

August 15, 2010



K. CLIJSTERS/M. Sharapova

2-6, 7-6, 6-2

An interview with:

KIM CLIJSTERS

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. How did the rain delay help you? You were down a set and a break, and you really came back and it was almost two different matches?

KIM CLIJSTERS: When I went inside, I kind of, you know, had one positive and one negative. The positive was that I really wasn't bothered or I felt that I was, you know -- actually felt comfortable playing the groundstrokes against her.

I was really hitting the ball well from the baseline and moving her around. I think that part of my game was good, but obviously my serve was kind of nowhere to be found. So that was frustrating. Obviously it puts a lot more pressure on your return games as well.

Because, you know, a few times I had some break chances, and you kind of feel like, Okay, I have to take these chances if I want to kind of give myself a little bit of a -- not an easier service game, but kind of stay with her in that game.

But obviously when the rain delay came, I came out here and I just stayed focused on my groundstrokes. Again, my serve still wasn't great, but I was able to just, yeah, battle through and I think kind of just be aggressive from the beginning onwards.

I kind of knew that I had to -- you can't start a match -- you know, when you come out of the locker room like that, you can't start it at 0-0. You have to be ready to go and you have to get yourself a little bit pumped up and fired up. That's what I tried to do.

Q. When you came back out and held and then broke, the crowd was louder than I had heard them the whole match. Did you sense that?

KIM CLIJSTERS: Yeah, of course. That's the energy that you kind of -- I mean, I knew that if I could break, obviously, you know, I was -- it was still a tough thing to do, but if I could break, the match could go either way.

I felt that if I -- I came out playing my groundstrokes really well, and I think Maria didn't play bad. I just felt that I was with the groundstrokes being very dominant.

I think that's something that also in the tiebreak just made me be more comfortable and put her under pressure a little bit more. She started making a few double faults as well, so you kind of felt a change coming there.

Q. Right before the rain, you had fought off three match points obviously. It almost seemed like the momentum was turning and the rain delay could have hurt you.

KIM CLIJSTERS: Yeah, that's the thing. When I saw those drops falling, I was like, Oh, no. I felt like if I could hold here, because I felt like I had some opportunities to break her. My concern was more on my service game. So I felt that if I could hold here and kind of, yeah, give myself a chance to break back like I had after the rain delay, you know, I felt that groundstroke-wise, like I said before, I really wasn't under -- in a lot of trouble.

I felt that my serve was obviously my biggest disappointment today.

Q. Did you notice any change in her game after her medical timeout, in her movement or in being more aggressive?

KIM CLIJSTERS: I mean, yeah, I think she started going for things a little bit more. She made some more double faults, I think. Maybe it was contagious, my first, you know, two sets.

Um, the thing is, Maria is the type of player that hits the ball so hard and deep, and it's very

hard to go for the lines on those kinds of shots. So I kind of knew that whenever I felt like I could step forward a little bit, you know, I had to take my chance to make her move.

I was able to do that very well at the end of that second set and in the third set.

Q. Were you trying to prolong some rallies to get her to move some more? She played 6 consecutive days and played 12 sets. Was that a key strategy for you coming in?

KIM CLIJSTERS: No. Like I said, you know, obviously she is one of the cleanest hitters out there. When she's behind the ball, she's so accurate that it's very hard to get out of that situation once she is putting pressure on you. I wanted to once in a while mix it up.

You know, I can't hit the ball as hard and as flat as she does. I wanted to kind of just go for the angles a little bit more and make her -- you know, don't hit too many shots in the same corner.

That's what I was able to do very well towards the end. Just don't give her two, three shots in the same corner where she can really be ready for it and be change directions on me.

Q. You started out at 2-1, and then she really went on a roll and kept that up, really, until the weather delay. Was that more like you mentioned the pressure you were putting on here, or you were still trying to find your game today?

KIM CLIJSTERS: Um, yeah, again, like I said, I felt like once I was in the rally I felt very comfortable, and I felt it was very close going either way.

