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An interview with:

MARAT SAFIN

PETE HOLTERMANN: We'll start with questions.

Q. You'll be doing the exhibition with Pete Sampras. Could you just tell us a little bit about that first great win you had at the US Open over Pete, and how you look that now and what it meant for you in your career.

MARAT SAFIN: Well, first of all, it looks like it was yesterday, but it already pass almost ten years. We're kind of looking backwards, and it's really a warm feeling when he have an achievement like beating Sampras in the final of US Open.

It was my first breakthrough actually, and it gave me the chance on becoming No. 1 in the world. Thanks to Pete that he wasn't at his best that day. And I'm really happy to repeat the match on Monday or Sunday. When it was supposed to be?

PETE HOLTERMANN: On Monday.

MARAT SAFIN: So I would love to play against him.

Q. Pete told us the other day you guys are kind of close. It's a very odd combination, because Pete Sampras is a very different kind of a guy from you. Can you talk about the relationship you have? Talk about the kind of guy he is and the kind of guy you are.

MARAT SAFIN: Yes, well, we are a little bit different. Few years we are different. But you know what, when I first came out on the tour it was maybe a time when you come into the locker room, you know, you just don't know anybody. It always seemed like you could talk with him.



For me, it was honor just to talk to him. He was pretty normal and you could chat with him for a few minutes. It's always nice to see the big guys are also people and are very down earth and very relaxed.

It was a big, big pleasure of sharing -- I shared the locker room with him.

Q. We know that you're a very charismatic sportist, and so was Gustav Kuerten. We would like to know if Gustav Kuerten was one of your biggest rivals of your career?

MARAT SAFIN: Yeah, well he kind of stole from me the No. 1 in 2000. I lost a couple of finals, one in Hamburg and one in Indianapolis, which there was basically a few points off becoming No. 1 in the world. Basically I lost that losing to him in the final. So if I would win one final, it would change the position as well at the end of the year.

He's always been a tough opponent, you know. He was playing very aggressive, very nice guy. But unfortunately I'm pretty pissed at him, because he stole my No. 1. (Laughter.)

Q. Do you think that victory against Sampras could make the rest of your final season more motivating, a good exhibition in Los Angeles?

MARAT SAFIN: First of all, it will be a nice to play. It will be a night match probably, and it will be nice. It would be nice to play against him. I would love to remember the feeling when I was in the finals. It will be nice to repeat it.

Q. You've told us you're retiring at the end of the year. Do you wish maybe you didn't tell us so you would just be able to play the season out and not have to deal with all the questions?

MARAT SAFIN: Well, but it came out. It came out, and I'm not really -- people have been asking too many questions. But anyway, I don't care about it. I know what I want. I know what I

want to do. I'm pretty satisfied with my career, and I'm not changing my decision.

Q. When Pete retired, he didn't go near tennis at all. He played a lot of golf and he kept to himself and; et himself slept in, he told us. He was very excited not to be on schedules and not have to play. Other players have said that same thing. I'm wondering, do you have any specific plans, say, you want to go to sit on the beach for six months, or are you not thinking about that? What is your fantasy for taking it easy when you retire?

MARAT SAFIN: Well, of course I'm gonna take it easy at the end of the season after I retire, because I need a couple months just to relax and just to realize that you really retired.

Because you're always on schedule and always on a flight and always running to practice and always doing something around tennis. It's kind of tough to, you know, like change your mind.

You need a couple of months to realize that it's over and start a new life. Of course it has to be somewhere nice where you can just be relaxed without any stress.

Q. What do you imagine as a great way to live for a guy in his 30s and has a fair amount of money? Is there a special thing, passion, or interest that you have that you would like to realize somehow? I don't know, like you did some hiking mountain climbing? What do you look forward to in retirement?

MARAT SAFIN: Well, there's plenty of things to do. I'm gonna stay active and do something different. Definitely not gonna retire and then sit on my -- sit on the beach and do nothing and just relaxing for the rest of my life.

I'm gonna be active and do my things. I have a few projects. I don't know, I'm gonna be working, so...

Q. Can you tell us what those projects are?

MARAT SAFIN: No, no. They're my things and it's okay. I don't want to share it yet.

Q. All these years, I don't remember your being asked about your name. What was with your mom and Jean-Paul Marat? What's the story there? Can you give us a little insight on that?

MARAT SAFIN: Oh, I have no idea. I guess she liked the name. It's pretty rare in Russia

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to hear this name, so it's kind of nice to have the name that not many people have.

Q. Yeah. Do you know anything about the historical figure, Jean-Paul Marat? Any thoughts about him? He was quite a character.

