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N. DJOKOVIC/J. Tipsarevic

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An interview with:

NOVAK DJOKOVIC

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. Obviously how difficult is it playing your close rival, close friend?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Well, it's always difficult I guess for both of us. We know each other really well. We played couple times official matches, but we played unofficial practices probably thousands of times throughout our careers. So we know each other's games. We watched each other develop and progress.

So, you know, I thought I started really well. He was missing first serves, didn't have a high percentage. Then in the second set, whenever I had a break ball he served well. So he was very close to take that second set. Then who knows what could have happened.

We both got a little bit nervous towards the end, I guess, and it was just luck to prevail.

Q. How old were you when you first met him?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Well, he was the best in his generation in every junior selection, I think. Under-12, 14-, 16, 18. He was the best junior in the world.

He was somebody that I was looking up to as well in Serbia. I think the first time was actually in Kapaonik, in the mountain where I grew up. His parents are actually coming from the city just nearby.

He was 14 and I was what, 10, or 11 years old. We played a match and whatever, we played a set. Our fathers organized a set. Then he was fooling around with me obviously. I was too weak for him. I think I didn't win a game.

But that was the first time that we met. Then obviously we grew up together. We played many Davis Cup ties and we come from the same city, so we know each other really well.

Q. So when did the tables turn? When did you realize you were better than him?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: When I got stronger. (Laughter.) No, well, not till late, late teenage years, I guess. I think we never played in juniors actually against each other. We never played an official match. We practiced many times.

He made a very quick breakthrough to top 200, 100 of the world when he was 17 or 19 already. For me it took a little bit longer after him, couple more years.

So cannot really say when the tables turned.

Q. Andy Murray tomorrow. Do you regard every opportunity you get to play against one of the top four particularly as a real challenge to just emphasize your position as No. 1?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Well, look, every time you play, especially top four, as you said, it's a big challenge for both of us. Especially after that Australian Open thrilling match, you know, that lasted for five hours.

You know, he's somebody that is established already at the top of the men's game, somebody that is one of the biggest talents that I have seen in the game. He has all-round game. He can play equally well in the defense, in the offense. He has a great serve. Very solid from both strokes on the baseline.

So there is not much weaknesses. I think we have kind of similar styles of the game. We try to win our service games rather than winning return, because we both have a great return.

Yeah, it's going to be a good match, you know. We both look forward to that. Regardless if it's a Grand Slam or 1000 or 500 event or 250, we always try win against each other and it's a great rivalry.

Q. Have you watched any of his matches this week?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: I've seen him play just a little bit today actually. It was the only couple games I've seen him play.

No, he's hitting the ball well. You know,

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he's always consistent with his game throughout the whole year. I think all of us top four guys, you know, are not really having a lot of downs throughout the year.

So we're always seeking to improve and to get better in these matches.

Q. The quick conditions here, who do you think it favors? You? Him?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Can't really say, you know. I guess I've been having lots of success in Dubai last couple years. Even though maybe I prefer a little bit slower surfaces, slower conditions, still, I think this surface is quite suitable to my style of the game.

It makes me be more aggressive and rely on my serve, which is good for my game. I'm trying always to improve that serve. And he loves playing -- you know, he has quite flat shots, so he loves playing on the fast surfaces. We never played in Dubai, so we'll see.

Q. Couple times tonight Janko got close to winning the second set and you got out of trouble with big serves. Would you say the serve is the biggest difference in your game between now and, say, two years ago?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: Looking at my elements in my game, probably is the stroke that I've improved the most, yes. Because I had really decent serve I think 2007, 8, and from some part of 2009. I think I played many matches in 2009 and got tired and I had some shoulder issues.

Then I suddenly changed the movement of my serve, and took me over six months to really get back to the old one. But, you know, it's behind me, so I'm happy for that.

Q. Dubai Tennis Championships was again voted as the best ATP 500 by the players. Were you one of the players who voted for it? If yes, why?

NOVAK DJOKOVIC: It's a secret. I can't really say. I will be fined. (Smiling.)

I'm kidding. Yes, yes, I voted for Dubai, and I'm voting for Dubai every year for last couple years. For 500 events, I think they're doing a great job in satisfying all the players, especially the top ones.

You know, allowing us to stay in the best hotel of the world and, you know, enjoying this beautiful venue as well. It's great. I think attendance is growing each year, so it's good conditions.

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