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**Western & Southern
Financial Group®**

MASTERS & WOMEN'S OPEN

An interview with:

RAFAEL NADAL

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. How do you feel physically coming into Cincinnati after getting a few matches under your belt in Canada last week?

RAFAEL NADAL: Yeah, I feel good, no? Yeah, I feel very happy to be here. And, sure, the last week was important week for me after few time outside of competition. Comeback, and it was a good comeback, no?

No, I played not a bad match second round, and against Del Potro I played a very good first set. Just very happy with that. Just practicing every day with allusion, and just try my best every day with my best positive attitude. Just like this I gonna have chances to improve.

Q. What would be, do you think, a good result for you here? Are you looking, I guess, for a specific result, or are you looking more for a feeling of how you move on the court, how you feel with your timing hitting the ball?

RAFAEL NADAL: Yeah, sure, for me it's more important -- you have good result you gonna have a good feeling, that's...

Yeah, but, sure, the important thing is feeling -- anyway, if you don't have a very good result, the important thing is move every day a little bit better and try to hit a little bit the ball every day with a little bit more confidence, no? So that's, in the end, the important thing.

Sure, the US Open is very important, but after US Open remains a lot of the season, and I would like to be ready to play the good end of the season.

Q. You think in some ways you might be fresher now than you tend to be at this time of the season?

RAFAEL NADAL: Fresher, sure. I don't know if this fresh is very good, but I am fresher, yeah.

Q. With respect to the injury time-out and whatnot, I know you like to spend a lot of time on the practice courts. How much more time until you're able to practice like you did in the past at a 100% with the amount of time you spend there?

RAFAEL NADAL: Well, it's impossible start from a zero to hundred, no? I need a little bit progressive and to go every day a little bit more. I did in Mallorca and I still doing here, no?

I practice, for example, today one hour 45. Normally if I have one more day gonna play little bit more, two hours 30. I need to go slow, no? The important thing is be good physically.

If I feel like this, I know with experience if I work hard and if I can work with the normal intensity, what I did in the past, I gonna have chances to be ready another time at my best level. If it's not this year, I hope next year.

Later or soon I hope to be ready for another time, but I have to be with calm.

Q. What do you make of the new world order with Andy above you now at No2 and you No. 3?

RAFAEL NADAL: What makes what?

Q. What do you think of the new world ranking system in tennis?

RAFAEL NADAL: It's very difficult to think a lot of things. It's only a number. Only a number change. I congratulate Andy. He's doing a good season.

But, yeah, I don't know. For me, doesn't change a lot my perspective and my goals. I'm very happy today, more than yesterday, or the same happy today than three days ago when I was

No. 2, and I say before when I was No. 1.

So in the end, what makes me happy is be ready to play and enjoying playing tennis. Be happy and don't have a lot of problems to play, no? If it's like this, if I can compete with normal conditions, I am very happy to be here.

I spend five years No. 2, and No. 1 almost a year. So the ranking is important, but it's not the most important thing, no? For me, the most important thing is be competitive to try to compete to win important tournament, no?

The rest, I hope to be ready in the future, too, to come back to No. 2 or to be in the top positions. No. 3 is very good number, too. (Laughter.)

Q. You've been saying all here year that Andy is good enough to get to No. 2, and he's proved you correct.

RAFAEL NADAL: Yeah, he's enough good to be No. 2, no? I think I had the season under the control before my injury. I was playing well, having almost perfect season.

After the injury, it's tough. But I know myself. I know when I was okay, I was there, no? I was the No. 1 in the race this year after -- before my injury, so I know if I am ready, I gonna have chances another time to be there.

Q. In the next few years, do you think you'll have to change your schedule a little bit? Will you take more breaks?

RAFAEL NADAL: Take more breaks?

Q. To protect your knees maybe.

RAFAEL NADAL: Depends. Depends, because depends what goals you have. It's very difficult to have a lot of breaks when the third week of January you have to play a Grand Slam. It's very difficult to have a lot of breaks when after three weeks you have two Masters Series in a row, and after you have three Masters Series in four weeks.

So what break can I do? After you have two Grand Slams in four weeks. Give me the -- well, give me the week. I didn't play a lot of tournaments outside of obligatory tournaments. I only played in Doha. Is normal tournament to prepare Australia. I only play in Rotterdam and Barcelona and that's it. I didn't play a lot of... Yeah, that's obligatory.

The schedule can change. The ATP can change the schedule. I can't change the schedule.

Q. But you did have a break for two months...

RAFAEL NADAL: Yeah, obligatory break. It's always the same: you stop or somebody stop you, something stop you.

Q. So maybe the knees stopped you and you had a break. What was that like? Did you follow tennis? Did you watch the French Open? Did you watch Wimbledon? Or did you completely tune out and try to not think about tennis?

RAFAEL NADAL: I was more outside than inside, yeah. Watch the final of Wimbledon, and I watched the last two games of the final of Roland Garros. That's it.

I watch the Davis Cup of Spain. I saw everything. But that's it. I watch Contador winning the Tour de France, and I saw Gasol winning in the NBA. A lot of good things for Spain.

Q. Was it conscious to keep away from tennis, or did you find yourself wanting to get back on the court and get back to the tour?

RAFAEL NADAL: No, sure, the first week is tough after you have injury. You arrive at probably one of the two more important tournaments of the year, Roland Garros and Wimbledon, with maybe your worst physical problems, your worst feelings with the physical.

Sure, in the beginning you go down a little bit, no, first week. But later, you know, the life is not only tennis. I was in Mallorca with family. That's always very important for me. With the friends, and a lot of support, no? A lot of fans was writing me on the website, writing on my phone, friends.

Yeah, it was very good time in Mallorca. The summer in Mallorca is perfect. Good weather, beach. Perfect. Nice water. So probably I was injured the worst time to be injured in the season for my tennis, but the best time to enjoy Mallorca, so...

Q. How much did you miss the competition? And how does it feel to be back in competition?

RAFAEL NADAL: Well, you know, I said before, the first two weeks, one week and a half, was I don't want -- I really don't want to speak about competition, no, because you go down a little bit, and it's tough moments.

But after that, I didn't miss the competition because I didn't watch myself ready to compete with my problem in the knees, no? I really wanted to come back, or try to come back, when I feel okay to come back, no?

Because you know, when I stop, I was a little bit tired to play with pain, no? When you go to practice every day with problems and problems in your knees and these are limiting you every day, you lost a little bit the allusion to practice. You cannot practice with your intensity.

Q. How does it feel to be back in competition?

RAFAEL NADAL: Very good. Very happy to be here. I lost last week and I go out of the court very happy, no, because I thought I had a very good first set with one of the best players of the world. So very happy to be here in Cincinnati and enjoying another tournament on the tour.

Q. You talked about friends earlier. During your obligatory break you lost a good friend. How will you remember Matthew, and is it weird to be at a tournament and not see him? Is that hard?

RAFAEL NADAL: Yeah, it was a shock, no, because when something like this happen, it's very tough for everybody, especially for the family.

But for us, too, no? Because you think a lot about these things, what happened in the last few years. You know, few weeks ago something similar happened in one important player of Spain, football player.

So in these moments I only can send all my support to the family, to the close people of Matthew. It's very difficult to accept, but that's the life, unfortunately.

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