

Nitto ATP Finals

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Andrea Gaudenzi

Press Conference



An interview with:

ANDREA GAUDENZI

THE MODERATOR: Everyone, thanks for coming to the press conference with ATP Chairman Andrea Gaudenzi.

Andrea, this is the fifth year of the ATP Finals in Turin. What has been your impression of this event so far?

ANDREA GAUDENZI: First of all, good morning, everyone. Thank you for being here.

Well, look, I think it's overall an amazing edition. We started obviously with COVID, that wasn't easy, but I think every single year the event has improved. Again, kudos to the FITP, they've done an incredible job. I think we were all a bit anxious post London, because London was great event. I think we've delivered and we are above the expectation we had initially.

This one particularly is exciting because we also have the No. 1 at stake. It may be decided today, maybe not. Obviously it's super exciting to have the best players in the world fighting for the No. 1 at the end of the year. I think this is probably the best possible outcome. It's great for the fans. It's great for everybody watching the final showdown.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. There's been a lot of debate about, of course, the content of the ATP season with the topic now returning to, let's say, lower-ranked tournaments like the challengers or 250s. How do you see the future of the let's say 250 series, especially now that we've decided to extinguish the week of Metz and Athens? What is the future of such tournaments, for example, Athens?

ANDREA GAUDENZI: Sorry, can you restate the first part of your question? There's been a lot of debate over the content or calendar?

Q. The content of the calendar. There are some mentions that the challenger tournaments may be extended or may start earlier, some of the 250s...

ANDREA GAUDENZI: Generally about calendar structure?

Q. In particular the Athens tournament.

ANDREA GAUDENZI: This answer could take an hour, so I don't know how much time you have. I'll try my best to be brief (smiling).

I'll start by stating the obvious that you all know, although we forget about it often. Tennis is a very, very, very difficult sport to schedule, probably the hardest, for a simple reason: it is direct elimination.

Look, for example, in a Grand Slam or in a 12-day event, a player can play one match one day or they can play seven matches 12 days. You even look at golf, for example, the top 60 players, they play the 72 holes over four days.

You have a cohort of players, the top 100, where you go from the top to the bottom, where you have Carlos and Jannik now playing around, I would say, 80 matches within 18, 20 tournaments. Then obviously the lower-ranked, they play 30, 35 tournaments, a lower amount of matches.

You're trying obviously with at least one calendar, but in reality you have four, five calendars within one calendar. I was one of those players that most of the time was losing first or second round (smiling), because half of the players lose first round, and 75% of the players are done by the second round. For most of them is a two- or four-day event. For others, it's a longer event. This is just to highlight the complexity of the calendar.

Obviously there are different cohort of players saying it is too much. For others, if you remove, it becomes too less for the others because they need to play. If you lose, you have to go to another tournament and play more matches. That's why we have the different tiers and categories: Grand Slams, Masters, 500 and 250.



We try to balance it for all the cohort of players, including challengers, because the challengers also very important for the pathway and to build the champions of the future.

To your question in particular about the 250s, in the last few years we've had the strategy to reduce the number of 250s. We are from 38 down to, I don't remember exactly the number, I think it's 29. The target in our effort to optimize the calendar for '28, when the new Saudi Masters will come on board, is to continue to reduce the number of 250s.

250s are very important, like challengers and 500. Every category is important. But we had a bit too many of them. Was really difficult to schedule within the calendar.

We have two problems. The year has 52 weeks and we're not going to change that. The other thing is that players need an off-season. They need a proper off-season. At the moment the off-season is a little bit too short.

You need sometimes to be able to rest, take a holiday, rebuild your body, restart practicing tennis, then you move into the Australian season.

On top of that we add in the complexity that we have seven entities participating in this effort. The four Grand Slams are individual. They have their own dates. Then you have the ITF with the Davis Cup format that has been changing quite a bit in the last few years. You obviously have the ATP and WTA.

