

Miami Open presented by Itaú

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Naomi Osaka

Press Conference



I. SWIATEK/N. Osaka

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THE MODERATOR: Not the result you would have wanted today, but it's been a great tournament for you. What are your initial reflections on that match?

NAOMI OSAKA: Initial reflections on the match, I thought first set was pretty close, but I think throughout the match I just couldn't really figure out what to do on her second serve. I didn't really know if I should go forward or go back.

I think this is something I probably should have decided before the match. But other than that, I thought it was kind of cool to see her movement up close.

Yeah, all in all, I mean, it was a sad outcome but it was a fun day.

THE MODERATOR: Questions?

Q. Congrats for the tournament. You are very amazing player.

NAOMI OSAKA: Thank you.

Q. My question is what's your next tournament?

NAOMI OSAKA: Yeah, I'm gonna try to take this clay court season really seriously, so I'm actually going to go to Europe a week before to train on the red clay. So next tournament would be Madrid.

Q. Congratulations for the whole week. Can you just kind of put the whole tournament in perspective? What did you learn about yourself? What do you take from this going forward?

NAOMI OSAKA: Yeah, I guess what I learned about myself is like I guess I'm a good learner. Like I feel like I learned a lot every match and I tried to apply it.

But I also think Iga was quite different from all the players that I've played previously, so it was a bit hard to adjust to

what she was doing. But I think hopefully, if I play her next time, it will be a much better match.

Yeah, I have learned that like, I don't know, I'm not as disappointed as I normally would be, like I think normally I would be crying in the locker room or something, but now I'm kind of like chill. I feel like I know what I want to do better, and I just want to go back and start training again to like hopefully win a tournament next time.

Q. You talked about you being more chill and you're not disappointed. What do you owe that to? Why do you think you are able to feel that way now in the sense that, as you said, six months ago, I guess, if I'm doing the math right, you really struggled to feel that way?

NAOMI OSAKA: Yeah, I guess just like life experiences. I find it a bit ironic, like a couple of days ago I was celebrating like being back in the top 50. So I guess just like not taking things like that for granted anymore. I want to keep pushing myself to become a better player and a better person and I think just being a bit more humble of the situations and the opportunities that I'm granted.

Q. I was wondering, had there been any conversation going on between you and Wim on what to do on the returns since that seems to be the key to the match? And also, are you going to train in the U.S. on clay before you go to Europe?

NAOMI OSAKA: No, I'm going to Europe to train there for like the first time in my life. Hopefully that goes well.

We did talk vaguely, but like there was just a bit of chaos everywhere currently. But yeah, I think Wim is the type of person that will be very honest with me, and he has been honest, and I really appreciate that about him.

But, yeah, he definitely won't sugar-coat things, and I'm sure when we get back on the court he will want to train on a lot of different things.

Q. When James Blake was talking and the crowd gave a big sort of long cheer for you and just supporting you, what does that mean to you, having that sort of



support in that moment?

NAOMI OSAKA: Yeah, I would say like I'm like really grateful for it. Like it kind of almost made me cry, but I don't want to cry in public anymore. So I was holding it in.

Yeah, I think it like -- it meant a lot to me, because I feel like aside from like winning and losing, I appreciated the fact that people were happy to see me like playing again or happy to see me happy. So I appreciated it like on a human-being basis.

Q. Clay, how do you sort of set expectations for yourself going into this surface?

NAOMI OSAKA: I'm not really so sure. Like I'm clearly not a clay expert, but, you know, I feel like if I get my movement together, I should be pretty good.

I grew up on green clay, being from here, so it shouldn't be that foreign to me. And I know, you know, Madrid, Sabalenka won that last year, so I think that there is opportunities for me to do well, as well.

I think I just have to get my mentality together to know that every match would be a fight.

Q. In the second set, as games were falling away, what was in your mindset at that moment? What were you trying to do? When it's one, two, three, four, et cetera games, that are going to your opponent one after another, what does that feel like? How frustrating? Was it demoralizing, what?

