

International Tennis

Hall of Fame

Saturday, July 16, 2022

Lleyton Hewitt

Press Conference

TODD MARTIN: (Press conference joined in progress) -- represented in the Hall of Fame. He is also the 34th Australian to be inducted into the Hall of Fame.

Lleyton's résumé is too long to fit on one piece of paper. But I'll mention a few highlights.

Wimbledon champion, US Open champion, 30 singles titles to his name, two-time Davis Cup champion, world No. 1, and now Hall of Famer.

Lleyton, tell us a few of your thoughts about being inducted into the Hall of Fame.

LLEYTON HEWITT: Yeah, it's pretty surreal, to be honest. Never something I ever thought about as a player. So to be here, I came to Newport when I was 17 years old my first time to play in the tournament here.

I love Australian tennis history, but really the sport of tennis, I learnt so much when I went through the museum. When I came back the last three years to play here in the latter stages of my career, I enjoyed it even more. That's the special part, I wanted to get my name on the trophy here because I knew it was the Hall of Fame championships, and it meant that much more to me.

I was able to do that in 2014, and I think it topped off my career nicely.

Coming back this weekend has been a big thrill, mainly to come back with my close family and friends that have meant so much to me throughout my tennis journey, but on and off the court as well in my everyday life.

TODD MARTIN: For those of you keeping score at home, he just said the Infosys Hall of Fame Open Championship was the most important tournament he ever won. Write that in your stories (smiling).

How about we take some questions from the media here.

Q. (No microphone.)



LLEYTON HEWITT: Four times. Yeah, played it as a 17-year-old, then obviously the years you're going deep at Wimbledon, obviously with the timing, it's hard to come back and play.

I love playing grass court tennis. When I first came as a 17-year-old, not really. I hadn't learnt to play on grass at that stage. I was able to win my first-round match, which was a big deal for me. Later on in my career, I felt like grass was my best surface and my favorite surface to play on.

Coming back here, I enjoyed it. I'm not sure, since they've done the courts up now, I don't know if that would have suited me or not. Some of the rough bounces, I knew it was playing Karlovic, Isner, Mahut, these big servers.

For me, I prided myself on having good footwork and adjusting to the bad bounces on grass courts as well. I felt like that played into my favor because I probably did it a lot better than a lot of other players out there.

You had to go out there with a mindset of not get frustrated. I felt like I did that pretty well in all those years and that's why I was able to have success here.

Q. (No microphone.)

LLEYTON HEWITT: Not a lot. I played in Hurlingham just a couple of exhibition matches just two days before Wimbledon this year. They were meant to be exhibition matches. Didn't feel like it. You come against Tommy Haas these days, and he doesn't know the word 'exhibition'. It was a lot of fun.

I enjoy going out there and playing somewhat a competitive match. My body is still good enough at the moment to be able to do that, so I might try to do that for as long as I can. It was good to be back on the grass.

My body felt it the next couple days afterwards, just the bending, getting down to the low balls. The glutes and hamstrings were a bit sore.

Q. Probably felt like forever for you to get here. Did



you have a chance to watch last year and think about what this day would be like for you?

LLEYTON HEWITT: Yeah, I watched most of them, to be honest, over the years. I was fortunate that I was in the semis and finals here those three years in a row which gave me the opportunity to be around here when they were going on the ceremonies for those days, how special it was for those people.

I think it's for most of the players, to be honest, when you're playing, it's not something you think about it. It seems so far away. It's nice to be able to actually sit back and reflect.

I've obviously had a little bit longer now since getting the call from Stan Smith originally. It's been nice to sort of reflect on my career and the ups and downs, the great moments, some of the tougher moments as well, and the people that helped you along the way get through those.

Q. If someone had asked you at the age of eight, nine, what you wanted to be when you grow up, would you have actually said a tennis player?

LLEYTON HEWITT: Not at that stage. I wanted to be playing for the Adelaide Crows at Football Park playing AFL football. That was my background, that was my dream at that stage.

It probably wasn't until around 14. I was taking tennis seriously, but at 14 I had to make a decision, so within the next year after that I quit football and went full-time, steam ahead, with tennis. Really didn't look back after that.

Obviously I think I made the right choice (smiling).

Q. Lleyton, you look at some of your peers, based on their ability, their physical gifts, they might not have reached the ceiling of what they could have achieved. I feel like you probably either approached that or did reach it. As you reflect on your career, how do you feel you maximized your gifts and the work you put in?

LLEYTON HEWITT: Well, I gave 100% every time I stepped on the court. It wasn't just the match court, it was the practice court as well. I felt like obviously training with the likes of Tony Roche every time I stepped on the practice court, it was about having a purpose. It wasn't just going out there to hit balls over a net.

I felt like working on my game was one area. Training like that as well trained me mentally to prepare to play five-set matches as well. Physically, I felt like at my peak, I was as physically strong as anyone on tour. That's why I prided

myself on getting in those long battles. I actually enjoyed them.

It wasn't something I stressed about. If I did end up in a long battle, I was able to just worry about executing. I didn't have to worry about how my body or mind was going to react under those pressure situations, which is a big relief as a player I think to know that going into those matches.

Everyone is hurting at some stage in a match. I was just banking on I was hurting less than my opponent.