If you think about the overall picture, I have sympathy from a player standpoint. You're dealing with seven entities that are managing a calendar, but in reality there's seven boards making decisions. So it's difficult to actually have a streamlined effort, which is at the core of my plan, the One Vision Plan, where you try to unify the governance and have somebody trying to come with an ideal or next-best option of an ideal calendar, which is definitely more streamlined.

Overall I think our strategy has been clear to focus on the on the premium product, which is the Masters. The reason for that is very simple: we need to provide the best possible experience to the fans. The fans love to watch the best players in the world playing against each other in the best events. Those moments, the four Grand Slams, the Masters and the Finals is the moment we all get to see the best players playing against each other.

Then obviously you have the 500 and 250 that for those players that play less matches in the Grand Slam and the Masters, they need to play down and play to continue to keep their level up and improve.

It's complicated. I have sympathy, for example, Carlos and Jannik, they have been getting to the finals of every slam, playing very well at the Masters. For those players at the very top making so many points, it's probably very difficult to play a full calendar.

Another problem that we have - then I stop talking for questions, because I'm saying a lot - in our system, it is an open system. Players are independent contractors. We have a calendar, but technically a player can choose where to play. They can prioritize a 250 over a 500, they can prioritize a 500 over a Masters.

We have rules that are related to the incentives, to the rankings, we try to influence their behavior. But ultimately a player chooses where to play.

It's a difficult problem to solve because if a player is attracted by money and plays in a lower category, which happens often, if you look at the date and the behavior of how they play, they often play a lot also in the lower categories, and they also play exhibitions outside of our system, and they play team events.

It's a complex problem to solve. I don't think there is one solution fits all. It's definitely something that I believe strongly, that if everyone would be around the same table - Grand Slams, ATP, WTA, ITF - in one room, one board, one governance, I think we would definitely do a much better job than what we are doing today.

I'll stop here because I know I said a lot (smiling).

Q. Getting back to this point. When you were a player, you were saying you got through one, two, maybe three rounds. How would you have liked it, if you were a player, and the number of let's say 250s was being reduced, making it a little bit more awkward for you to get through and maybe advance to 500s or 1000s? The other part of this is that tournaments, from what I'm understanding, don't like the fact that they are being pushed to finals midweek. They would rather have finals ending on a Saturday or a Sunday. The third thing is, the players continue to grumble about the 1000s with the extended number of days. Jack Draper called all the top-20 players, I don't think it was a very positive response or outcome, to these extended 1000s.

ANDREA GAUDENZI: So there is a lot in that. I'll try to unpack the three questions.

The first one was around the 250s, which obviously is in contradiction with expanded Masters. If you do one, you

have to do the others. You can't increase the 250 and expand the Masters at the same time.

In my career, I considered myself an average player. I was never one of those guys who played the finals, went second week deep into the Grand Slams and the Masters. I was between 20 and 50 I would say most of my career, and even lower.

First of all, I was really frustrated by the fact that, even when I was ranked 50, 55, I could only play in main draw in two Masters. I could play main draw in the Grand Slams, but only Indian Wells and Miami were at the time with current format. You end up being 50 in the world, you couldn't access Monte-Carlo, Rome, Madrid and the premium tier.

I said, Why can I play in a Grand Slam main draw and why can I not play in a Masters main draw? If we have this, we want all the top players playing.

I think the job availability, it was really closed, too restricted. Hence why I think it's very important to go what we've done, to go to the 96 draw. You provide top 100 players with the possibility to play main draw in Grand Slams and Masters, at least in seven occasions now, in our case, out of nine. The exceptions are Paris, Monte-Carlo, and Saudi will be the same. That's the first item.

In terms of the 250s, I've made a lot of mistakes in my career, a lot of them. Honestly, I've often played 250s on clay in Europe the week before the US Open. Again, they were scheduled there. Remember a time with Umag, San Marino, pretty much swings everywhere, tournaments all over.

I really felt at some point in my career I made mistakes. I learned, improved my behavior. I really should be playing on hard court in the States here if I want to really play better at the US Open.

