



Written by [James Murphy](#) on February 16, 2022

World's Number-one Tennis Player Will Forgo Grand Slam Tournaments Before He Takes COVID-19 Shot

Novak Djokovic, the world's number-one tennis player, has signaled that he's willing to skip top tennis tournaments instead of taking the COVID-19 vaccine. The 20-time Grand Slam winner was recently expelled from Australia earlier this year, even though he had received an exemption to play in the Australian Open. Djokovic has already been infected with COVID-19 and thus has natural antibodies against the Chinese virus.

The 34-year-old Djokovic, a Serbian, has been ranked as the world's top male tennis player for nearly a year since taking the top spot from Spain's Rafael Nadal. Since 2011, Djokovic has held the top spot in the world rankings for more than 10 years total. The Serbian tennis star's 20 Grand Slam titles is just shy of Nadal's record of 21.



AP Images
Novak Djokovic

Now in an [interview](#) with the BBC, Djokovic has made clear that he would rather retain his own bodily autonomy than continue to collect championships if it means having to take one of the experimental COVID-19 vaccines.

"I was never against vaccination," Djokovic, who was vaccinated as a child, said. "But I've always supported the freedom to choose what you put in your body."

Djokovic said he hopes that vaccination rules surrounding both the French Open and Wimbledon will be relaxed prior to those tournaments this summer, but that he is ready to sit out those tournaments, rather than be forced to take any of the experimental vaccines.

When asked by BBC why he felt so strongly on the subject, Djokovic replied, "Because the principles of decision making on my body are more important than any title or anything else. I'm trying to be in tune with my body as much as I possibly can."

Djokovic seemed to fully understand the gravity of his decision and said it was "the price that I'm willing to pay."

Other tennis personalities chimed in on Djokovic's decision. Former American player Pam Shriver called the news "terrible for tennis." Shriver hoped that Djokovic would find someone to talk some COVID sense into him: "I hope that the right trusted person, who is an expert in science and medicine, probably would have to be a Serbian, can sit him down and show him, and walk him through all of the steps that make the science and the medicine trustworthy and safe to put in his body," Shriver said condescendingly.

"Because it's terrible for tennis, not good for him — and, really, he does lead by example. The fact that



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he doesn't trust it, it does lead a lot of people, in his home country and throughout the world," Shriver concluded.

Or, perhaps, the fact that he's a 34-year-old, finely conditioned, world-class athlete with little to worry about even if he does become infected again, he can simply decide against the unnecessary shot.

Djokovic was detained in Melbourne, Australia, for 10 days in January, despite being granted an exemption by the Australian government to play in the nation's national open. Australia's Immigration Minister Alex Hawke unilaterally rescinded the exemption, claiming that having the unvaccinated Djokovic compete in the Australian Open risked fanning the flames of anti-vaccine sentiment. A panel of Australian judges rejected the tennis star's appeal of the decision and kicked him out of the country.

Djokovic tested positive for COVID-19 in mid December, which allowed him to get the original exemption to play in Australia. Australian officials, including Hawke, suggested that it was very convenient for Djokovic to receive a positive test so close to the Australian Open.

Djokovic described his situation in Australia as "hard," relating that he was free to train while in detention, but it wasn't his normal training regimen.

"It was not the regular kind of training days that I would normally have prior to the Grand Slam competition," he said. "I had helicopters flying above every single training session that I had on Rod Laver Arena, cameras all over the place. Also, I felt that energy and those looks from from my colleagues and people that were in the tennis facility.... That really hurt me a lot."

Aussie Prime Minister Scott Morrison eventually backed Hawke's expulsion of the Serbian star.

"Our strong border protection policies have kept Australians safe, prior to COVID and now during the pandemic," Morrison said on the subject. Australia is currently facing widespread [protests](#) in its capital Canberra, over what many citizens feel is government overreach on COVID-19 vaccine mandates.





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