MARAT SAFIN: Obviously he's a French revolutionary, and he been a pretty famous guy in Europe, mostly in France. But nothing to do with my --I mean, I don't think my mother and father named me after him. I'm pretty sure about that.

Q. What are you doing now? It's pretty late in Moscow, isn't it?

MARAT SAFIN: No, it's 9:00 in the evening.

Q. Pete is the ultimate competitor and showed last year in some exhibition games with Roger that he still possesses all the weapons to give anyone a run for their money. Do you see this match as a bit of lighthearted fun, or do you expect a tough battle out there?

MARAT SAFIN: No, it's gonna be mostly fun because I don't have to show to anybody anything, and he doesn't have to. Just to play there, remember good times, have fun so that the people have fun. Work some nice points so the match will be nice.

It's all about fun. It's not about to show to each other who is the best one and whatever. I know he was much better player than me. He achieve much more than me, and I don't want to argue with that. I don't need to. I just want to have fun.

Q. You're not too far away from retirement. Any special memories that you would like to share with us?

MARAT SAFIN: Well, just been some great moments. There have been so many things that I lived through and so many good decisions that I made, and couple of bad decisions. But actually it's good for the experience in life, and I'm pretty happy that everything what happened to me, it actually happened and was a really, really nice trip all those 12 years.

Just I can't pick a specific one that made me happy, because every moment was special and every moment was a different stage of life. It's difficult to pick one.

Q. You've got a handful of tournaments left to play. What would be the perfect way to say good-bye to the tennis world?

MARAT SAFIN: Well, if I would win a couple matches here and there it would be great.

Q. Your sister is keeping the family flag flying high at the moment. She is, however, yet to win the elusive first Grand Slam. Do you think it's just a matter of time, or something significant that she needs to change in her game physically or mentally to climb to the next step?

MARAT SAFIN: No, it's just more just take some time. She been unexpected the No. 1 in the world, because not many people really believe that she would become one day, and finally she became.

But the next step, maybe she was not really ready for that, now she's been through a few finals and she's more experienced and the next one will be hers.

I'm pretty sure sooner or later she gonna make it. Once she gonna crack one down, first one, and then much more will come. She's really competitive and really tough girl. She was crack it down, it just takes a bit of time.

Q. Dinara has remained extremely grateful in light of Serena Williams' criticism of the rankings and how she deserves to be the real No. 1. Is there anything you would like to say to that matter?

MARAT SAFIN: No, it's okay. It's a girls' matter. It's just girls talk. Well, they're two big players. Serena is more experienced and she been on tour much more time. She been out there for much longer time.

My sister, she's a new one, basically new No. 1 in the world. The rivalry, the next time they're gonna play, it's gonna be a nice match. Serena, she is a nice girl, but it's her own fault. They are tough actors, and it's what happens.

But I think it's good to see that it happens on the tour that they are fighting for No. 1 and giving a little bit of trouble to each other, but without any harm to each other.

Q. Tennis has been so enriched with so many great characters: Nastase, Gerulaitis, Connors, McEnroe. With your going, do you think you're one of the last great characters? Does that piss you off in some way?

MARAT SAFIN: Thank you very much to put me in the same as all these guys. Thank you, thank you, thank you for the honor.

For tennis, I hope there is much more to come. Because tennis, actually they need somebody not -- a little bit not crazy, but just a little bit untender, but it has to come natural.

So I'm really hoping there will be somebody on the tour. In the early years, like 20, 15 years ago, it was much more character. But over time it only became more as business and just trying to be less, less, and less like that.

Like you said, Mats, Andreas are kind of -- but I'm sure it's a circle. Sooner or later it will come, people like that, and tennis will live another nice era.

Q. Can you see anybody? Maybe Tsonga or Monfils?

MARAT SAFIN: Well, they are good players, great players, but let's see what they gonna do. They have a great potential, but the result will come at the end. You can be somewhat close to the final but never achieve anything, you know.

So like quarterfinals and semifinals don't really count. Only finals and the winners. Mostly winners. So the rest, quarters, semis, it's nice, but it's not big enough to become a class tennis player.

Q. With a personality like yours, what was the toughest part of this way of life? What were the things that were really hardest for you to deal with?

MARAT SAFIN: Throughout the years, probably continuous, not stress, but some kind of thing about -- you have to live with tennis 24/7.

There is no way you're gonna leave and like for days relax and not think about it. Sooner or later you're gonna think about tennis. This is the toughest part. Once it gets into your head, you really think you have to travel and practice and defend the points here and there. It's in your mind.

So basically the mental game is a little bit the tough one. It brings a little bit slightly stress, because you are all the time depending on tennis.

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