

Miami Open presented by Itaú

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John Isner

Press Conference



J. ISNER/F. Auger-Aliassime

7-6, 7-6

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. You want to talk about that game in which he was serving for the first set a little bit?

JOHN ISNER: Yeah, I mean, simply put, he didn't play a good game.

Q. That's being kind.

JOHN ISNER: Yeah.

Q. At that point, did you say, This kid's terrified?

JOHN ISNER: No. No, not at all. I didn't say that. He just had a bad game. Maybe his toss went awry a little bit. I don't know.

But, no, I didn't say that at all.

Q. Without saying he was terrified or anything like that, how much do you think experience helped you in a match like this? He's 18, on the big stage, a qualifier. You're defending champion, 33 years old. How much does experience count in a match like that?

JOHN ISNER: I think it may have helped a little bit. But you see a lot of times where someone can have all the experience in the world or some teams can have all the experience in the world and they don't come through against an inexperienced opponent.

May have had something to do with it. Maybe he was a little bit fatigued, also, which is not an experience thing, because he came through qualifying. So prior to this match he had played three more matches than I have. So could have been a little bit of inexperience and maybe a little bit of fatigue, also.

Q. There is a lot of buzz about the young guys, and there's a new venue from last year. You have flown under the radar. Have all of those things kind of helped you get where you are now in terms of maybe taking a little pressure off? There is a lot of attention on young guys.

JOHN ISNER: No, I don't think that's -- you know, that's not what's taken the pressure off me. I think someone told me if I lost my first match here, I'd be 12 in the

world. Like, big deal, you know. That's really good.

So I just looked at it like that. You know, there is no pressure, really. It's just another tournament. Just because I did well in it last year -- I mean, if this was eight years ago, I might have felt that pressure. But now, I don't ever think about defending points or anything like that. I have done that enough throughout my career to worry about that. I used to worry about that, but I don't anymore.

Q. It's got to be gratifying to back up a win from last year?

JOHN ISNER: Oh, for sure. I have backed up other tournaments before after winning them the previous year, but nothing of this magnitude. So you're right. To be back in the finals is a good accomplishment for me.

Q. How come you're playing tiebreakers so well?

JOHN ISNER: I don't know. I'm just finding myself pretty calm in those situations. Maybe it's a little bit mental. I'm definitely playing my best tennis when I have been in that situation this week, there is no doubt.

Q. How do you feel about a possible final with Federer?

JOHN ISNER: Yeah, well, that would be awesome for me. Any time you play against him would be, in a big stage, a tournament like this, would be amazing.

I played him in the finals of Indian Wells about seven years ago, I think. He beat me there. It would be really cool to play against him. I'm not rooting for anyone tonight. It's going to be tough either way. But certainly playing Roger would be a very big moment.

Q. How would you feel if you're gonna play the final against Denis?

JOHN ISNER: Well, I would, as I said, it would be very tough because he's a very good player. We all know what he does well. He's very athletic, and he's lefty, which is pretty tricky, also. I think if I were to play against him, he would certainly be ready for that moment.

I think he's a kid that's built for big stages. You know, if he doesn't get to the finals this tournament on Sunday, he'll have a lot more chances to get to big finals in his career.

Q. You actually do have a good record of repeating success at tournaments for every one that you have won, six different ones that you have either won again or been back to the final now. Is there something about confidence, knowing you're capable of doing it, coming into a tournament that helps you? And also, nine out of ten sets have been tiebreakers here thus far. Do you go in there mentally into a game and knowing how to exert yourself, preparing for the tiebreak at this point in your career? Because you play so many of them.

JOHN ISNER: I think there is something to be said about having success at a tournament. I mean, look, I have played Atlanta a bunch. I have won that tournament a bunch. I'm just very comfortable there.

Here, it's a little bit different because it's a different venue. It's a completely different feel from last year, obviously. But as you said, knowing that I won this event last year, I really took the approach coming into this year that there is zero pressure at all to defend this title.

And I said in press before the tournament that chances are I'm not going to defend it, because I have only won one of these in my whole career, and I have probably played a hundred of them. But now I'm one match away, so hopefully I can eat those words. I have been doing it so far.

And as for the tiebreak situation, I mean, of course I have been in that moment a lot throughout my career. It's not so much energy -- I mean, I try hard throughout the whole match. I'm not really saving myself for the tiebreaker. I'm trying not to win sets in a tiebreaker.

Today was a little bit different way of getting there with my opponent serving for each set. But once I got each set back on serve today, I felt very confident that if it continued on into a tiebreaker, that I would have a chance to win.

Q. Serena has made a big point over the last year and a half of talking about how motherhood has changed her. I'm wondering, how has fatherhood changed you and your perspective? Is that what's made you so much calmer, or is it just with the years?

JOHN ISNER: Oh, I think, for sure, I think it's the years, for one. But also, I do believe that, you know, getting married and having a kid is something I have always wanted to do. Now that my wife and I are experiencing the joys of having a kid, it's been amazing. It's the funnest thing I have ever done (smiling).

I miss them a lot. Certainly taking the approach at this

tournament that if things don't go well, I'm on the next flight home and I get to be with my family. That's a very, very good consolation prize.

Q. When you have had success against Roger in the past, what have you done well? Last year at the Open, Kyrgios said his chip return is one of his most underrated weapons. Is that something maybe you serve to the body more, serve and volley occasionally? What do you do to counter that?

JOHN ISNER: Yeah, I think we saw last night in his match that chip return gave Kevin some trouble. Kevin's a big guy, and Roger, with that chip return, it's something that he can do in his sleep. He just gets it down low and gets it short. He almost forces his opponent to come in.

At that point, you have to hit a great approach shot and a good volley to win the point, because he's going to have a look at a pass if you make the shot, and it's very difficult to do.

If I do play him, maybe there are some things tactically, especially on second serves, that I'll try to avoid maybe. Not go into his backhand as much. But he can do that, as I said, in his sleep. It's an incredibly high-talent shot that not many players can do, but he can do it all the time.

Q. We are in the middle of March Madness. Have you been able to watch the tournament? Do you have any teams? I'm sorry Georgia is not in it.

JOHN ISNER: They weren't even close. But, yes, I have had a very good schedule this week. I have played most of my singles matches pretty early, and I have been able to get back in relatively early fashion and sit at the hotel and watch all the games.

It's been nice. I love to watch sports. Whether it's NCAA or hockey on TV, I have been doing it every single night here.

Q. Did you do the brackets?

JOHN ISNER: Yeah, but, you know, I'm not -- I used to really, really get into it, but not as much anymore. My bracket is terrible.

Q. And your pick is?

JOHN ISNER: I mean, I chose Duke before. I know. What do you want me to do? It's all the favorites of...

Q. Do you think playing Zion as a tennis player would be frightful?

JOHN ISNER: Well, that would be scary. It's like LeBron, if he chose to play any other sport, he'd excel in it. Wouldn't matter what it is. I think Zion is cut from

the same cloth.

Q. When you said at the beginning of the tournament that you didn't really think you were going to defend just because of odds, but did you really believe in your heart that you wouldn't defend, or did you really think that you could win this again?

JOHN ISNER: No, I knew, I think -- I believe personally that any tournament I enter I can win because of how disruptive I can be and because of how well I can serve at times.

I'm not surprised that I'm sitting here back in the finals again. But I was just going on pure math and just the number of Masters Series events I have played and the number of Masters Series events I have won: one of them. You just crunch those numbers. That's why I came up with that answer.