NAOMI OSAKA: I wouldn't say it was frustrating, because she's clearly like No. 1 for a reason. I would say for me I try to figure things out a lot on the court, so my mind was like going into like let's say the stats that Wim gave me or like the calculations that I like myself picked up during the match. But I would say for me, myself, right now there is a plan A and a plan B, and the plan A wasn't working. The plan B is to get more balls in the court. But like doing that, I hit a bit slower, and I can't do that against her because she just comes in automatically.

So I think like I need to find a way to make my base bigger. Yeah, it will be interesting to see how that goes on clay.

Q. You were completely open and honest in terms of you not being in a final for a while. My question to you is that feeling of being back and obviously, as you mentioned, facing Iga and the level of her, what do both of them feel like in terms of being back and facing an opponent like her?

NAOMI OSAKA: Yeah, I would say it felt really good to be back. For me, I would say like Miami is a tournament that I have always wanted to win, so of course it's a bit sad for me right now.

But I think I can take a lot of positives in this week, and I also know that like the amount of rounds that you have to play as not a seed in this tournament is the same as a Grand Slam, and that's kind of the thinking that took me from Indian Wells to US Open like in 2018.

So I think it's all about keeping a certain perspective. Playing Iga today, just knowing the kind of roll that she's on, I guess I have to think about it more, like what specifically did I learn today, but I don't know.

It's kind of cool to be blown away by a person, like an opponent, but at the same time, I feel like I'm strong enough that that shouldn't happen. So I'm a bit like irritated a little bit, but I feel like, you know, this is like the learning process, and something good will happen eventually if I keep sticking with what I'm doing.

Q. You touched on some of these things, but what's it like playing at the Miami Open, the atmosphere, feeling such love from the fans, being so close from where you trained? Are you feeling the love? Are you feeling like it's your hometown tournament?

NAOMI OSAKA: Yeah, definitely feel the Love. I really appreciate it. I think the atmosphere here today for the finals was one of the best I have ever played in.

I don't know. I am reminded of the times that I was little, so it was really great to see everyone, and I saw a lot of little kids out there. I'm sure that their parents took them to watch these finals, so it was definitely really cool.

Q. You have been friendly with Iga for a long time, as long as she's been on tour, which is not that long. What is it like seeing her getting to No. 1, playing this well, and what do you sort of see as her growth as a person, as another friendly kid you met in Canada a few years ago?

NAOMI OSAKA: Yeah, yeah, for sure. A couple years ago, I had a dinner with her in Australia, and she was telling me like she might go to college. I was telling her, Don't do that.

You're welcome, Iga. Anyways... (Smiling).

Yeah, it's been really cool to watch her grow. For me, I think the most impressive thing is like being able to string together these two wins in a row. Not even

back-to-back-to-back wins but going from Indian Wells and like even getting to the quarters of this tournament to me would be impressive, because I personally know, like, how tiring it was to like -- I had to play Serena right after I won Indian Wells, and then I was completely dead after that. But she's like, it seems she keeps going. So that's really amazing to see.

I think that she's like really amazing for the sport. All the young players, like Raducanu, Coco, I think it's bringing this new generation -- I don't know if I'm part of the new generation as well. I might be like a middle guard. Yeah, it's definitely really cool to see like a young player at the top.

Q. I want to know a little bit more about that conversation. What did you tell her about college was not the right decision for her, that continue on? What is it about her game? You said she's different from everybody else. Can you explain what is it about her that makes her so tough?

NAOMI OSAKA: Yeah, I wouldn't say like I went direct, like, You should not go to college.

I mean, college, whoever went to college, it's a good job too. Not job, but like a good move.

But I just like remember thinking like you're really young and you are this good. I think maybe you should, you know, commit to playing more tournaments first. Then like see how you go from there.

She's clearly a very smart person, and I honestly don't think my words had any effect on her decision at all. I'm just joking.

Yeah, I don't know. Like for me I feel like really young, talented players should at least like give it a try for six months to a year on the tour before they make their like full commitment.

And then as why she's different from everyone else, I would just say she's like very explosive. Like I don't think her serve is the fastest, but like, say, she hits a serve and then I hit a return, it's not the greatest. She will be immediately there. So I think the reaction time of her is really good.

