

International Tennis Hall of Fame

Saturday, July 20, 2024

Kim Clijsters

ITHF Induction Ceremony

BRETT HABER: Good evening, everybody. Good evening and welcome to Newport, Rhode Island. Welcome to the International Tennis Hall of Fame and to our enshrinement ceremony. Tonight in Newport the international tennis community has gathered for one of the greatest occasions in our sport, the International Tennis Hall of Fame's annual induction ceremony.

It is my pleasure to join you once again as the host of this wonderful and deeply meaningful event.

This evening we will honor three individuals who have each made a mark on our sport in a distinct, compelling and powerful way. Unquestionably, induction into the Hall of Fame is the ultimate honor in tennis. A fitting exclamation point, if you will, to a lifetime of accomplishment and devotion.

Each year, as we induct a new class, we're also graced by the presence of many past inductees. Please join me as we welcome this tennis legends back to Newport.

Let us start with someone who personifies all the grace and class that our sport is all about. The president of the International Tennis Hall of Fame, a winner of four Grand Slam singles titles, Class of 2017, Kim Clijsters.

Next, another leader, vice chair of the Hall of Fame board, one of the most accomplished doubles players, winner of 17 Grand Slam titles and two Olympic gold medals, from the Class of 2010, Gigi Fernandez.

This legend completed the career Golden Slam. That means all four major titles and Olympic gold, and was also No. 1 in the world, a member of the class of 2011, the great Andre Agassi.

Another all-time great who earned a career Grand Slam in singles, 18 majors, world No. 1, she personifies the epic excellence of this place, inducted into the Hall of Fame in 1995, the legend Chris Evert.

How special that we are joined in succession by Chrissie's



close friend and her greatest rival, one of three players in history to have earned titles in singles, doubles and mixed at all four majors. That is the lifetime box set. Ladies and gentlemen, Martina Navratilova.

He played on eight Davis Cup championship teams for the United States, earned singles titles at both Wimbledon and the US Open. He also served as our Hall of Fame president for 11 years, from the Class of 1987, Stan Smith.

She was No. 1 in the world and twice took the title at the US Open, from the Class of 1992, America's sweetheart, Tracy Austin.

A trailblazer who in 1970 launched the first women's pro tour, 12 Grand Slam doubles titles, inducted into the Hall of Fame twice, first on her own in 1996, then three years ago alongside the members of the Original 9, Rosie Casals.

He is one of our sport's premier historians, author, journalist, broadcaster, from the Class of 2017, Steve Flink.

This man is a wheelchair tennis legend, No. 1 in the world, winner of 20 singles titles and doubles titles, from last year's Class of 2023, the great Rick Draney.

They are living proof that once you're inducted into these halls, we hope you come back forever. We transition from the past of these halls to the present.

To briefly introduce for the first time our incoming Class of 2024, of this distinguished trio, two are the first Asian men to be inducted into the International Tennis Hall of Fame, and the third is one of our sport's most accomplished journalists.

First from India, a champion, a popular worldwide television personality, and a global ambassador for our sport, Vijay Amritraj.

From Great Britain, he has covered tennis for more than 60 years. He has authored more than 20 books and is truly an indispensable contributor and historian of our sport, please welcome Richard Evans.

Finally, another legend from India, winner of 18 Grand

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Slam titles, an Olympic medalist from the 1996 Games in Atlanta, Leander Paes.

On this very special day, we will soon learn and hear more from Vijay and Richard and Leander.

First, the president of the International Tennis Hall of Fame and a Hall of Famer herself, Kim Clijsters.

KIM CLIJSTERS: It is wonderful to be here to celebrate this special moment. Richard, Vijay and Leander, your contributions in tennis have been remarkable and inspiring to so many. It is a pleasure and honor to welcome you into the International Tennis Hall of Fame. Congratulations once again.

The Hall of Fame's mission is to preserve tennis history and celebrate its champions, and in doing so we are striving to inspire generations globally. For the past six years, the Hall of Fame has been inspiring countless youth in Newport through our TeamFAME program, whose home base for learning enrichment is here on this property.

