“I have the feeling I’m playing my best tennis”

27/10/2019 An interview with Australian tennis player Ashleigh Barty after winning the "Porsche Race to Shenzhen".

These are exciting days for Ashleigh Barty. As the winner of the “Porsche Race to Shenzhen”, Australia’s new tennis star received a Porsche Cayenne Coupé even before she hit her first ball in earnest at the WTA Finals – as the fitting reward for a fantastic season. Now on Sunday the 23-year French Open champion has won her opening match at the prestigious year-end tournament in the Chinese high-tech metropolis 5:7, 6:1, 6:2 against the Swiss Belinda Bencic. We spoke to Ashleigh Barty about her rise up to the top of the world rankings, her passion for doubles and how she became a better tennis player through cricket.

Ashleigh, you’ve had a fantastic season. Is your “Porsche Race to Shenzhen” win the deserved reward?

“It’s been an incredible year leading up until this point. I think It’s been just extremely exciting, and to win the Porsche Race to Shenzhen has been incredible. It’s been a very special season and I’ve played some extremely solid tennis. Obviously, I feel like I’m playing the very best I can at the moment. So, we’re still working to build and hopefully we can finish off very well here in the Finals.”

“I think so, yeah. I think it’s going to be an exciting off-season, a time to reflect and relax, for myself and for my team as well. It’s been an incredible year and we’ll be able to sit back and celebrate what we’ve been able to achieve this season.”

You received a Porsche Cayenne Coupé for your “Porsche Race to Shenzhen” win. Do you actually drive, and where do you prefer to sit, at the wheel or in the passenger seat?

“Yes, I do, especially when I’m home in Australia. Obviously, driving is a little bit of a novelty that we don’t get to do too much of when we’re on the WTA Tour. I’d like to say I’m a safe driver first and foremost, I naturally prefer to take the wheel but hopefully I’m a calm passenger too.”

“It’s a bonus. I think it’s been a progression and I feel like I’ve been very consistent throughout the whole year and I’ve earned my spot at the top of the rankings. I’m looking forward to trying to build and becoming a better player and a better person and try to stay there as long as I can.”

You’ve won the French Open and you’re the number one – do you fellow players treat you any differently?

“No, no, not at all, I’d like to think that no matter what ranking or no matter how I’m playing, I’m always

well respected or well-liked among the players and my colleagues. I suppose. But I have a very good friendships with a lot of girls and that certainly hasn't changed."

After the 2014 US Open, you gave up the game for two years and played cricket professionally for Brisbane Heat. How did it affect you? As a player and your personality?

"I think first and foremost, it changed me as a person because I grew, I developed, and I became much more mature. For me, it was the opportunity to lead a normal life for a teenager. And I found that tennis was what I really wanted to do. So, I think it created more passion and more drive, and obviously it was something I needed to do. I certainly wouldn't be sitting here today at the WTA Finals, if I hadn't taken that break. That's for sure."

What are the strenghts you can rely on when you're out on court?

"I think I always like to know that I can I rely on my serve and my slice backhand. I think those are the two shots in particular that I love to hit but I also like to pride myself on having a complete game and trying the best I can to fight for every point."

In Australia, you received the "Don Award" for the Sports Personality of the Year and now stand alongside sporting legends like Cathy Freeman and Ian Thorpe. What does it mean to you?

"I felt I didn't belong in that Hall of Fame room if I'm being completely honest. It was a room full of Australian sporting legends who have inspired nations and generations of athletes all around our country. So, I'm extremely humble to have been recognised and be such a small part of the event. It was an incredible night."

You're a top player that plays doubles regularly. What fascinates you about it and what does it do for you?

"I love playing doubles. I think I enjoy having a friend on court with me. I enjoy that it can be relaxed and it brings in a different geometry of the court and it changes the game a little bit. And I think it's still a part of my tennis I love, I enjoy it so much. So, it will definitely continue to feature."

Will we see you at the 2020 Porsche Tennis Grand Prix?

"I would love to try and play in Stuttgart and obviously next year the schedule is a little bit different being an Olympic year, so we have to sit down now and plan our schedule the best we can – but hopefully I can play Stuttgart one day, if not in 2020."

You fulfilled your dream of winning a Grand Slam at the French Open. Which tournament do you really want to win in 2020?

"I think there are a lot of tournaments that I would love to win, but first and foremost, it's important for

us to try to finish of the year well. Afterwards, it'll be about resting and reflecting and switching goals to 2020."

After your opening win, what are your goals for the WTA Finals?

"I think my goals for this week in the WTA Finals are very simple - it's go out there and compete it, enjoy and, I think, enjoy a week where I'm playing the best of the best. These WTA Finals are an extremely tough challenge and every single match is a tough challenge. I'm just going out there to enjoy, have fun and hopefully bring my best tennis."

Porsche – global partner of the WTA

As a part of its global partnership with the Women's Tennis Association (WTA), Porsche is the title partner of the "Porsche Race to Shenzhen" and as such is visible at all every worldwide WTA tournament. The Stuttgart-based sports car manufacturer is additionally the exclusive car partner of the WTA as well as the Shiseido WTA Finals and is the sponsor of the "Porsche Race to Shenzhen Challenge", the annual WTA online fantasy game. Over and above this, Porsche has expanded its presence through partnerships with the WTA events in St. Petersburg (Russia), Dubai (United Arab Emirates), Monterrey (Mexico), Birmingham (Great Britain), San José (USA), Cincinnati (USA) and Linz (Austria). The company has sponsored the Porsche Tennis Grand Prix since 1978 and has also been the organiser since 2002. The tournament in Stuttgart's Porsche Arena is regularly voted by the players as their favourite world tournament in its category.

About the "Porsche Race to Shenzen"

The "Porsche Race to Shenzen" is the official qualification ranking for the Shiseido WTA Finals. The eight most successful singles players and doubles pairings earn the right to compete at the tournament. For the "Porsche Race to Shenzen", the players are ranked according to their best results during the course of the season. In 2019, they were able to win points at a total of 56 tournaments (52 WTA events plus four Grand Slams). Every tournament is symbolised – in allusion to Porsche and motorsport – with its own pit board. The player with the most points in the singles ranking receives a Porsche as the prize for the winner.

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