

August 22, 2010



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MASTERS

R. FEDERER/M. Fish

6-7, 7-6, 6-4

An interview with:

ROGER FEDERER

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. Did you increase your level of play after nearly losing the first set in the tiebreaker? You played well the whole match.

ROGER FEDERER: No, I mean I thought I played well the whole match through. I don't think I played better in the second or third set. I thought the first set was the one I really should have won and ended up losing, so I think it was a close match. Could have gone either way.

Sure, I had a tough moment staring at one set down and breakpoint in the second set. You know, you think you're playing a good match, but you might lose 6 and 4. This is how tennis used to be played, coming up, big serves, some volleys.

So it was played on a couple of points here and there. I hung tough and made him work hard and was able to come across the finish line faster than him.

Q. Beyond the obvious, the one service break, why were you better today?

ROGER FEDERER: I just think overall I was really consistent on my serve. I had the upper hand from the baseline. You know, he had to start taking chances. And, who knows, maybe I was also just a touch fitter than him today. He had maybe tougher matches, even though I had to make a turnaround from night to day, which wasn't easy for me either.

Look, I've been playing well the last couple weeks, and today was just another proof that I'm playing really well.

Q. This is your first title since the Australian Open. What does that do for your confidence going into the Open, and what do you still need to work on?

ROGER FEDERER: Well, it's nice knowing that the hard work already in the off-season after Wimbledon pays off right away. I know it's not all work from there, but I've been committed to this sport for many years. I think when you do that and give yourself chances over and over again, you'll break through by winning tournaments again.

I came close a couple times earlier in the season. Should have won Halle, I felt. Could have won Madrid, but thinks didn't really work my way. I was maybe playing a little bit too passive. Now I'm taking it more to the opponents again.

I'm happy that that's the right game plan right now.

Q. Were you seeing the ball well on your return? Looked like you hit a lot of errors long.

ROGER FEDERER: No, I mean, he's got a great serve. He keeps you guessing. His first serve is particularly hard to read and get any proper play on it. I saw the stats against Roddick, and he had 95% first serve winning percentage, not only here, but in Atlanta.

That shows you the guy can hit absolute bullets on the serve, and very accurate, too. Every time he misses, he either hits the tape or he misses it by this much. He's not a guy that's just gonna have completely off day on his serve.

Then his second serve he mixes it up well with kick and faster space and sliders. That just kind of keeps you guessing the whole time. You think, Okay, I'll play safe, and obviously that's the wrong day. Then you think, Okay, I'll go for it, and that's the wrong play, too. That's credit to a good server.

Q. How big a part of your game is the dropshot now?

ROGER FEDERER: Well, on the

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R Federer - 08 22 10

hardcourts it's obviously not the best shot. You can use it on the clay, maybe on slower hardcourts. But these courts play too fast and the ball bounces too high. I thought I played a good one in the last game. I think I served for it and he got to it easily actually.

So that kind of shows you that you really have to choose it at the right time. And when I chose to play it, I could also hit a proper forehand. Just to mix it up sometimes I use the dropshot. I think it's a nice shot. I used to think it was a panic shot because I didn't know what else to do.

Today I used it the right way. I'm happy it's part of my arsenal now.

Q. Mardy is trying to get where you are obviously. Is it harder to establish yourself as an elite player or to remain an elite player?

ROGER FEDERER: Well, I guess getting there is harder, because not many guys get there. (Smiling.) Yeah, once you're there you feel like you belong there and you get maybe better seedings, better draws. If you take advantage of those, you can hang around there for a couple of years.

Then again, it's windy at the top, you know. For me it was easier to stay at the top than getting there, even though I was able to get to -- make it to the top 5 in the world sort of in 2002, 2003 already when I was 21 years old.

But I had a lot of pressure just coming along, people saying I was gonna be the next No. 1, the next future Grand Slam champ. It's not so simple and easy like people think it is.

You see how hard it is today to win slams and tournaments. There are many good players around and many dangerous floaters if the draws. It's hard to win them all.

Q. The perception is that your peers have narrowed the gap between you and the rest of the field. What changes do you think you need to make to your game to become dominant again to win a lot more slams?

ROGER FEDERER: Look, there's only four a year. That kind of gives you the answer. You can't win ten. You got to be smart with your scheduling. For me, it's about being healthy and keeping it fun and doing the right things out on the tennis court.

I'll always have new challenges coming up. Used to play against Sampras and Agassi, and Moya, and Todd Martin and all those guys. Next

generation was sort of already my generation almost. It was Roddick and Hewitt and Safin and Ferrero.