I actually thought I was responsible for my own decisions, for my own calendar. It was a little bit of a self-discipline. I saw other players who really played a smart calendar, who weren't really attracted by the opportunity of the guarantees. Often in the small tournament, we had guarantees. My partner was Muster. Often he had guarantees, so often I had to play where he was playing, without a guarantee (smiling). We sort of had a schedule where we were attracted by the money.

I don't think players should schedule with the guaranteed money as a priority. Players should be playing for ranking points and titles, especially if you are a top-50, top-100 player.

Unfortunately I go back to this system which is an open system where there is temptations everywhere. There is the fear of missing out. It's really being in control of your own behavior.

Back to the number of 250s, it's not going to be a problem because our plan is to have exclusive, dedicated category weeks, when you have the four slams, the 10 Masters, today we had 16 500s, that means double up, eight weeks of 500s, then we're going to have 10 weeks of 250s. This is a little bit of a goal, right?

If you really think about it, you have 10 weeks of 250s, eight weeks of 500s, that's 18, then the 10 Masters, that's 28, then the four slams, 32.

This really serves all the stack of the top 100. If you're at the top, you probably just play slams and Masters and a few 500s. If you're lower in ranking, you play more 500s and 250s. If you are lower in ranking, you play 250s and challengers. It's a pyramid. The lower your ranking, the lower you go play.

If you're high, in my opinion, you shouldn't be playing down. If you're Sinner or Alcaraz, you have no need to play the 250s for money, because it doesn't fit within your ranking, and it's not your level. When you're winning slams and Masters, you should be really playing up.

In no other sport, a Formula 1 driver is allowed to go and race in a race which is in a lower category. They try to protect their talent. But they have a different system.

Back to the 12 days' expansion. I really haven't invented anything. Indian Wells, Miami were there for 35 years. I came in, I really looked at the numbers, and I could see these tournaments were really out-performing the others.

You look even at the slams. Why are they so successful? Two reasons: infrastructure, incredible infrastructure, and of course, history, the brand. They have big stadiums and they have three weeks technically, 15 days of main draw plus quallies is three weeks.

We are a sport that is very, very heavy in terms of ticketing. Ticketing revenue are already above 50%, 60%. You compare other sports, they're very media. You look at their breakdown of revenue, media is probably 60%, 70%. We are low in media and very high in ticketing for many reasons, one of them the fragmentation I told you before. So ticketing is really the core.

When you add days, I've seen now '25 was year three of the plan, but year one of the expanded Masters, including



Canada and Cincy, and I already see the results. If you look at the top-line revenue, that I cannot disclose, it's going really up high. It's changing a lot.

But you've already seen, thanks to the formula the players now have with expanded, see the last year, which was the '24 results, we paid out almost \$20 million in profit sharing. That was coming from \$6 million. That was a 25% on top of the usual prize money, which was already increased.

\$25 million means the total profit of the Masters with you close to 110, 109. I don't know if you know how the formula works, but you take the profits, you deduct the base prize money, and you share the excess.

All I'm trying to say simplified is it is working from a financial standpoint and provides a lot of value to all players because that money goes to the whole ecosystem, also to the players ranked 100, 150.

I knew, I always knew, that that format is particularly probably not well-received by the top, top players because they need to spend a few days early. And also have a lot of sympathy for the fact that these guys are the ones that stay late. They're really the ones affected by the 12 days. All the other players, they lose early. Even in the quarterfinals, there's really not much of a change.

I think the issue we have now is maybe we need a few more years into the plan or we probably need to shift more compensation to them and reward them for the value they're driving because they're really driving the value.

It becomes, too, a little bit of a debate around compensation per day. It's a very simple mathematics. They probably look at this event and say, I could be making X in an exhibition for one day. If I go there, I make X divided 12 days. That's the issue at the moment. I think it's an issue of economics.

Again, I want to be very clear. I'm not dug in or believe that exist a perfect product and that is the perfect model. All I believe is we've started with an assumption, we need to give it a few years to see if it works, then we have a review moment where we decide whether we go backwards or we continue.

We also need to look at all aspects because those 12 days were achieved with a deal which also had the compromise finally the tournament would open the economics to the players. Just to be very clear, for 35 years the players had no access to the economics of the tournaments. They had no clue how much money we were making.

