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Jessica Pegula 6 6
Anna Blinkova 2 0
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THE MODERATOR: Jess, congratulations on a great first win. Can you just talk us through the match and your performance today?

JESSICA PEGULA: Yeah. I thought it went very well. At least, I mean, ideally, I guess that's how you want to play first match on clay and with a quick turnaround coming off the hard court. So just glad I got a good win.

Q. Can you talk about your time here in Charleston when you were training here in 2013 and 2015 and how did that help in your development as a player?

JESSICA PEGULA: Yeah. So I trained here kind of when I was in between where I wanted to train. I was working with Michael Joyce at the time, and I guess he got an opportunity to try and start a group of kids here, specifically, like on Daniel Island at this club. So I was here, grew up in Hilton Head, so I was familiar with the area. But yeah, I was here for, I think, almost two years, and it was just, I think -- I mean I loved living here. I lived in Mount Pleasant, and I thought it was great. It was kind of a good time for me as well to be on my own, training on my own, like kind of doing my own thing and learning a lot, and it was just a great base for me. And a couple of the other girls that were -- at the time I was still playing a lot of challengers. So they weren't too far away, a lot of challengers in the South and in this area. It was a fun kind of period of my life, like maturing and growing into my career, and, yeah, figuring things out. So it was a great time, and I loved everyone here. A lot of the same people, Stringers, people that booked the practice courts, volunteers, obviously Bob and Eleanor, and I don't think Ben Navarro was there at the

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time. Yeah, that was before. But I know them all very well, and it was a really nice time.

Q. I mean obviously the score line tells its own story, but how did you feel on the clay today, especially with the quick turnaround from Miami? And what do you feel like you're going to have to do the next few days to try to level up to get literally your feet underneath you on the surface?

JESSICA PEGULA: I felt great today. I mean, I feel really good physically. It was a little hot out there, but I think there was a little breeze, which kind of helped with the shade on the one side of the court as well. So I felt really good. I mean, I definitely, I think, maybe a little better than I thought. But, again, I'm pretty comfortable on the clay. I didn't think I was going to feel horrible. Obviously I think there's still room for me to feel more comfortable as far as moving and shot selection at times. But today I did everything I kind of needed to do. So tomorrow I'll have a tough match against someone I played before on clay and is, to me, I think, maybe tougher on clay; I'm not sure. So it'll be -- I think tomorrow will be a really good test for me physically and as well as mentally.

Q. Just getting back to Charleston and outside of tennis, what is it that you enjoy about coming back to this area? Is there any sort of special places you like to go and things you like to do if you get the time?

JESSICA PEGULA: Yeah. So I just love coming back. I feel like everyone is so nice. Doesn't matter who it is. Like you walk into the grocery store and I remember like the first -- even though I grew up in Hilton Head, like I would walk into the grocery store here and everyone would just be asking me, like, do you need any help? I'm like, is there something wrong with me? Do I look funny or weird? Like why is everyone talking to me. But like so nice, right? So I guess it's that southern hospitality that you get from being here, and you definitely feel that, you know, in the city and the town, but also like here on site with all the people and the people working the event and the volunteers. They just are really excited. So it's just so fun to come back.

I obviously love trying all the restaurants. The food is always amazing. And I'm actually staying on Isle of Palms.

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So I really like that area, because I have my dogs with me. So it's a really nice area. Dogs can go on the beach. I feel like everyone has a dog here. So it's just really pet friendly, and it's really beautiful. So just kind of staying in that area.

Q. Jessica, congratulations on your win. And what do you think you bring to your clay court game that gives you an edge over other players? And second part of that question, do you still have that little miniature --

JESSICA PEGULA: Maddie. Yes. I do still have Maddie. Yeah, my mini Aussie. She's here. Yeah. She's here, and she's very happy. She went to the beach yesterday. I call this week like their dog vacation week where it kind of centers around them.

But, yeah, as far as my clay court game, I think -- I don't know. I think my court sense really helps. I think my touch has gotten a lot better, so as far as drop shots, lobs, sliding, the slice, isn't something I was bad at, but I just think it's gotten so much more efficient, and I've been more confident being able to use those skills on clay court. I think my forehand has gotten a lot better over the last couple of years where it's more of a weapon. I feel like I can really use it on the clay to run around and hit my forehand. And today I thought I did that well, especially on the returns, looking for my forehand to really dictate, because I think that's a big shot on the clay.