Q. Who are your toughest opponents and who did you like to play the most?

LLEYTON HEWITT: I think the toughest challenge in tennis is playing Rafa at the French Open. I think that is the toughest challenge that I've ever been part of or ever experienced.

Roger Federer could nearly play the perfect match I think on most surfaces, especially grass or hard court. But I think playing Rafa on center court at the French Open, it's pretty much proved itself with how dominant he's been at that particular tournament.

He's in a different league. There's certain times where you just felt like you were helpless out there playing against him.

Players I like playing against (laughter)? I had a good record against Jonas Bjorkman. First time I played him, I was only 16, 17 years old I think. 16 actually. He was world No. 4 at the time in Sydney. I had a good record against him.

And then Tim Henman. I think there's something about the Aussies playing the POMs, and it's like an Ashes battle. So I got a lot of enjoyment from being up on the team quite a few times. He's one of my good mates, too, actually. He's a great guy. We talk a lot about it. I'm very happy I got on the winning end against Hennes.

Q. When will you turn your mind to selecting your next Davis Cup squad or whether you'll leave those decisions till the last minute?

LLEYTON HEWITT: Yeah, obviously great result. Max and Maty Ebden winning the doubles, came close to winning their first Grand Slam at the Australia Open, losing to Nick and Thanasi. The way they were able to fight, compete, save match points in a couple of those matches was impressive. They had a great result.

Obviously Maty Ebden, as well, making the final of the mixed doubles with Sam Stosur. Nick making his first Grand Slam final at Wimbledon. We always thought that Wimbledon suits Nick's game, the grass courts, if he serves well.

I think the biggest thing for him is now having that belief that he belongs there, he's capable of doing it. We'd like to see him go on with it.

In terms of Davis Cup, we're still monitoring everything that's going on at the moment. Hopefully we can pick the five strongest players for the team that we have to play in Hamburg in a couple months' time.

Q. Are you hoping that Nick might make himself available for that tie?

LLEYTON HEWITT: I'm certainly hopefully. I've had a couple discussions with Nick. I'll be speaking with him in the next week or so again, catching up with him. Yeah, we'll take it from there.

TODD MARTIN: This is my first time I hosted a press conference. Can I ask a question, too (smiling)?

You spoke about not certain whether the grass courts being great would benefit your game or not. We've actually tried to keep our grass courts somewhat softer than Wimbledon so that we would imply the need to be somewhat creative and reactive to the play.

If I'm not mistaken, I believe you're the last men's Grand Slam champion to use all gut string.

LLEYTON HEWITT: Okay.

TODD MARTIN: Or perhaps the last No. 1. What do you think about technology and how that affected you and your career and others?

LLEYTON HEWITT: I think the technology, not only racquets but string, played a massive part in the transformation of the game. I think it made it awfully tough for guys to serve-volley consistently as well when some of those synthetic strings came in, a lot of players were using half and half.

The second part of my career, probably the second two-thirds of my career I ended up using half gut and half synthetic as well. It was completely different for a while. Felt like guys could swing as hard as they wanted at shots and it wouldn't go long. I think that gave guys more confidence on their return of serve as well that the ball wasn't going to fly on them.

I think as a whole the balls got heavier as well, which slowed down conditions, which made it awfully tough for guys to serve and volley consistently. It became more of a surprise tactic or a change-up tactic rather than a game plan of actually continually doing it.

We even look at Roger Federer, how great an all-court player he is. He more uses it as a change-up play, the serve and volley, even on grass. He's looking to set up the point with his serve, he'll come into the net off a great shot or on his terms.

When I first came on the tour, I felt like return of serve, Andre was in a class of his own. I tried to work towards getting up there. That was certainly one of my strengths.

A lot of the other guys on turn didn't return unbelievably well. I felt like that's where I had an advantage over a lot of players in that generation that I was able to put pressure on their service games with my return of serve. But obviously my passing shots, as well.

Q. You have transitioned into your current role remarkably well. How did you approach that? Did the Australian sporting culture play into that for you?

LLEYTON HEWITT: Yeah, it's not always easy. There's certainly challenging times. I think I'm fortunate to have someone like Tony Roche around who has been there and done that and instilled this culture that we expect when representing Australia in Davis Cup or in any team competition.

In terms of that, it's made it easy because I'm following in Newk and Roche's footsteps. That's all I know, how I was put into the Davis Cup, what I expect from all the players.

The hard thing is dealing with different personalities, what motivates and drives those individuals. Quite often I look -- because I love AFL football so much, I look at an AFL coach. The tough thing for them is they're dealing with 44 players on a list, all those personalities, trying to get them to gel together. I may only have six to ten players potentially on that list, and five guys at a particular tie.

The hard thing with me is that I'm not in control always or the federation is not always in control of picking players or swapping players all the time because they're in control of their tour for 11 months of the year. It's a totally different setup.

For me, it's more trying to work with those players, making sure they feel comfortable with the people that we have around the team all the time, but also just knowing how to

get the best out of all those players because they train differently, they think differently.

The young guys with social media, there's a whole lot of different stuff off court they deal with that I'm not really that big on. You have to somewhat have that connection with those players to understand what they're going through.

TODD MARTIN: Thank you all very much. Enjoy the rest of the day.

LLEYTON HEWITT: Thank you.

TODD MARTIN: Thanks, Lleyton. Congratulations.

LLEYTON HEWITT: Thank you.

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