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MASTERS

An interview with:

RAFAEL NADAL

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. You actually have won more matches in your career on hardcourt than you have on clay. You haven't yet won the US Open. What is it gonna take for you to break through there?

RAFAEL NADAL: That's really normal. I play 60% or 70% of the matches on hard over here, no, so that's normal. Well, I gonna try my best in the US Open, but I am in Cincinnati now, so I am focused on Cincinnati.

Q. The US Open obviously is the only major you don't have. With all due respect to Señor Roig, I was wondering why your Uncle Toni doesn't come to these tournaments?

RAFAEL NADAL: That doesn't matter if my uncle came to these tournaments or not to prepare the US Open. But first thing, I don't play this tournament to prepare the US Open; I play these tournaments because these tournaments are very important for me. (Smiling.)

Q. You're known as a very sort of superstitious player on a lot of things. I notice that you're wearing pink again in Canada and probably again here. When you were wearing pink last was at the French Open in '09 when you lost to Soderling there. Do you think about that at all?

RAFAEL NADAL: I am not superstition on these things.

Q. No?

RAFAEL NADAL: For sure not. You if you play well, you win; if you play bad, you lose. That's all history in general.

Q. What was the bigger story: you winning Wimbledon either time or Spain winning the World Cup in Spain?

RAFAEL NADAL: That's no doubt. You know, winning Spain World Cup, for sure that was amazing for everybody. The football is the king sport of Spain, and for me, and I think for everybody, it was just amazing live this experience, no?

You know, for so many years we deserve to win there because of our tradition with all sport in general, but especially football it's unbelievable. Finally we did, so it was, yeah, all the country was on the street.

Q. Can you talk a little bit about your decision on why you decided to change to the strings that you're using now?

RAFAEL NADAL: The string?

Q. Yeah. Did you change the strings for more spin or...

RAFAEL NADAL: I changed before the year, yeah.

Q. Right. But was there something in your game that was lacking that you decided...

RAFAEL NADAL: No. Nobody told me it was better. I tried, I like it, I change. (Laughter.)

Q. How did it change your game?

RAFAEL NADAL: The string?

Q. Yeah.

RAFAEL NADAL: No, I don't think so. Nothing.

Q. How is your practice the last couple days working on the backhand and serve that you wanted to do after Toronto?

RAFAEL NADAL: One day.

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Q. Only one day?

RAFAEL NADAL: Just yesterday and today a little bit. I gonna practice a little bit more this afternoon after, when I finish with you, and that's it.

No, it was good. The court is completely different. It's very fast here. Much faster than Toronto, it's not easy to adapt to this court when you arrived to semifinals or final in Toronto.

For sure I am here to try my best.

Q. Is the ball jumping more?

RAFAEL NADAL: No, stays lower, and, yeah, it's faster. Much faster.

Q. Does it feel different being No. 1 this time than it did being No. 1 last time, two years ago?

RAFAEL NADAL: Doesn't make any difference. Doesn't for me. Finish No. 1 in the end of the year, that's something that I would love to do it. But right now I don't think if I am No. 1 or I am No. 5. So I am Rafa, and I go to every tournament to try to play well and to try to be competitive and win as many matches as I can.

For me, important thing is that I feel that I play well, feel that I am competitive to try to win everybody. And when we finish the season, we will see where I gonna be, no?

Sure, was -- no good for me was more important to come back to my best tennis and to win in Monte-Carlo, Rome, Madrid, Roland Garros and Wimbledon than be No. 1. So that's most important thing for me.

Q. You set a record earlier this year for most career Masters Series titles, and people talk about the US Open being the only slam you haven't won. You're close to having won almost every Masters Series tournament at least once, too, which would be a pretty tremendous accomplishment. Cincinnati is one of the ones you have not won yet. Does that give you extra motivation to win here to try to complete that set?

RAFAEL NADAL: Well, it's difficult to -- I think it's almost impossible have all the Masters 1000, no, because that's change. Grand Slam didn't change, but that's change, no?

For example, I won in Madrid indoor, and right now is Shanghai; I won in Hamburg, and right now it's clay, Madrid. That's true, I won in Madrid

now on clay, too, no? But too much coincidences to win all nine.

So it's nothing that I really focus on, no? I try my best, and I would love to win here in Cincinnati. But I am in first round, and conditions and opponents gonna be very difficult.

