

Rolex Paris Masters

Sunday, 6 November 2022

Paris, France

Cedric Pioline

Press Conference



CEDRIC PIOLINE: Hello, everyone. Welcome. Thanks for being here for this tradition, for this end-of-tournament conference, even if of course the tournament is not over, because we still have the finals of the doubles going on, and we will have the final for the singles.

We are delighted to announce that this edition was a success, as you could see throughout the week, because already we have reached 164,000 tickets sold. So as a reminder, last year, 2019 was the record year with 152,000 tickets sold. So that's a capacity of 99%. We have very few tickets that have been unsold, so we are very satisfied with this.

Of course it's actually the success is wider than that, because it's actually a winning combination due to, as I said, more foot traffic and a draw that is very high with a lot of top players. 17 out of the 20 top players played during this tournament. It ended with the 49th worldwide.

The added value, the icing on the cake, was the emotion, the emotion with Gilles Simon, because he played his last matches here. It was his last tournament. I think he was true to the wildcard that was offered to him with the third round, with a beautiful run in the draw, and then afterwards the ceremony, and all the emotions that we all felt that were tangible.

All this shows that generally everybody had a lot of emotions. The public at large. Of course it's more difficult to know what the public felt. We will know it later through studies that we will carry out, but over other population groups, such as the hospitality group or the sponsors, the feedback is very positive.

This edition was to be under the aegis of good humor, hospitality, service, friendliness. All the promises were delivered. Of course we can still improve this this year. We have had evolutions.

When I took up my duties in March, approximately, I wondered what added value should I bring to the tournament on an event that recently, outside the pandemic of course, worked well.

The idea was not to fix something that wasn't broken. This is why the guideline was to improve the entrance show with added colors. I think it worked well. We even went further, because as you have seen during the week, because that was announced before each match through one of the new partners, but I will talk about it later. Well, the public had the possibility to vote on three different types of music through an app, and that was what I wanted.

I wanted to make the tournament more immersive, more interactive, something that apparently was liked by everyone because people actually choose what they want, and the majority vote will opt for the type of music between rock, electro music and symphonic music. I think this is something that was strong, that was liked by everyone.

Then, on another note, something else that was important to me, even if it's less visible and had less media conference, is the CSR actions. We have a robot that was set up to improve the accessibility to certain population groups. That's not a huge volume. But, for example, for people who are in hospital that helped to weave a social bond. A lot of players actually were included in that program. Novak, Nadal, Gasquet, Wawrinka, they participated.

I think it's good. Because what we want is we want this tournament to be accessible and to have CSR aspects.

As for the public, the ratings are good. They are actually growing. The last match of the semifinals yesterday we had a TV rating peak of 640,000 people watching, so we can see that there is a general momentum, which is positive.

People want to come. People want to watch this tournament. Journalists have an important role to play, because they cover the tournament. It's important for people to read about it, to watch videos about it, and I could say that all signals are green. So we will appreciate this, we will enjoy this, but very quickly in the weeks to come, we will take stock of the situation, and we will do some debriefing, to see what we can improve, where we can go, what we can do moving forward.



As you know, there are evolutions regarding ATP, regarding the Masters 1000 series. Obviously that forces us to question ourselves to see how we can be more competitive. Even if our format is different, we are the only tournament that is indoor, with other specificity, other standards.

But we want to know, we want to see how we can improve ourselves, how we can upgrade our product. Bearing in mind that everything that has been set up, well, once the players arrive on the court, then it's beyond our control. We can't control the duration of the match. But everything that is around that normally we can actually control that.

In terms of spectator experience and satisfaction, we want it as high as possible so that next year we can have this same momentum. This is what matters to us.

So that was the elements that I wanted to give to you. I guess now you have questions on various subjects. So the floor is yours.