So I've played through many generations now. Always been different challenges and rivals. That's not gonna change. I think every five years you'll have someone new. I think the next generation is probably already sort of knocking on the door.

It's surprising actually to see no teenagers in the top 100, which I'm quite surprised, because Becker won Wimbledon at 17 and Hewitt won Adelaide at 16. I was 30 in the world almost when I was 19.

At the moment I just think people are so strong and physically and mentally tough that it's maybe hard to break through. I think the next few years we'll see again some new faces and names.

Q. Could you notice a difference between Mardy of two years ago and Mardy of today?

ROGER FEDERER: Yeah, he beat me 3 and 2. This he lost against me, even though I feel like he's playing better. There you go. Tennis is a funny sport sometimes.

No, but he seems like he's playing well. I didn't see him play that much this year. This is the Mardy I kind of know and know he can play at this level.

Then again, we have many guys who can play good tennis. It's played on a couple points here and there. You just can't win them all. He's doing a good job at the moment and he's on a good run and he's gonna be a tough guy to beat at the Open, especially on home soil. I think the Americans just play with more belief.

Q. Were you trying to keep the points shorter today?

ROGER FEDERER: Well, I was not gonna bunt it into the middle of the court so he can take a crack at it and come to the net. You're gonna stay offensive yourself and keep him on the back foot. He does move well, but it's not his No. 1 strength.

It's his serve, his backhand, his game moving forward. So that's why I had to take chances from the baseline. I thought it worked out well.

Q. Do you find yourself having to work

harder now than you did even a couple years ago to achieve the same kind of success?

ROGER FEDERER: Not necessarily. I'm working hard since many years now. I've been with the same conditioning coach for the last -- I think it's been maybe ten years almost. We've been doing great work together. He's also working with Wawrinka and he used to work with Rosset and the Maleeva sisters.

So we've always looked for new ways to keep it interesting. The workouts, even though they're not the most fun sometimes. But you got to go through them. Now today I know why I'm doing it; whereas as a teenager I never knew. I didn't know why a biceps exercise was good for my tennis, because I didn't get a five miles faster serve after that.

Today I know exactly what I need to do and have to do, and I have much more fun working out than ever before. It's kind of strange actually.

Q. Do you think Andy Murray is your biggest threat in New York? Of course there are other guys.

ROGER FEDERER: Yeah, I mean, I guess top 4 have the best shot again, you know, naturally. We can all play really well on the hardcourts. Murray has proven himself, so has Djokovic on the hardcourts and so has Rafa. He's won the Australian Open.

Maybe US Open is a bit faster, so you figure Rafa will struggle a bit more. But if the draw goes his way, he'll be in the finals and have a crack to the title, too. He knows how to win slams. He's won all the other ones.

So I think it's gonna be an interesting US Open. Many guys are playing well again. Murray didn't win a tournament for a long time, and he's been able to win Toronto again. So that definitely puts him as one of the favorites as well.

Q. You haven't played Rafa very much in the last few years. No one else really plays like him. Do you miss that particular challenge?

ROGER FEDERER: Yeah, I mean, I think it's an advantage or disadvantage, depending on when you play against him. Many times I did play him during the clay court season. Look, I was able to beat him two times, but I've also lost to him over ten times. So depends where you play him.

Unfortunately we hardly ever get a chance to play here in the States where conditions maybe

suit me more. That's the way it is. I think we get excited when we play each other, but I don't think we miss each other when we don't play. We've had that many matches against each other, and the matches are tough and grueling on both of us. There's a huge hype around it, which is also a bit exhausting at times.

Look, I hope I can play him at the Open. I don't think it's possible before the finals again, so we'll see how it goes.

Q. Is there any intangible that you were able to draw on today that helped you get by, confidence, experience, what have you?

ROGER FEDERER: Um, well, yeah, I mean, experience helps you to a certain degree. I thought today was just a really close match that went my way. I had huge belief that I was gonna win today from the first point until the end. That sometimes can make a bit of a difference.

Then I was positive all the way through because I felt I was playing well, even though I lost the first set. So I never got down on myself and doubted myself. I think that reflected in the game as well.

Q. Is there any aspect of your game that you're not happy with today in today's match?

ROGER FEDERER: Yeah, I could have sometimes not messed up some stupid, easy volleys I had. Then again, he did well to get it down there and keep the ball in play.

I thought I played an excellent match today.

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R Federer - 08 22 10