I felt obviously the biggest difference today in those first two sets was with the serve. You know, she was serving very well, and also her second serve. She didn't give me a lot of opportunities to really step in and put her under pressure. That's what I felt like was the biggest difference in the first two sets.

Q. You made your comeback here last year. Is it especially special for to you win here this year?

KIM CLIJSTERS: Yeah, of course. It's always nice to -- you kind of have a different connection to a tournament where you win. To me, obviously being my first tournament that I played last year, it was already special. It kind of just for everybody in my team, it was just nice to be back at the place where we started last year.

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But, um, to win it this year, you know, means a lot. Obviously after the injury and everything, I kind of felt like after - Miami I think was my last tournament win - so it's nice to just play a few matches here and to win. And to beat a players like Maria and Pennetta this week is go to take to with me to Montreal, and then obviously with the US Open ahead.

Q. When you were down 0-3 in the tiebreak, did you see the match starting to go away from you at all?

KIM CLIJSTERS: No, I mean, you don't think like that. I mean, I kind of knew that if I, yeah, could go -- yeah, I think she was serving too at the at the time. I thought if I could just get one or two of her service points, if I could just get back into the tiebreaker like that, I think I just felt that -- you know, I felt fresh. I felt like I was moving well and I was retrieving a lot of the balls and kind of just made her play that extra shot. A couple of times she went for a mistake, and that kind of gives you that energy that you need in a tiebreaker, because it's win or lose.

And so once I won it, you know, I was obviously relieved. But then again, you kind of have to switch straightaway, because you want to start off well in the beginning of that third set.

Q. What does it say when you take a month off and come back and win a tournament right off the bat? Are you hoping to get a month off before every tournament now?

KIM CLIJSTERS: Maybe I should keep it up. Obviously I wouldn't like to have the injuries. Obviously that's the most frustrating part about being back on tour is dealing with the injuries. You know, obviously spending my time, you know, between being fit and be able to -- when I'm back, to be able to compete with the top players, but then and also going out to the physio and doing all that stuff. So that's frustrating.

But hard work pays off. I think that is something that obviously Maria, she's back, and she's one of the hardest workers out there. I think it's nice to see that she's back as well. I think we'll play some more big matches like that. Could have gone either way tonight really.

Q. Your winners to unforced errors actually improved.

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KIM CLIJSTERS: Thank you.

Q. Is that an indication that you're timing and rhythm are coming back?

KIM CLIJSTERS: Yeah, to me it is. Obviously I'm not the type of player -- I'm focusing towards a goal that I have, and that's trying to reach my best level. My best level is -- my type of tennis is to step into the court, go for shots, change directions when I want to.

Obviously I'm not gonna change my plan, although -- I you know, was hitting more unforced errors, but to me, like I've been saying all week, I didn't feel like I had the rhythm. I was trying to find my game. You know, once in a while I had some good rallies out there, and that's what keeps you going is trying to achieve that.

Obviously today it was better; it was a lot better. But then again, it's never perfect. The unforced errors are down the and serve doesn't work. So it's kind of, ah, you know, I guess it keeps you going.

Q. You had a short match yesterday. Can you talk about how long it took you to get into that rhythm today?

KIM CLIJSTERS: Um, I mean, yesterday, yeah, I mean, I started off yesterday well in the match, and I think that's something that I was looking for. I think it was something that I was kind of missing in my previous matches. I didn't really start of that well.

I knew it was something that was very important today as well. I felt that I started off well, and we had some really close games and good rallies in the beginning of the match. I really felt a lot more comfortable in the beginning of my last two matches.

Obviously yesterday was disappointing the way it ended. I'm more happy with the way that I'm starting and the feel that I'm having for the ball when I'm starting these last two matches. So that's a big improvement. It just makes you feel that little extra confidence when you go out there.

Q. With this win, you're projected to rise to No.4 in the rankings. When you came back, is this where you expect to be a year into this?