Q. You talked about Rolex Paris Masters amongst Masters 1000 series. Very often it was an important stake. It was fragile at once. The future seemed to be questioned. Now it seems to be okay, but up to which point? What are the evolutions? Can we know more?

CEDRIC PIOLINE: Without getting too much into the details, because otherwise we would talk about it at length about the important pillars, I would say that first there is an ATP strategic plan, as you all know. The whole series has protected Masters 1000 for 30 years, namely until 2053. Already this is something that is important. Before it would be renewed every year. Now this is set in stone.

As for the side evolutions, next year there will be three Masters 1000s that will be mixed gender in 2025, because 2024 is an Olympic year. There will be two more, so that will bring seven out of nine. There will be only two last tournaments that will not be mixed; mainly, Monte-Carlo and Rolex Paris Masters. All the others will be mixed.

This is why I was talking about standards. Without getting too much in the nitty-gritty of everything, we have a draw of 56 players, and with 56 players we have three match courts that are compulsory and three practice courts that are compulsory. The bigger the draw, the more courts we need. We will need more capacities and bigger facilities.

So we will have to do an evolution, to do this evolution, we have an indoor structure. It seems very complicated. I do not want to say it's impossible, but it's very complicated, because this does not exist to have in a single venue more

than four or five courts. If we were to have a draw with 96 players, we should have eight match courts and eight practice courts on the venue. 16 courts for one draw -- well, two draws, males, females, and doubles, from both sides.

So it's a mini Grand Slam format, very close to a Grand Slam format. Closer to Grand Slam than a Masters 1000 than what we have now.

So for these reasons, we do not consider going into that direction, but we have to grow. This edition is a good milestone, because it shows that we are full. During the first days when the doors opened, the people would actually run in the halls to go to Court 1 and Court 2 to have a seat, because the capacity is what it is. They wanted to make sure to have the right seats.

So how can we grow? These are the subjects that will come up. The deadline that we have is comfortable, but it's also tomorrow. It's 24 months. It will come fast.

Q. Will there be this obligation for you or no?

CEDRIC PIOLINE: No, we don't have any obligation. ATP does not impose this on us. But, you know, when your neighbor repaints their house, your house looks less good. This is the way I should describe it.

Q. Would you consider having in the short term a Bercy with over 10 days with 96 players?

CEDRIC PIOLINE: That will be part and parcel of the subjects we will delve into. The problem is that the schedule is difficult to manage. Every week will overlap with a Masters 1000 that will take an additional week, because even if it starts on a Thursday, it actually eats up the whole week. So this is something that is complicated as of today. While we talk, this is not considered.

As a general rule, we need two years ahead of time to prepare, to modify a schedule. But now, we could say, well, we could consider a different format, a bigger format, with 64 players maybe.

I don't know. We'll have to study this, how many players that represents. A lot of options are open right now. We can't say that it's not possible. Even if we had these evolutions, we can't invent infrastructures. And the reality is that we need to strike the right balance between the format, this new format, and revenue that you can generate.

So the bigger the format, the more costly it is, and so we need to have more revenues. We need to strike the right

balance between all these aspects. Once again, we will debrief with all the teams of the Federation to everyone, all the stakeholders of the tournament will have their word to say, and we will see what we will do. Next year we will try to have a vision and anticipate as much as possible.

Q. Among the options that are available, could you consider to move the tournament out of Paris?

CEDRIC PIOLINE: That's one of the options that are available. We are thinking about it. We are starting to make inquiries. Of course until now, we were very much busy with the organization of this edition, but we do not exclude this. We will study this.

Then the Federation at the highest level, namely the president and ComEx will make their decisions, and we will implement it. This is possible.

I say this in full transparency, because Accor Arena knows about this. They know that we are thinking about it.

Q. Is it short, mid, or long term?

CEDRIC PIOLINE: Well, this evolution takes time, because it's a tournament that is a big baby, should I say? In terms of foot traffic, in terms of infrastructures, in terms of constructions. Going from a place A to a place B, even if it's the other side of the street, that requires a lot of work.