And, yeah, just being smarter out there. I think I just have some good intangibles, and with my court sense and smarts, I guess, around the court, I've just been able to kind of find my game a little bit better on clay than maybe in the past, and I think that showed a lot last year, and hopefully it can show again this year.

Q. Just talking a little bit about American tennis, you're obviously leading the way as the top American. Can you just speak to the talent and just how special it is to have this many Americans in a draw, especially in the U.S.?

JESSICA PEGULA: Yeah, the American women especially have been really, I think the depth has been amazing, especially in the Top 100, and it's been really exciting to see, and even more of an honor to be the No. 1 American when there are so many Americans doing well. So that's been really kind of just a

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crazy thing that I get to experience and do, and it's been so much fun.

But, yeah, we have a lot of depth right now with the Americans, and it's been pretty cool to see girls of all different ages, at different rankings and having really steady results, it seems like. And I think we're all kind of rooting for each other because it kind of gives each other confidence and makes us want to do better when we're all seeing everyone do well. And we all practice with each other, and play Billie Jean King Cup together, do all these things, and grown up together as well. So it's nice to just see everyone excelling a lot.

Q. You obviously did very well in Miami last week. Is that kind of a double-edged sword because you advanced so far in the tournament and then not a whole lot of time for rest? And talk about just the transition from the hard court to the clay.

JESSICA PEGULA: Yeah. I think what we usually say it's like a good problem to have. You kind of deal with it when you get there and make the decisions, but for me, obviously I love coming here, so I wanted to play. I have a tradition, I drive up with my husband, with my dogs, and we kind of keep the same pattern. So that's always nice.

But the transition, again, you know, I played on clay a lot, especially the green clay. I'm pretty used to it. Like I said, I grew up playing here, grew up in Hilton Head, which we mainly played on green clay, and there's a lot of it in Florida as well. So I didn't feel too troubled. It's not like I was going to Madrid where it's red clay and there is altitude and there is a lot of other factors. I feel like I knew what to expect coming here, and I think that helps, at least mentally, you know, keeping a good mindset and a good attitude, even if I didn't play well today, that I kind of knew what to expect. Maybe that is what helped me today. I'm not sure. Hopefully it'll help me the rest of the week, but again, yeah, I don't struggle that much switching surfaces, I don't think. I think over the years I've kind of figured out what to expect and how to better transition and what I need to focus on and what I need to do. And that's made the transitions a lot easier than maybe five, six years ago.

Q. Going off of that a little bit, we were talking yesterday about you being the top seed and maybe the pressure

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that goes along with that, but what do you feel like you've learned the most these last couple years as you've risen up the rankings and you take on more responsibility? You've got more of this to do; you've got a million things. I think you've got a lot of folks here that want to see you and want pieces of your time. How do you make sure to keep the mountaintop always the exact focus of the tennis itself?

JESSICA PEGULA: Yeah. It definitely it's a balance, and I think you learn a lot how to prioritize things. I think you have to have other people help you as well. That, I think, is important to help manage your time and that can see where your priorities should be and maybe where they shouldn't or give advice and opinions on someone you can talk to or ask as well. I think that's really important. So having a good team that you really trust.

Obviously I feel like I've added other elements. Like now I have an agent. Now I started working with a physio on the road. Like those were all things where at the time I don't think I needed them a couple years ago, but I think as time went on, inorganically I was like, you know what, it's time. I think I did a good job of trusting my decisions of -- or trusting myself into making those decisions, like okay, it's time for this, it's time for that. It's time for X, Y, Z. And I think I've done a really good job of that where I have a really great team around me that makes it also fun. So I think I just trust my instincts on kind of what I need to do and what I think helps me.

I think I've talked in the past about how I like to stay a little busy because I don't like to be sitting around doing nothing just like thinking about my next match, because to me I would start overthinking things a lot. But it's a balance. So I think as long as I feel comfortable on court, getting in my time and even little things, like prioritizing yourself, like, sleep, eating, recovery is really important to make sure as I'm doing all these other things, that I do still have enough energy and enough focus on the practice court for my main priority.

But, yeah, I think I'm just instinctual, and I trust the decisions that I make, and I think it's important to own up to them as well, if you make mistakes, and know, okay, well, I'm not going to do that next time. You just kind of live and

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learn, I think. So I've learned a lot about that over the last few years.

Q. Maddie is spelled how?

JESSICA PEGULA: M-A-D-D-I-E.

Q. How old?

JESSICA PEGULA: She's ten now. I know. She still looks like a puppy, though. She still looks young.

End of Interview

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