Q. What specific changes do you need to make to your game to move from Toronto, a slower court, to a faster court here?

RAFAEL NADAL: I don't know. We will see. The competition start tomorrow. I only had the chance to play a few games today in the morning with Sam, so that's my first feeling. Because yesterday I practiced specific things with my coach.

We will see. I don't know. Sure, gonna be change. Gonna be very important the serve that didn't work me very well the last week in semifinals. I didn't serve well in that match for sure, so I have to serve much better if I really want to have any chance to be in the tournament competing for something.

So I am working on...

Q. You and Novak plan on playing doubles again in the future?

RAFAEL NADAL: Why not? Yeah, if we have the chance. I have a very good relationship with him. If we find the right week, why not?

Q. Do you think that if the US Open was at the start of the year rather than at the end of the year that you would have won it by now? Is the timing of the tournament part of the reason why you've yet to win it, given all your efforts to do what you do throughout the year getting to this stage of the season?

RAFAEL NADAL: I didn't understand nothing. (Laughter.) (Through translation.)

I don't know. I really don't know. That's impossible to know. The thing that I can say is little bit easier for me, no, because I lose a lot of energy with the clay season and grass court season. That's true, no? It's a lot matches for me, a lot of tension in that three months, so was -- it's a very important part of season for me, and I put everything there. And after that, it's normal go down. Since everything is very good like it was this year, it's normal go a little bit down.

But I am perfect mentally. I say if I didn't win the US Open, it's because I wasn't ready to win

the US Open in the past. I don't know if I gonna be ready this year or in the future. That's what I gonna work, and that's what I gonna try every year.

So I am focus on keep improving my tennis to have more options to do and to have more options to do when the matches are difficult in that tournament. But I gonna do all what I can all my career. But remember, is a Grand Slam, and every Grand Slams is very difficult.

Q. So you don't think it's a physical thing?

RAFAEL NADAL: Was a physical thing a few years; another years wasn't a physical thing. 2005 I was perfect physically. That's true. I was worse playing on this surface in 2005 than what I am today.

2006, I still was worse than what I am today on this surface, but I lost in quarterfinals because Youzhny played better than me. In 2005 I lost against Blake in third round because he played better than me, and that's all.

In 2002 and 2007 I had problems on the knees, and I lost against David Ferrer in fourth round.

In 2008 I arrived perfect physically but destroyed mentally winning in Roland Garros, Wimbledon, Toronto, Olympics. So it was crazy for me. Very hard season.

And last year was another time. I broked my abdominal in Montreal, so I played here with a little bit broken abdominal. But every match was bigger and bigger -- (through translation) the tear, the abdominal tear was bigger.

I finished the US Open destroyed, so for me it was amazing result being in semifinal last year.

Q. So this year you go there in a good position to win? That's an interesting list, but this year how di you arrive if August?

RAFAEL NADAL: We will see what happened there, no? Every year is different. You can be playing very well here and you can arrive there and lose. You can be playing bad here and arrive there and start the tournament slow, better and better every day, and you can finish playing your best tennis and win.

You never know. This year I start Roland Garros for me playing terrible, and finally I played very well the final and semifinals and finally I win, no? You can do it everything perfect, and not for that reason you gonna win or you gonna be

playing well in that moment. So that sometimes is the...

Q. Physically now you're 100?

RAFAEL NADAL: Physically I'm perfect. Give me two weeks to broke everything. (Laughter.)

But I don't think that's gonna happen. I think I am fine. I am fine physically. Hopefully doesn't gonna happen.

Q. Is there anything specific you're working on this week other than your serve that will get you in a better position to do well, not only here, but also at the US Open? Any area of focus?

RAFAEL NADAL: You know, I gonna try to have the best result as I can here. After that, I gonna have one week in New York to adapt to the court, to adapt to the balls, and to prepare US Open.

The conditions here to the US Open are completely different. The ball is different; the court is completely different; the weather is different, too. So all these many different things makes the tournament another sport. So, yeah, it's difficult to compare. That's true.

If you win here, for sure the confidence is higher and you can arrive there and play a little bit easier. But 2008 I was playing better than ever winning in Olympics in not very different conditions, the same ball, and I arrived there and I played very bad.

I lost in semifinals, but seriously I was playing bad.

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