As we look to the future, we are committed to expand the impact open more youth globally. We celebrated an important moment in the Hall of Fame's commitment to inspiring kids yesterday when TeamFAME's headquarters was dedicated in honor of the incomparable Chris Evert.

Chrissie is an 18-time Grand Slam champion and a great supporter of developing youth through tennis in the classrooms and in their communities. It is most fitting that the Hall of Fame's youth enrichment programs will be based in the Chris Evert Learning Center.

(Video Shown.)

KIM CLIJSTERS: It's so special for the Hall of Fame to have someone like Chris Evert as part of our community. Class, grace and commitment to excellence. She brings so much to our sport.

Ladies and gentlemen, Hall of Famer Chrissie Evert.

CHRIS EVERT: Thank you. I'll be short. I know this night isn't about me (smiling).

Thank you, Kim. You are definitely the nicest woman tennis player that we've ever had. Definitely.

What a joyous night for everybody tonight. I am so honored to have my name on the Learning Center building. I feel very privileged. I have Dan and I have Nora to thank for that. Thank you so much for believing in me.

The International Tennis Hall of Fame is known to preserve the history of the sport. That is for certain. But it also supports everyone. It supports everyone from the current players by having this wonderful tournament this week, and also we have the women next year as well, which we're very happy about. It also supports the former champions, the former icons like Leander, Vijay and Richard. Couldn't have asked for three nicer guys than they are.

Now we have a wonderful program called TeamFAME. It supports hundreds of students by providing services like education, academic support, mentoring, wellness, tennis, and character building.

The goal for that is hopefully to take this worldwide globally at one point and have thousands and millions of kids have these same opportunities.

I think the Hall of Fame just checked off every box when it comes to helping everybody. This is some very important work we're going to do. I just want you to know I take this very seriously, this responsibility.

So thank you very much.

BRETT HABER: It's a very special dedication to a very special woman. Thank you, Chrissie. Might I add it is so great to see you and Martina side by side looking so great.

Ladies and gentlemen, we're just getting started here at the International Tennis Hall of Fame.

This evening two inductees will become at the same time the first Asian men to receive this honor in their respective categories.

Our first has been elected in the contributor category because, while his outstanding playing career earned him 28 singles and doubles titles, his greatest contribution to the sport has been as tennis' global ambassador. Let's hear more about India's Vijay Amritraj.

(Video Shown.)

BRETT HABER: As you may know, Vijay has also spent some time in the broadcast booth over his career. He has passed that talent along to one of his sons. Here to present his dad is a great friend and colleague of mine from Tennis Channel, please welcome Prakash Amritraj.

PRAKASH AMRITRAJ: It is such a tremendous blessing, honor and privilege to be here today to introduce my greatest hero, who just also happens to be my father.

I'd like to address Vijay's impact today from three unique



perspectives that I have. First, as an analyst, his beautiful, free-flowing game on court, his style, it looked like calligraphy in human form. When you couple that with the immeasurable impact he left in expanding the game to reaches of the globe that it didn't previously touch, that kind of lasting impact, absolutely immeasurable.

But I feel from my other two perspectives, he's even had more impact.

For a long time, people of color, we felt we didn't belong, we felt we weren't good enough, and we were told we couldn't. I've heard countless stories from Indian immigrants across the world.

A young doctor in the early 1970s here in Massachusetts doing his residency, how his white superior wouldn't acknowledge him, wouldn't really speak to him. One day he saw Vijay beat Rod Laver at Forest Hills on CBS. Started speaking with him the next day, I saw this inspirational Indian kid. Where are you from? They started building a bond, a friendship. He ended up becoming one of the most successful surgeons in the Northeast.

Another man of Indian origin told me, I was born in the UK, but I wasn't born British. It wasn't until I saw Vijay win victories at Wimbledon in the name of India that I felt I truly belonged.

