

Mubadala Citi DC Open

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Washington D.C.

Mark Ein

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: What does it mean to be the first combined 500 event on the tour?

MARK EIN: Yeah, I mean, when we took this event over in 2018, one of my three main goals was to create equal-level event, ATP and WTA. Obviously the event our week was in San Jose, so it took a while to make that happen. Once we got in a conversation for the first time in earnest last fall after both of our tournaments, it moved pretty fast. I think people saw the merits of it.

I think you see today why this is so powerful. We will have pretty close to the same number of people over qualifying weekend that they had the entire tournament in San Jose.

So I think one of the things about tennis that's so special, obviously, is it's the one sport where men and women compete on the same court at the same time, same playing surface, but it never felt right that they were different-level events. I'm really proud we were able to pull this off, make it the first combined 500 in the world.

We committed to equal prize money by 2027. The event, if it stayed as a stand-alone, it was 2033. So I think it's a great step forward for tennis and for this event.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. Congratulations on another great start. As the tournament continues to thrive, is Rock Creek Tennis Center a big enough footprint to hold the event, or is there room to expand?

MARK EIN: The three objectives when we took over, first was to elevate the fan experience. I think you guys most know my story. I was a ball kid here and then a fan. I used to come. I couldn't find any food I wanted to eat. If it rained, I'd know where indoors to go, or air conditioning it was hot. That was step 1. 2 is this combined event. And 3 is to really figure out a permanent solution to our facility.

I would say, and this is like a team of hundreds of people. It's pretty extraordinary what they do on the site, especially when you consider we are only allowed to start moving in

like two to three weeks in advance.

So to build this city in that amount of time is really hard. It's a real issue, to be honest. I think the site could do it. I think it needs some real investment in its permanent facility so not everything is temporary.

I also think if we did that, this would be a much, much, it would be a really incredible community asset throughout the year. The issue is in its current state, it's not really well maintained, and it's used and the courts are used, but it could be so much better.

The ultimate vision, I'd love to keep it here where Arthur Ashe, Donald Dell, and John Harris put it. But if we are going to do that, it definitely needs a bunch of investment. Needs some flexibility around some of the rules, moving in and out. We are at capacity.

The events sold out every session for the past two years, and it's pretty much sold out already for the entire tournament. There's a couple tickets left. We are hitting the limits of what we can be here and hopefully we'll find a solution.

Q. You mentioned just the disparity between equal prize money in '27 and '33. Are you ahead of schedule just because it's a combined event so it brings more money in?

MARK EIN: Well, credit to the WTA, they push and say, If you're going to put men and women on the same court it needs to get equal faster.

The stand-alone events have to have equal prize money to the same category in 2033. The combined events, of which we are the only one, have to do it by 2027. And that's fine. It gives us a bunch of years to make the economics work and get it there.

I actually should know this, but prize money is way higher as obviously it's a 500. What was a real disparity was the men's 500 and women's 250 in the current state. We already take it a big step up, and then by '27 it will be the same.



Q. I know you have answered this question earlier, not today, but local kid helped save this tournament. How difficult, how many challenges, and what does it mean to you when you look around and you see what the tournament has become?

MARK EIN: Yeah, I mean, it's honestly indescribable, I could get choked up talking about it, to be honest, because I grew up so close.

My favorite days are yesterday and today. No one believes it. There is a spirit on these days where it's the first day back, people are just excited to be back at their tournament like I was. Everyone is all over the grounds.

We sell 500 outer-court tickets so it's at full capacity and stuff is happening. And the spirit in this place is just unreal. I'm going to sound cliché, but our passion for this, the power of sports is bring people together in a time we need that more than anything. You look around yesterday, it's a melting pot of everyone in our community. So it means the world that we are able to do it.

I will tell you the other thing that meant the world to me was Clervie and her story about growing up right down the street and saying I'm going to 16th Street to hit balls. Incredible upset yesterday. Another chance today. We are giving her a wildcard in the doubles so she can stay here and fans can see her more.

You know, it's also, if you think about the Clervies, the Franceses, the Denis Kudlas, Paul Goldsteins before, the amount of players who this tournament was part of their inspiration to being pro players is really powerful.

You realize if this tournament wasn't here, none of those players would have been pro tennis players. Whether people come and are fans and just have a great time or there's a young kid out there who might ultimately be a star, that's our passion. That's why we love what we do.

Q. You understand that about 26 years ago there was a local boy done good who bought our National Football League team and everybody had high hopes. In that regard, running the ship here, is there ever any pressure on you or do you ever get nervous? Do you want to make sure that you keep this thing as amazing as it was or and/or better than you were when you were a kid?

MARK EIN: Oh, my God, yes. I mean, endless, every day, every night, starting months, many months in advance.

I mean, Allie from my team is here. She works around the

clock tirelessly. She celebrated her birthday here two days ago, morning to night. She has kids at home.

People work really hard to make this great. Yeah. We all feel a lot of pressure to deliver for people. But then when you come and see it, honestly we are all a little amazed it all comes together every year in the way that it does.

We feel the pressure, but also, as Billie Jean King said, pressure is a privilege, it means you're doing something special.

Q. You talked about upgrading or expanding facilities here. Are there conversations with the city, the National Park Service already happening, is there a timeline for that?

MARK EIN: Yeah, so there actually are, it's been talked about for a long time, conversations with the park service and the city about is there a better solution bringing all the stakeholders together, WTF too who does stuff here. Those conversations are further along than ever before.

I'm hopeful that they end up in a really constructive place. I think people all see it and want it. They all see how incredible this is. This tournament generates almost \$30 million of economic development for the city in one week, 3,000 hotel rooms. 80,000 people will come here during the week. This is an important event.

