

A WORD FROM THE CHAMPIONS



As sports medicine professionals, we dedicate our careers to athlete health. How can we learn what they need from us? Ask them! That's why the Aspetar Sports Medicine Journal brings you interviews from some of the most famous names in sport, every issue.

This time, we have the fortune of presenting not 1 but 3 of the biggest stars in tennis: Victoria Azarenka, Novak

Djokovic and Rafael Nadal. Between them they have won 23 grand slams. The highlights from their interviews give great insight into the life of a professional athlete, their bodies and the strains they are under.

These players are the most valuable asset the game of tennis has – by understanding them we can help them stay at the top longer, under the safest possible conditions.

ON TRAINING

My regime is different when I am on or off the tournament schedule. I often have a couple of weeks leading up to a tournament, which becomes my practice phase. During this phase I usually spend a lot of time in the gym. I do physical training and cut down on my tennis a bit. During the tournament phase of training I play more tennis and train for about 5 to 6 hours a day. Out of tournament I train about 3 to 4 hours a day.

ON ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE

I don't really like it unless it is really necessary. I would never try acupuncture because I'm scared of needles!

ON TRAVEL

The most important key to travelling well is to get enough sleep and to maintain good nutrition. These are the basic things you can do to make sure your body recovers well. I also drink a lot of fluid when I travel and just try to adjust to the time as quickly as possible. I have a basic routine for staying hydrated during flights.

ON RETIRING INJURED

It is very frustrating because sometimes there is nothing you can do about it, you just have to do it. An injury during a tournament stops you from doing what you have worked hard for. As an athlete you also have to be very conscious of not really hurting yourself badly if you're injured, so you have to be smart about that.

VICTORIA AZARENKA





ON PSYCHOLOGY

I have certain techniques that help me such as visualisation, meditation, relaxation or quite simple things like walking through a park which does miracles sometimes, I must say.

ON BEING NO. 1

It is not easy, I can tell you that. You have to sacrifice a lot in life to be on top. From early morning till evening we have a strict schedule of things we must do – 4 to 5 hours of practice each day, no matter if it's 50°C outside. Fitness work, gym, running, ice-baths and a controlled diet are just a small part of it. Not to mention commitments to sponsors and tournaments. We travel so much, that sometimes we wake up not knowing which city or country we are in.

ON RECOVERY

Tennis trains your body and mind to recover fast from a very early age. Because the season is so long and we play week after week, we don't really have time to recover our energy to its fullest. We get one or two times per year to fully recover. Everything else is just grinding, and not giving up when going gets tough.

NOVAK DJOKOVIC

ON HIS TEAM

I don't travel with a doctor. We do all the necessary tests several times a year, so there is no need for him to be with me at tournaments. On the other hand, a physiotherapist is a crucial part of my team. He helps me to recover, to prevent injuries and to get my physical condition in the best possible shape. I also travel with my tennis coach and fitness coach. We are a team with a capital T.

ON LIFE WITHOUT GLUTEN

I feel great. I feel more relaxed, more focused and more in control of my life in general. I've learned to sync food with my body's needs, giving it exactly what it wants, when it wants it. It probably sounds strange to say I feel more relaxed and at balance but it's true. I am at one with my body – I feed it with the right energy and in return I get a healthy and energised body. My mind and body are now more focused on performance than on masking or fighting pain.

ON THE TRAVELLING DOC

When I travel outside of Spain, I think it's very important to have a doctor by your side during a tournament. Many times I have only been able to finish a big match or tournament thanks to the travelling doctor because he gave me a local injection. In

ON RTP

It's complicated, because as athletes, we all want very fast solutions. You expect to be recovered, to come back to play in 3 weeks, but after 3 weeks you still have some pain. So you start to feel a little bit desperate. At that stage I personally try to find new solutions, for example during a past injury I tried growth factor treatments.

ON SUPPLEMENTATION

These days every small detail is very important for an athlete. It probably won't affect whether you win, but you can certainly lose one match or tournament if you are not taking all the supplementation prescribed. Of course these are always prescribed by the doctor of the Federation. We have to take care and be aware of the doping controls as players need to follow the rules in every tournament and during the season.

A close-up photograph of tennis player Rafael Nadal. He is wearing a bright orange short-sleeved shirt with a white Nike swoosh on the chest and a red headband with a white Nike swoosh. He has a focused and intense expression, looking slightly to the right. His hair is dark and appears damp. The background is a blurred green, suggesting an outdoor tennis court.

some countries, the local doctors won't usually give you any kind of injections so you have to rely on someone from your own medical team.

RAFAEL NADAL

ON RISK FACTORS

Our job has to change. The tournaments and the ATP circuit have to change a little bit. There are too many weeks. The circuit is too long and there are too many matches. Sometimes we experience problems because of the courts we play on. Hard courts are very harmful to your back, knees and shoulders. It is preferable to play on grass or sand than hard courts.