There are lots of things to consider. If it were to happen, if -- I'm saying "if," and I underline it strongly -- if that should happen, we would need time. There is a whole process that I'm studying, that we are studying.

Once again, after the tournament, we will try to have the timeline to see the different milestones to moving forward and make our decision, either to stay here, because this is a historical place, it started in 1986, it's the 37th edition, it's a beautiful venue, and with what we know, we could see how we can grow, or, as you said, consider different options.

Q. Are there other venues in France that could be considered?

CEDRIC PIOLINE: Well, what I want to tell you is that you didn't listen to what I said. I didn't say that we wanted to go elsewhere.

Q. Well, if you want to move out and have 64 players, maybe you're thinking about 64 players first, aren't you?

CEDRIC PIOLINE: We are thinking about it. I didn't say

that it would be 64, 32, 16, or 8. But all of us, including yourself, we have traveled a lot. We know all the venues.

A venue, if we think about the ratio between the standard draw with 96 players, well, we would need eight match courts, eight practice courts. And once again, I'm saying this, but the Federation needs to arbitrate, but maybe we could manage to have seven courts, seven match courts and seven practice courts, but I don't know any venue that has that.

There is the right balance that needs to be struck, and it's my job as a director to find the right ratio between sport and turnover and revenues.

What is the right balance between what exists and what could be? We need to have these two aspects in mind. If you know a venue, well, do not hesitate to tell me.

Q. I would be delighted to find it for you.

CEDRIC PIOLINE: Because I don't know it.

Q. Because it's an indoor. At this period of the year, it's hard to find.

CEDRIC PIOLINE: Yes, we all know it's hard. We all know that the schedule is always a difficult matter. It's a headache for everyone. For next year we will have another formula, the formula we had before with one additional week after the Rolex, as it was the case when I would play a long time ago.

But every time that we change something, we need to arrange the logistics, and it's complicated.

Q. Do you think that ATP wants to keep that Masters 1000, or are there big investors that want their share of the pie?

CEDRIC PIOLINE: There were two sales this year; Cincinnati and Madrid. So today, to answer to a part of your question, there is a market value, which is interesting.

But now, the Federation's position is not to consider selling, because unless mistaken, we are the only Federation with a Grand Slam and a Masters 1000, because Cincinnati was sold. It's an important thing to showcase tennis, to promote tennis. It's a good thing to have one foot in the Federation, one foot in the Grand Slam organization. This is good.

A lot of things are happening right now, and it's important to have a foot in both sides for the Federation. It is not considered right now to sell. This tournament has been



going on since 1986. The Federation is very much attached to traditions. It's a showcase for tennis. Others do not have that anymore.

Q. Do you think, just like Nadal said, that sport is stronger than players? Because you have record sales. Nadal is about to retire for good. The French players are not standing out very much on the tour right now. And still this sport is very popular.

CEDRIC PIOLINE: Yes, this sport is popular. We have had record ticket sales. Ticket sales worked very well as soon as July, as soon as it was July. The tendency, you know, when we talk about when you start from zero, you don't get very excited, but the rhythm of sales sped up in September. That led us to think that we were going in the right direction.

And the people that started to buy tickets at the time, well, you know, we have had a lot of debates on this. It's a mandatory tournament, and it happened that we had last-minute cancellations from players. But yet people did not wait to know who was going to play. So that shows that the profile of spectators is different from Roland Garros.

Rolex Paris Masters has a true identity, had actually strong sales arguments, and they can find their happiness with this mix of show, this format, with a tighter tournament.

We have mix of show of tennis matches with a shorter format, with a tighter schedule. And that is very interesting.

Q. Who impresses you most in the next generation?

CEDRIC PIOLINE: I haven't seen so much good tennis for a long time, personally. I just saw bits and pieces of tennis matches, because I'm involved in the organization, of course, but globally, everybody played very well throughout the week.