You know, you bring people to a national park, it highlights national parks. I think everyone in their mind recognizes the challenges and also having a discussion about a set of possible solutions that we hope we complete to fruition. We need something. So hopefully it will be successful.

THE MODERATOR: This is Xander with Sports Illustrated Kids.

MARK EIN: I love that. Sports Illustrated, November 1972, I got my first Sports Illustrated. Steve Spurrier was on the cover. I still have it. It's a great publication. Thanks for being here.

Q. Are there any new developments or changes in the tournament format that fans should be aware of?

MARK EIN: On the site here, things that we did?

It's an awesome question. Obviously the big thing was bringing men and women at the same level. That was the biggest thing. Part of that was we have a new co-title sponsor who was really a lot responsible, because they were involved in the tournament in San Jose. They believed in this and said, Let's move it. You saw their fun

activation out there and they are doing a lot in the community as well.

Then on the food side, we have four Michelin Star chefs, which is probably a first for any sporting event onsite, which is really special. We have a Kids Cafe there for you. There is a special thing for kids food.

We are always trying to elevate the fan experience in terms of new food, new drinks. Then just, you know, just making players accessible. One of the things about this tournament is everyone gets a chance to get an autograph, get a picture. Hopefully you will too.

We are always trying to find more and more ways to make our players accessible to our fans.

Q. Do you have any plans to be able to bring back the Washington Kastles and to jump-start the TeamTennis?

MARK EIN: Yeah, it's a good question. We were very passionate about that for a long time. The reality is the league hasn't been able to find a way past COVID to come back. The calendar, we used to have a three-week season. Kind of couldn't do that.

So then you need a different business model. I hope they are trying to figure it out. It's a really special product. But, the silver lining is it let our team and myself put all our energy in this. I think for people who went to that, you see elements of all the things we learned there, brought over to here.

That is a real silver lining. It's really let us put our time and energy into just making this extraordinary. We'll see where that ends up.

Q. You're talking about the expansion and what you have hopes for in the near future, ten years, whatever. One of the biggest problems, from my point of view and from many other people's point of view, is the parking.

MARK EIN: I know.

Q. It's horrendous. You can't even park. The local area seems to be like growing and cutting off parking on the street. These lots definitely can't handle, get wet. Now there's a fee, ride the shuttle buses to the auxiliary parking lots. What are you going to do about parking?

MARK EIN: We spent a lot of time on this. First of all, there isn't a fee. We're not doing the fee from the shuttle.

No, we're not this year. There was and there is not. There isn't. But there might be in the future.

Because it's a really difficult problem, to be honest, and we struggle with it. To provide the proper shuttle service is totally uneconomic. I think we literally spend \$50 a person doing it, which makes no sense, right? But we do it.

It's a long, complicated thing. We are only allowed little buses because big buses don't have anywhere to turn -- there's stuff like that, don't have anywhere to turn around.

We struggle with it. There's a lot of sporting events in the world where people find their way there, and they don't get there by car. People aren't providing shuttles and everything else. But we know it's important to our fans. We are trying to figure out a solution to it with the Park Service and with the city and with the neighborhood, who has a really important voice here, and everyone has a perspective.

It's one of the big challenges of this site that long term we need to solve, and I feel horrible about it. But it's a really hard problem to solve, too. I'm sorry about that.

We try really hard. Like, if we could have bigger buses, you would actually make it that whole thing way better, but we're not allowed for a variety of reasons. We have small buses and they can only run so often. It's just a hard problem.

Can I just comment that I love your shirt. And as an example of how much this grew, our first day -- sorry to talk about the business of sports -- but our first-day business sales were nine times what they were the year before we took over. We take a lot of pride in having people want to represent the tournament. It's not really about the money. It's people wanting to represent the tournament and being proud of it.

Q. Yesterday there is a big storm and I saw you tweeted something about climate change is impacting. I think all outdoor activities and outdoor sports, is that something on your mind when, with the fans and the players, is that something... How do you kind of prepare for that?

MARK EIN: Yeah, I mean, yesterday was a really bad storm. Thankfully no one got hurt. There was actually a lot of damage around the site. Again, tribute to people who basically for two straight nights have been here all night getting the site ready. You don't see it, it looks beautiful.

It is the nature of an outdoor sport. It happens in every tournament, even tournaments that have roofs don't have

them on every court. So maybe we will get it a dome stadium or a roof, but probably not.

Then it's just going to be part of a summer event. We do try, you know, we work really hard for a contingency plan, try to be fair to people. And the good news is the weather looks great for the rest of the week. Let's fingers crossed. Yes.

Q. You have been around Frances Tiafoe for a bunch of years. What do you think about his last year, where he is now, and how far he can go?

MARK EIN: Yeah, I mean, I love him. We have been friends since he was a little kid. My mentor in life built the JTCC, Ken Brody. I remember when he hired Frances' dad to work there. We are all so proud of him. We love how he represents our community everywhere around the world.

You know, to me, the breakthrough with him has just been the consistency. He is now not having a good week once in a while and long periods of time. Every week he's winning a lot of matches. A lot of weeks he is going really far. In the big events like the US Open or Tokyo, he's getting to the end.

He's really serious. I mean, you guys didn't see because we cleared this out last night, he was supposed to do something really fun last night and practice at like 6:00. The storm came. He was here at I think 9:30 practicing. To me, that's indicative of his commitment to every single week doing the best he possibly can.

I think it's also indicative of how much this tournament means to him. I really believe, and you'll ask him when he comes in, I think it would mean more to him than anything other than winning a Grand Slam.

I'm so proud of him. He's like the greatest role model we can all have, and one of the great figureheads for our whole DMV community.

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