It's almost saying like you and I have a partnership. You

make \$100. You ask me how much I make. I tell you, Sorry. And we are a 50/50 partnership. Now the books are open. They have full benefit. They are now equity partners. So that was a compromise.

The other compromise was the aggregation of media. There are a lot of things that we've done that will benefit the entire ecosystem over time. All I'm asking is be a little bit patient because I think it will deliver value. The second one, try to manage your schedule slightly differently in the other tournaments that you play.

Yes, we've added in that category, but if you take away from other tournaments where there is exhibition or lower category tournament that you play, I think you're going to be fine because it is a matter of the balance between the two.

I'm talking a lot.

I don't remember the third question.

Q. The midweek finals.

ANDREA GAUDENZI: The midweek finals, sorry.

That also is a difficult one. I think the only case you refer to is Cincy/Canada?

Q. China, too.

ANDREA GAUDENZI: Not Shanghai. That would be Beijing, Tokyo.

Regarding Cincinnati, we agreed and decided to go next year to a Sunday final. Obviously Canada being very short, the swing between Wimbledon and the US Open, there was no other alternative than squeeze it in three weeks. If you squeeze it in three weeks, you end up with a final on Wednesday. I don't know whether that is optimal. Probably not.

I know that many sports have gone away from the Sunday final at 2:00 as the Holy Grail. If even if you go to soccer now, they play a lot of Monday night matches. Football in America I think is on Thursday. Champions League on Wednesday.

I generally believe in the new world, our habits work is a lot more flexible and remote. Also people don't work Monday-Friday 9 to 5 as they used to. Generally I see in other sports more flexibility in the scheduling.

One of the elements of scheduling should also be fans. It should also be what you're up against. If you go against



Formula 1 on Sunday, and Formula 1 is very attractive, I might think, Okay, tennis should be scheduling against another sport or we try to engage as many viewers as possible. It's complicated.

Then also we have the problem of being global, which means what works well in the U.S., it could have been evening, and why sometimes we have to go early afternoon, because of Europe, because of the time zone. Scheduling is extremely complicated.

I say, again, open mind. Let's give it a few years to test. For example, I'm happy we're changing to Sunday next year. See the difference of the fan response Monday to Sunday and the viewership and TV. We need to be flexible and potentially adapt in the future.

Q. Possibly a simpler question to answer. I was wondering whether there was any idea whether this tournament will stay in Turin until 2030?

ANDREA GAUDENZI: Not yet. We haven't really decided, other than next year. Is a conversation we need to have with FITP I think probably early next year. Yeah, there hasn't been a decision yet.

We're super happy here. That's obviously a consideration that we need to take into account. But we haven't decided, we haven't made a final decision. We've agreed to sit down after this event and have a debate early next year.

Q. Does that go for next year, as well?

ANDREA GAUDENZI: No, I think next year has been announced already it's going to be in Turin. We're talking about '27, '28, '29 and '30.

Q. I wanted to ask, have you got an ideal number in your mind the amount of weeks you think an off-season should actually be in tennis? We've been talking about this and debating it for so long. You talk about the uniqueness of tennis. Is it six weeks? A month? The ideal time for a player to put down their racquets, see family, friends, have time away from the game.

ANDREA GAUDENZI: It's a good question. While I'll answer the question, I'll unpack and elaborate on the calendar just to give you a sense of the complexity.

I don't know whether there's an exact number. Some players would say six, some say seven, some say eight. Surely a player needs one or two weeks off, then one or two weeks when they start building their body, which is athletics, gym, then they pick up the racquet again. I think

it definitely needs to be longer than what we have today.

Then the question is, For who? In my time, for example, I was pretty much done in Paris. I was losing first round indoor, was very fast (smiling). I played the Davis Cup Final once in my career. That was the only time where I had to wait for that. Otherwise players like me would be done.

Obviously you have these guys, the top eight, that have to stay longer. They actually finish later. Now we have the Davis Cup with this format that has all the players who lost in Paris having to wait for the Finals, then wait again for that event.