KIM CLIJSTERS: My goal was never set on rankings. You know, obviously with once in a while taking a month off, it's obviously not my goal to focus on the rankings and to play more

tournaments because I want to get higher in the rankings.

I really want to, yeah, peak at the important times. I play the important tournaments, and I need to mentally stay fresh. And also, as a mother, I mean, you tend to feel guilty if you take a lot of individual and selfish decisions. So, you know, it's very important for me to make sure that I spend enough time with Jada and home and taking care of her.

So of the that will never change for as long as I'll play. Yeah, so that's part of my schedule now.

Q. Your a competitor and you really want to win, but it appears to everybody that you're having so much fun out there since you've come back. What are your expectations for Grand Slams now as opposed to when you played prior to your retirement?

KIM CLIJSTERS: I mean, my expectations are the same here as they are when I go to the US Open or to Wimbledon or play in a smaller tournament. As a competitive player, you want to win every match that you play, and you kind of don't -- you know, you forget where you are. You just kind of play that opponent.

So you want to win every match that you play. Obviously it's nice when everything kind of falls into place at the big tournaments. And obviously that's in my situation what I'm really trying to peak for, to make my game fall into place when I want it to. That's obviously for the big tournaments.

Q. As No.4, you'll likely have your own quarter during the US Open. Does that make a difference to you? I know you went in there last year unseeded. Will it help at all to have the...

KIM CLIJSTERS: No. I mean, no, I don't think like that. I mean, especially in the Grand Slams. So many things can change and draws can open up. You have really tough quarters. If you win, you have to be the best whenever they come. If it's in the semis or the quarters or the first or second round, it doesn't -- it's a challenge.

You know, it's fun in a way too to see tough first rounds or tough second rounds. That's what makes the tournament. So that's a part of the draw, so I don't care either way.

Q. Did you get a little nervous trying to close out the match? You had several match points. It was a big win for you.

KIM CLIJSTERS: Yeah, no, um, nervous, you know, I was kind of just trying to make that first serve every time. You know, every time I did and she missed couple returns on my first serve, I was like, Okay, one more, one more.

She obviously took some risks on a couple of my second serves, and I really had no chance of getting into those returns. So you kind of have to just start over and try not to think about the match points that you had. You just really try to focus on whatever point that you're playing, whether it's deuce or game point.

So you don't think about -- or you try not to think about it. Obviously somewhere you do think. I mean, I was probably more nervous about my serve holding up than trying to close out the match.

Q. You're such a fast-paced player out there. Is it tough playing Maria who is possibly one of the slower players on tour?

KIM CLIJSTERS: No, you adapt. I mean, I think I kind of got into that rhythm. You know, when I started playing, you know, I played girls who now practice with Ai Sugiyama, Chanda Rubin, Jennifer Capriati. I mean, you know, I hit with her a lot, and I think she was one of the players who was very fast in between points. So you kind of just go into that rhythm. Lindsay Davenport as well is one of the players that played very fast in between points.

No, it doesn't bother me that she takes her time. She stays between the limit of what she's allowed to. Each player finds their own rhythm and what suits them, how long they need to recover after long rallies and everything.

But I like things to go fast. (Smiling.)

Q. Today the end of the match, Jada came out and watched for a little bit, and she was yelling and cheering for you. How did that make you feel, and did it affect you at all?

KIM CLIJSTERS: Um, I saw her. She was actually sitting up in the one of the boxes up higher, so I saw her a little bit during the injury timeout that Maria took. I heard her, Mama, and then looked back and I'm like, Oh, there she is.

So, yeah, I mean, and then I went out there and started jumping around when there was like one more minute left of the injury timeout. I saw her, and she was like waving, and I'm like, Hi, so that nobody sees it. (Laughing.)

But it's fun to see her. Obviously, what is it? She's back in the hotel; bedtime now. No, but it's nice. She's getting to a stage where she can actually sit and watch a match as long as there are some stairs where she can walk up and down.

Yeah, it's fun. But she still doesn't know the difference between winning or losing, so that's good.

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