Among the new generation, well, it's easy to say Rune, because he qualified for the final, and he actually defeated top-10 players. Felix, as well. He's had a wonderful run. Both stand out. There is also Musetti, as well. Well, at first we could say maybe it's less obvious to see him rise as much as the others, but if he makes improvements from a physical point of view with his level of play, I'm sure he can rise very much, very high. So these are the ones that will have the top rankings.

So we have three generations playing at once right now. We have the last ones with Nadal, Djokovic mainly. Tsitsipas, Zverev, unfortunately he couldn't play today, we know why. We also have Medvedev. Thiem, will he come

back? That's the big question. And now we have the others, Alcaraz, Rune, Auger-Aliassime, and others. And we already see that the two that won in the intermediary generations are Thiem and Medvedev, and then we have Alcaraz winning. So it's very interesting, very exciting what's happening. Nadal and Djokovic, I think they have two seasons left.

It's quite funny to see this final. I don't know what the biggest age gap between two opponents, but 16 years is much.

Q. There was another tournament in Montreal. Nadal and Agassi in 2005.

CEDRIC PIOLINE: It's also a matter of ranking, yes. And the fact that the year that Djoko went pro is actually the birth year of Rune. So there is a lot of symbols here and there scattered, and that shows that we have a turnover of generation. We have one in the middle?

Q. We have three matches that ended up very late in the morning. What is your opinion about this? Do you think, okay, that's the way it is? Or because, you know, when we have players playing so late in the morning, do you think that we should change the schedule?

CEDRIC PIOLINE: Of course I have questions about this. This is something that we will definitely tackle during the debrief meetings. We will actually handle all the points that need improvement, but there is a moment where we can't control anything. It's beyond our control.

We have, it's a two-set match, it can last one hour, one hour 30, two hours, three hours, and we have had three matches that last three hours. It's beyond our control. So I'm fully aware that that's not the ideal solution for athletes on important matches, because we have had French players, we had Norrie, as well. He was alternate, for instance.

I'm sorry for this, but, you know, when the matches drag on, it happens. But Monday, the day match ended at 5:30, and as for the night session, it started at 7:30 and we ended up at 1:00 in the morning.

So I wonder, what is the ideal solution? There is none. Because it's beyond our control. We are trying to have a framework. We are starting at 11:00 in the morning. We have four matches. The last one at 7:30. And on Thursday and Friday, it ended up at quarter to 11:00, 11:00, 11:30, let's say. So it was quite reasonable.

We will talk about it, for sure. But spontaneously, I don't

have an ideal solution.

Q. What's your personal opinion? Because this week we are having a NextGen tournament with different rules. The doubles are playing with different rules to have shorter matches. Do you think we could have an evolution?

CEDRIC PIOLINE: Are you asking me for my personal opinion, or my opinion as the director of the tournament?

Q. No, I'm asking for your personal opinion.

CEDRIC PIOLINE: It's a complex subject. The NextGen tournament is an experiment. We are having very top players, and we all know that we can have long matches. What makes it dramatic, it's when we have a tight match, when we have a tough battle, it's a tight scoreline, when we know that they are tired, they are worn out. This is what happened with Tsitsipas, and what happens is that the public is happy about that. We can see that during the semifinals.

But because of their ranking, they cannot meet at the beginning of a tournament, and we can't say, Oh, no, you know, that's not possible.

You journalists, you say, Oh, my God, we're gonna work for long hours and we need to write our articles. There is no ideal solution. Can we have the same emotion, the same suspense with the NextGen tournament format? I doubt it. This is why this sport is so amazing. It's because we have suspense. We don't know what's gonna happen.

Until two or three points at the end of the match, we thought that Tsitsipas could overturn the match, pom, pom, pom. Djokovic was very robust. And at the end he would make his roar like a bear, and that was it, the end.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports