

Mubadala Citi DC Open

Monday, July 29, 2024

Washington D.C.

Frances Tiafoe

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. Are you wearing a Sabrina Ionescu jersey?

FRANCES TIAFOE: Yes.

Q. What is that about?

FRANCES TIAFOE: Big fan of hers. Obviously they're all there in Europe right now, in Paris, for Olympics. We have the same agent. So showing her a bit of love.

Better to where this in New York. I was waiting for my D.C. stuff, my D.C. jerseys. I'll be wearing a bunch of D.C. stuff this week, but not today.

Q. Your eighth time playing in this tournament. What brings you back here every year?

FRANCES TIAFOE: The obvious thing: get to play at home every year. I think it's a super exciting thing to play here at home every year, playing in front of friends, family, I guess compete at the highest level. I love being home. I don't get the opportunity to be home a lot during the year. It's incredible to be out here.

Obviously the chance to hopefully win it.

Q. This year with the ups and downs of your season, is there something a bit special about coming back here and playing at home, energizing?

FRANCES TIAFOE: Yeah, for sure. I think, I mean, I feel much more energized since Wimbledon. I played Wimbledon probably the best I played in a long time. Just got that spark again, want to compete, want to have fun.

Obviously coming here, I want to perform, put my name around the stadium. Gets me going. I mean, I need to get a few matches under my belt, get some momentum, obviously try to get some good momentum to get me to the Open.

Q. How much do you think that match against Alcaraz

at Wimbledon and your whole run there, how much do you think those matches you put together can kick-start something in you this year?

FRANCES TIAFOE: 100%. I mean, those matches are big. Those matches are big. I've never come back from two sets to love down. Had an MCL. Didn't really know if I was going to play Wimbledon.

I dug deep there. Winning those two first rounds is almost better than I played against Alcaraz. I'd been losing to guys on paper I shouldn't be losing to.

Beating guys I was supposed to beat was almost more a celebratory win than my match against Alcaraz. We all know what I can do against the best players in the world. I have beaten some of the best players in the world in tight matches, 50/50 kind of things when I get on the biggest courts in the world.

That was cool because I'd never played Centre Court Wimbledon. It helped me a lot, just getting that buzz again, standing O walking off. Okay, I feel like I'm back.

Q. You have a new coach, working with David. What goes into making that decision to work with him? It's ultimately up to you to play, but how can he help you?

FRANCES TIAFOE: Yeah, I mean, just a guy who has done well around the tour. He's been on the tour 15 years. Only had two relationships: Venus and Pegula. Both of those relationships he did a really high level, got the best out of both guys.

He's so relaxed and laid back, instills a lot of confidence in guys, aggressiveness in their game. It's not just on the court when you're hiring a coach. It's also day to day, how they are. We're very similar in our approach to how we see life. Just go about it in a very chilled, relaxed way.

It's going to be great. I'm really excited about the partnership. It's tough to find a perfect mix for me. I'm not the easiest guy to work with. I need a special guy to be with me. I think it's going to be really good.



Q. In working with David, was part of the decision process someone that you hadn't worked with before to give a fresh perspective?

FRANCES TIAFOE: Yeah, I think it's great to kind of start brand-new. I think it's really good to start brand-new and have someone I haven't worked with before, really get to know him. Also someone that I've known but not actually worked with. He's done really well here with Jess. He did an incredible job with Jess, incredible job with Venus. I think hopefully third time lucky with me (smiling).

Q. Next to the majors, how important is this one to win?

FRANCES TIAFOE: It's the fifth one, brother. It's the fifth one (smiling).

Is probably the fourth one because I don't really count the French Open, so... (laughter)

Q. Speaking of France, you made the decision, you had good reasons, other players made the same decision, is it harder now that the Olympics are going on?

FRANCES TIAFOE: Yeah, brutal, brutal. Brutal, yeah. It's tough. More tough just like seeing everybody on the boat and stuff like that. That was a tough day. I had to play later that day in Atlanta. I'm like, Yeah, I'm turning off every TV and social media. That would have been a cool experience.

But actually being here in D.C., understanding what I'm trying to do, where I'm trying to peak at. It's great.

Again, I'm young. I plan to be in L.A. I also had to look at my body. Still trying to get my knee 100%. To go grass, clay, hard court again, I don't think that would have been the smartest thing for me.

But all the best to those guys. Hopefully they'll come back with medals.

Q. I know how happy you are to be here every year. How much of it is the excitement leading up to the tournament? How much is you're hungry, ready to go out there and win this thing?

FRANCES TIAFOE: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I'm definitely ready to win this thing. I'm ready to put my best foot forward. I mean, it would be great to just play a bunch of matches here this week and get myself to the weekend, get myself to the position to try to win the event.

But I'm ready to put my best foot forward, give it all I got - here, Montreal, Cincy - feel really good going to the US Open. That's the ultimate goal.

No question I want to win this tournament. I think everyone knows that. If I get to the weekend and win matches in a row, I think that's the biggest thing for me. I've struggled to put consecutive matches in a row week in, week out like I have been the last couple years. I want to start that here, so on, so forth, the rest of the year.

Q. You are a D.C. sports fan. What is it like coming here this week and getting the sports folks supporting you?

FRANCES TIAFOE: It's great. It's great. It's like might favorite week of the year as far as that. Like D.C. United wants to give me a jersey. The Nats want to give me a jersey. Every team wants to give me their jersey, rock their team, because I rock them all year.

It's great. A bunch of players that take care of me at the games want to come. Players and stuff like that. It's going to be a cool atmosphere. I think a lot of cool people are going to come tomorrow. So it's going to be good.

Q. It was 10 years ago yesterday that you made your pro debut here. Nice milestone.

FRANCES TIAFOE: Crazy.

Q. You were a scrawny 16-year-old kid. What do you remember about that, what that opportunity meant to you at that time?

FRANCES TIAFOE: Yeah, I actually didn't even know that it was 10 years ago. Getting older (smiling).

But that was an incredible night. I've never been so excited. I was supposed to play quallies. When I found out I had a main draw wild card, I was shitting it. I was so nervous. I did not want to step on center court and play.

It was an incredible night, man. Incredible night. Once I played that close of a match with a guy who was 110 around that time, looks like I got a pretty good shot of making it if you put that in perspective.

I remember it was so weird to look in the stands and I know every single person in the low bowl.

I know this is definitely a tournament I want to win and a tournament I'll always play in my career.

Q. You still have a lot of runway left in front of you.



Now that it is a decade, what do you hang your hat on with what you have accomplished on and off the court? Can you appreciate what you have and what maybe stands out for you?

FRANCES TIAFOE: Yeah, I've had a really good career. Like, coming where I came from, things I've done, things I've done for the city, things I've done for the game of tennis. I think I've brought interest in a bunch of people who usually wouldn't have interest in watching the game. I've introduced a lot of people to the game.

I've won on the biggest stages. I've played on the biggest stages. I've been able to bring my family to watch me play. Take care of my family. I think I've had a really good career.

Now I'm at a stage where I want to chase my dreams and do my thing, ultimately do the goals I always wanted to do as a kid, kind of focus on that, continue to have fun and continue to innovate the game. That's kind of my focus.

Q. On social media there are some tennis fans who are sort of taken aback at Wimbledon when you said 'clowns' about past opponents.

FRANCES TIAFOE: I knew you were going to bring this up, Ben. I knew you were going to bring this up (smiling).

Q. What do you think of people, sort of how delicate people can be in tennis, rocking the boat?

FRANCES TIAFOE: 100%. I mean, I definitely like a bunch of team sports. People were saying way worse things. I've seen Luka Doncic in the Playoffs cursing guys out. I mean, saying way worse things and it's not that serious.

I really didn't mean it in a bad way by any means. I use loose words like that all the time. People are going to take it how they take it. I'm super chill and cool with everybody on the tour. I didn't mean it that way at all.

I felt like I should have been doing better. Rightfully so. As I said, I was 10 in the world this time last year. I'm not going to be happy about it, what I've been doing.

Yeah, I think it got taken the wrong way. At the same time everyone on tour was laughing with me because it's me. I think it was all good fun in the end. I think people are going to hold their hat on that for a while.

Q. Was anybody who was a possible clown talk to you about it?

FRANCES TIAFOE: I mean, everyone brought it up to me. Wawrinka sent it to me 7 a.m. the next morning when I woke up. Berrettini came up the next day, Thank God I didn't play you last year. A bunch of people were coming up to me in that sense. It was funny, man. It was funny.

Q. This is Robin Montgomery's first time in the main draw.

FRANCES TIAFOE: That's right. Actually that's right.

Q. You've had a close relationship for a long time. Have you had any conversations with her about preparing her for this experience?

FRANCES TIAFOE: Man, I haven't spoke to her. I was just speaking to her saying good luck. But I haven't spoke to her in-depth.

She's going to be an unbelievable player. She's playing great tennis. Qualified, won a round at Wimbledon. Took Sabalenka to a tough match in Madrid. I was there. Should have won that. That's another story.

She's going to have an unbelievable career. I just want her to go out there and have fun today. I don't want her to feel like she has to prove anything to anybody to have an unbelievable run here if she does great. Just focus on playing good tennis and enjoy the experience.

She's going to play a lot more of these. What is she, 19? She'll play this tournament a lot more times than this year, so...

Q. It seems in tennis a lot of players, when they do get a new coach, they elevate their game in the short-term. Do you have any thoughts on maybe why that is?

FRANCES TIAFOE: Hell, yeah. I mean, I think did. His first tournament with Pegula was here. She won the tournament. I told him, Shit, you brought some good luck to this place. Hopefully you do the same thing with me.

Yeah, I mean, I think it's something new, right? I think it's just something new. Maybe a new voice is what you need to hear, a different perspective. Guys start playing looser, things make a little more sense, so...

Maybe that does apply. No pressure. Things are going to click when they do. But yeah, hopefully it's this week.

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