

August 14, 2009



**Western & Southern
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MASTERS & WOMEN'S OPEN

D. SAFINA/K. Clijsters

6-2, 7-5

An interview with:

DINARA SAFINA

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. After she broke you to go up 2-Love in the first set, you really turned it on after that point. What happened at that point?

DINARA SAFINA: Well, you know, just nothing happened. It's 2-Love down. It's like, Okay, just play point by point. Because I had a breakpoint already in the first game -- I think I had two breakpoints, and I didn't use them.

So I was like, I was there. I was like, Okay, just stay there and do it a bit more like in important moments.

Q. What can you tell us about her game? What did you see? What did you expect, actually?

DINARA SAFINA: Well, for me, we played so many times. I know exactly what to expect from her, because I took her like top 10 player. For me, she's one of the best players. I think I stayed very aggressive today and didn't let her to dictate too much.

With her it's very dangerous. Once you let go, she can really level up the game. I was staying with her and not giving her easy shots.

Q. Were you a little bit nervous at the beginning of the match because it was her?

DINARA SAFINA: No, not really. Because me, I only think about myself. I'm playing mostly with myself, you know, so not really. I was

just thinking what I need to do, not really focused on her.

Because, I mean, obviously when you play against top 10 player, you can't think, how do I have to play that she's not comfortable.

No, I have to play how I have to play, and then let's see who gonna, you know, dominate and put their game.

Q. You started the week pretty slowly. Do you feel like you're hitting top form now?

DINARA SAFINA: Yeah. Slowly I'm getting into the tournament, you know. Sometimes it happens, you know, like you have to play one match like this kind of disaster that you go through everything. You can't put the ball inside, everything is flying, you don't know what you're doing on the court.

Somehow you manage to win the match, let's say next day you have off, then yesterday was a little bit better, and today completely different game. This is tennis.

Sometimes you really have to -- some kind of matches really you have to pull them out. God knows how, but you stay in the tournament and you're like, Okay, I went through everything. Worse it cannot be. So now from the worse it can only be good.

Q. We saw more variety from you today.

DINARA SAFINA: Well, you know, when you play a top player, you have to use all your shots. You have to mix up the game and, you know, to make them think a little bit.

Q. She made a compliment yesterday about you. She said during her break that you were the player who made the most progress, also in the sense of athleticism. Do you think that made also a little bit the difference today?

DINARA SAFINA: Well, you know, I think the people can see and compare how was -- even the beginning of the last year, and now it's

completely two different players on the tour. I been overweight. Everything was there. Mentally struggling, unhappy. So.

Now I think I'm one of the fittest on the tour now, I'm positive, smiling, playing my game, and enjoying much more.

Q. How sweet is this victory?

DINARA SAFINA: You know, it's definitely a good win because she's a great player. Gives you just confidence. I think with the game today I should be very happy today.

Q. Did you feel a great player today?

DINARA SAFINA: I still think there is some room inside. But, you know, you can't play from the first match disaster to today completely different. Slowly I'm picking up my game. I feel like day by day it's getting better.

Q. How do you feel about going into the semifinals?

DINARA SAFINA: Good. You know, how else you can feel?

Q. Do you think the tournament has changed with the Williams sisters both losing yesterday?

DINARA SAFINA: They lost, so the players who beat them are good. Flavia is in great shape and winning I don't know how many matches. Sybille Bammer is a good player. So, you know, they're not there, but there is other players who you have to beat.

Q. Normally you're a crowd favorite, but today everyone loved the comeback story. Did you feel the crowd may have been against you at all?

DINARA SAFINA: Well, not really today I was listening to the crowd. I know that of course the people, they still remember Kim, they love her, so I have to deserve their respect, their love. Hopefully tomorrow they gonna be more behind me.

Q. There was a lot of double faults and breaking today.

DINARA SAFINA: From who? From her or from me? Both?

Q. Both.

DINARA SAFINA: I would say both. How we can be without breaks? It's not possible. Then it would be men's tennis. It's women's tennis still.

Q. Was there a lapse of concentration in the second set when you traded the breaks?

DINARA SAFINA: Yeah, she -- maybe I a little bit slow down and she started -- I slowed down and she used it, so that's the point. I think it was not -- you know first set I was really much more dominate, and hitting the ball a little bit -- in the second set, I stepped a little bit back instead of stepping in.

But good that I change it. I didn't let it go. I know she was 4-2 up and 40-Love. I turned it back and still hang in there.

Q. Did you feel she was nervous?

DINARA SAFINA: I cannot speak about her.

Q. But she had a few words to you after the match.

DINARA SAFINA: She said, Well done and good luck tomorrow.

Q. She said more, I think. You had a little chat.

DINARA SAFINA: I don't know. That's what I told you. No, no, she just said, Well done and good luck tomorrow.

Q. Is there anything you tell yourself mentally when the first set turns quickly? Do you say, Okay, I'm the No. 1 player? Is there anything you tell yourself to stay in the match to really change it back to your side, the momentum?

DINARA SAFINA: Well, I just realize like the moments she start to be dominating, I'm like, Okay, now I have to do a little bit more, because I see that I'm starting to run a little behind the ball instead of moving her around.

So I was like, Okay, come on. Do a little bit more. So I'm always saying like, Come on. If I'm going down, I have to level up.

Q. If you had to name one point or one quality that made a difference today, what would that be?

DINARA SAFINA: I think overall, I just played a very solid, heavy game. It was hard

hitting from my side.

Q. How far do you think she can go in her comeback?

DINARA SAFINA: Very far. It's the first tournament, and she beat already Bartoli who just won a tournament. She beat Svetlana who been in a good shape. I think she just need a few more tournaments to get the match rhythm, to get the tournament rhythm. That's all.

I mean, the game she has, and with picking up more tournaments, she will raise her level. Still maybe she doesn't know how we changed. After two years, she doesn't know how we hit the ball.

So play more times and practice more times with us. I mean, just give her three months and she'll be back.

Q. I remember that you played the last match against Justine Henin before she stopped. Now first match Kim coming back.

DINARA SAFINA: Okay, so next it's gonna be Justine coming back. (Laughter.)

Q. First you stop the comeback story of Kim.

DINARA SAFINA: Now I have to make Justine come back.

Q. Maybe.

DINARA SAFINA: I would love her to come back. For me, she was the greatest player. I really admire her. I was looking up to her a lot because of what she managed to do, how hard worker she was, and how mentally tough she was. I'm just -- I don't know, I really respect Justine a lot, and I love her game a lot.

Q. What were you especially pleased with today in terms of serve, footwork, volleying? What did you really like that you did today, and what do you still want to work on to win the tournament?

DINARA SAFINA: Well, I still have to use a little bit more -- after my good shots to step a little bit closer to the court. I get many short balls and sometimes I don't use them. I come a little bit late for them. But just to follow a little bit more points after my good shots, good strokes.

Q. You must be very lucky girl today then, more self-assured than yesterday?

DINARA SAFINA: Yeah, I would say.

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