I introduced this concept that I think I already mentioned. I do really love the Davis Cup. I think is an amazing event. I probably had the best matches in my career there. I think it's an incredible asset for tennis. We should all come together to try to make it the World Cup for tennis.

I think the best product is the home and away. I think the atmosphere, I've played one Final in Milan, probably the best memory of my career, and where I've been playing in different places. You go to different countries. You go to cities where we don't take tennis with the tour.

I've played quarterfinal against the U.S., Agassi-Sampras, in Palermo. You going to places. We played in Florence against Zimbabwe. I'm going to mention my experiences. I'm sure you can mention many of them.

The federations have the opportunity to bring tennis into cities that have never seen tennis. Regardless of which players you have, even if they're not the top players, you're going to have a full stadium cheering for your country. That atmosphere for me is the core of our product.

Obviously the problem at the time was playing it every year and in different surfaces cause as problem because one year we end up playing Davis Cup against Czech Republic in Naples. We won. On Tuesday I had to play in Dubai on hard court. You go from clay to hard court, two days away, fly to Dubai, have a bye. I don't know how, but I played the final that year in Dubai. It's challenging.

In the ideal world I think if Davis Cup could go home and away and over two years. There is no World Cup in sport that happens every year, to my knowledge. First of all, I think it would be better for them, for the product, and also would create release a lot of pressure from the calendar.

Last but not least, there is that difference between Paris and the Finals obviously. That is where I think the beginning of the season comes into play.

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

Correct me if I'm wrong, I don't know the stat top of mind, I believe Novak won seven times the Australian Open without playing anything prior to that. Jannik won the Australian Open without playing anything. For those guys, probably winning at that level, sometimes you probably can gain a few weeks in week one and two.

Again, I go back to the concept before: you have the flexibility to do that. You don't have to play week one and two. If there is no Masters, that's where you create your own flexibility. If you go too deep and play more matches than the other, that's when you have to stop. That's why we're going to look at '28 in trying to keep that in mind.

I think when we have this conversation, we need to say, You can build your own flexibility within the schedule. I do believe players need at least seven weeks off, I would say, in the off-season.

I'm sorry if my answers were too long.

Q. What are the latest movements of the top players with the Grand Slams, how does it affect their relationship between ATP and all the ecosystem?

ANDREA GAUDENZI: Generally speaking, I'll go back to One Vision, the plan I laid out in 2020 when I started.

There are obviously flaws in our system because of the legacy and having four slams independent, the ATP and the WTA and the ITF.

The slams, and I want to make this very, very clear, they are the best tournaments in our sport. They are incredible assets. The slams are probably the best way to showcase our sport. I thank them immensely for what they have done and what they're doing. As a player, obviously, you grow up dreaming to be in a slam. Probably the main two goals are becoming No. 1, winning a slam, then everything else. So they are super important.

Then obviously if you look from a player perspective, players have no representation. In the ATP, 50% of the governance is players. Every decision we make, we need the approval of the player board representative that gets elected by the players council, which is 10 players representing the wider group. So is a very democratic environment where with every decision I make, I have to go through the board, I have to consult with the players council, with the tournament council, who consult with their members. Obviously you have four independent entities.

Maybe that's to a certain extent an advantage because you just do things and you don't have to ask everyone

permission.

On the other hand, if you look from a player perspective, say, I'm not represented, what about the compensation. We discussed before the formula. We have a formula, which is very transparent to the players. They deliver value, they gain more value.

The economics with the slams, which by the way I repeat, they drive a lot of value and pay a lot of prize money. All they're asking for generally is fair representation and fair compensation, whatever that is. Maybe the level is already right, but they just don't know and they don't feel they're heard. I think that's a fair ask.

That is the goal of One Vision, to get everyone in one room, players, men and women, equally represented, then Grand Slams, Masters, 500s, 250s. Everybody needs to be at the same table because we are talking to the same people, the fans and you, that they watch the entire season.

I said many times, it's like writing a book and the chapters are wrote by different writers and they're sold in different bookstores. It's not optimal.

Thank you.

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