Q. A few days ago you were suggesting it's difficult for you as a very prominent player to, and I'm paraphrasing here, to socialize with other players. You have just said you had dinner with Iga in Melbourne a couple years ago. How many players do you socialize with and go out to dinner with or have in-depth

conversations with?

NAOMI OSAKA: I honestly think I can probably count them on my hand, but I'm not going to name them because I don't want to call them out. I feel like you have to have a certain type of personality to talk to me, and it's always like the outgoing people, because I never talk first. I think Iga is the first person that I kept approaching her a little bit.

But, yeah, like I think Wim or some people tell me I'm like intimidating to like start talking to or whatever. I never really thought that way about myself, but yeah, I guess I have already built up the reputation of not being the most socializing person, so... If anyone sees this, you can talk to me if you want to (smiling).

Q. Earlier this week you had talked about playing in front of your mom and your friends and how you don't always get to do that. Well, some players don't like playing in front of their parents. How was that experience for you throughout the week? Would you like to do more of it?

NAOMI OSAKA: Yeah, I mean, for me it's really cool because it's like having -- well, personally for me, like my mom never really watched my matches, because she would always be at work. It's kind of cool just to look in the stands and to see her like cheering or relaxing, because, you know, she's always such a work type of person.

But yeah, one of my best friends, she came here because of spring break, so she's called herself my lucky charm because I made it to the finals. I think for me it's just given me a more relaxed atmosphere. Like I love my team, but I guess it's good every once in a while to see like a friend face. Not that my team is not my friends, but someone that relates to me, not that my team doesn't relate to me (smiling).

(Naomi's answers to questions in Japanese.)

NAOMI OSAKA: Yeah, I would say from Indian Wells to now, I have known that my tennis like is at a good level, but I haven't like strung together victories like this in a while.

I'd say that my No. 1 goal from Indian Wells to this tournament was just to play well, and no matter what happens happens. I know that French Open is far away, and the clay season is upcoming, but I think my goal there is just to like keep a positive outlook on life. I'm going to watch a lot of Nadal videos to see how he moves. Shout out, Alcaraz, because he's killing it.

But yeah, I just think that knowing I'm still a student and I



have to keep learning. Clay and grass is something I really want to tackle this year.

So I'm willing kind of to do whatever it takes to get good results. Not that results are everything, but I really want to do well.

Yeah, for sure. I think I have maybe said it last year. That was a bad idea. Yeah, I think I have a possibility of doing better on clay than on grass, just because I'm more comfortable with sliding there.

Yeah, I don't know. I feel like for me it's more of a comfort level. I haven't played that many matches on grass. I think that's why I never really do well. So just knowing that and giving myself the opportunity to like sign up for more grass tournaments and stuff like that.

Yeah. I would say it's definitely really interesting, like last year I didn't really care about my ranking at all, but this year I find myself, like, wondering if I went to the top 50 or the top 40 and stuff like that. My main goal is to be seeded at French Open now.

But yeah, I think by like next year or by the end of this year I would love to be top 10. By next year I would love to be the No. 1. Oh, that's a big statement. Close to -- top 5. Erase that. Top 5. You know what? I'm going to set that goal. Top 1, yeah, No. 1.

Yeah, I don't know. It feels kind of good to chase something, and I think that maybe that's a feeling that I have been missing, like wanting to strive to do better.

For me, like, it's cool to see where the level of No. 1 is so like I can find out if I can reach that, if that makes sense.

Yeah, when I hear someone say like "rivalry," it makes me remember when people said like me and Barty were in a rivalry, but we didn't play that much, to be honest. I mean, I would love to be rivals with Iga, but I feel like we need to -- like Federer and Nadal played so many different times, so we'd need to play at least five different times, I would say.

But yeah, for me, like, I always keep the same answer. Rivalries are what make the sport go around. People want to see the matchup in different countries or different surfaces. I think that's the most exciting thing about tennis is like you play in different altitudes, different conditions.

So yeah. I don't know if she really considers me a rival, but sure, that would be fun.

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