

But, yeah, I feel like things happen for a reason, and I don't know. We can only like keep pushing forward. I can't really talk too much about what happened in the past.

But it probably is bad for tennis, but hopefully, I don't know, we can do better.

(Naomi's answers to questions in Japanese.)

NAOMI OSAKA: Yeah, I would say like the times that I felt panicked against her, like Wim was kind of describing it, but I played her a couple of times and apparently they were all in like important moments. Like US Open I was defending that year. Indian Wells I was defending that year. Madrid was the only one that I wasn't defending. But I always felt like very tunnel-visioned, short-breathed all the time, because I would always think, like, I have to win this match.

I think today was the only time I went into the match not thinking that I have to win the match but I want to win the match, if that makes sense. I think that mindset change is very important.

Yeah, it's tough to play like a really good player and like think that you have to win the match. I'm kind of repeating the same words over and over, but yeah, I just feel like I'm the type of person that I always want to prove something, and it's hard to do that consistently against someone that is

kind of like your natural -- everything that she does, I don't like it, if that makes sense.

Yeah, I would say like, for example, if you were to talk about me, you would say my serve and my forehand are my two biggest strengths. She has really amazing service returns, so that immediately puts me in pressure and puts me in a very uncomfortable position that I don't really like.

Then she's immediately aggressive from the first ball. But her ball isn't hard, if that makes sense. Like it's fast but it's not hard. So my footwork, I have to adjust it a lot, because there is literally no other player that plays like her. I found myself like kind of on my back foot most of the time, but I'm confused why I'm on my back foot because it's not hard.

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