There was a kid who grew up in the early '80s, in Los Angeles, who loved movies. He wanted to be like the titans he saw on the screen, but he got called racial slurs in school and was told, "You'll never be anything more than Apu from 'The Simpsons.'"

He was able to see a handsome, debonair, Indian secret agent help James Bond save the day, and he knew it could be done.

Vijay's life shows us why heroes are so important. He was a beacon of hope for people that desperately needed to believe in themselves, be proud and embrace the color of their skin, and who now know that the impossible truly is possible.

Vijay crawled and walked so we could run and play.

Thirdly, being a parent. It's the most important job on earth. It's something that will impact us long after we're all gone.

I remember an afternoon decades ago when my mother, Shyamala, took my younger brother Vikram to McDonald's after school to get some Chicken McNuggets. She parked the car, he left, went in to get the chicken nuggets. As he

went in, he held the door open for an older lady. Picked up his food, came back in the car. My mother looked at him and said, Son, that's so sweet. Why did you do that?

He looked up and said, I see Dad do it all the time.

Parents lead by example, whether we like it or not. As he gave his blood, sweat and tears to this sport and other people around the globe while keeping God, family and India in the forefront, he still made sure that Vikram and I knew what it is to be a man, that we fall only to learn to pick ourselves back up, and that good will always triumph over evil.

On behalf of my mother, Shyamala; my brother, Vikram; his wife, Florence; our entire family; all the countless lives that you've touched all across the globe, I love you, Pops. You're the greatest man I've ever known.

Congratulations.

VIJAY AMRITRAJ: I told him how to do that (smiling).

When I was given the news that I was going to be inducted this year into the International Tennis Hall of Fame, a feeling came over me that I'd never experienced. This was an honor not just for me, for my family, my parents, but for all my fellow Indians in my country and living around the world.

My grateful thanks to the International Tennis Hall of Fame, the various committees, and my dear friend Cherenjiva for starting the process. Thank you.

It was this month in 1973 that I made my first visit to New England, to a little town in New Hampshire called Bretton Woods, to the Mount Washington Hotel to play a tour event with some of the greatest players in the game of that era.

I ended up, after being down eight match points, winning the tournament, beating along the way two of the greatest who have ever played the game: Rod Laver and Jimmy Connors. The following day in the "Boston Globe," the legendary Bud Collins wrote that it was India Day in New England.

It is with great pride that I congratulate my fellow Indian and my dear friend Leander Paes, who was in our BAT program in Chennai growing up, guided by my mother in his tennis and his education and his religion. Leander, congratulations.

My dear friend Richard Evans, who wrote the only book on me, and became a best seller (smiling). Congratulations, Richard.

I grew up in the city of Chennai in the southeastern coast of India. A very different India than it is today. Growing up with health issues at an early age, it became a real challenge to my parents to get me to be fairly normal.

As my mother got me into tennis to overcome my health issues, she had two horrific accidents in her 30s. Now the real challenge began. These two ordinary people did extraordinary things with my life. They dreamed the impossible. Flying blind, they sent me on a journey that would get me here, to the ultimate honor in tennis. An impossible life story of a boy from 1950s Chennai.

I miss my parents every day. But on a day like this, it's truly painful. They are watching from above, I know, with my mother saying, I told you so.

I would like to thank my first coach, Mr. (indiscernible). I was also sick when he started coaching me. He said he would make me India's No. 1 before he died. He did it. He put the first racquet into my hand.

The great Pancho Gonzales, who took me from being Asia's best to be able to compete with the world's best on the global stage.

To the incredible Roy Emerson who kept me on tour through the latter stages of my career for several more years.

And my dear friend Gene Malin, who coached me and the Indian team throughout our miraculous run to the Davis Cup Final in 1987, only the second time in the history of Indian tennis in the Open Era that India had ever been in the Davis Cup Final.

To all my dear friends from far and wide who have come here to spend and share this evening with us, my grateful thanks.

To my brother, Anand, a big thank you to him. I could not have played as long as I did if it wasn't for him traveling with me. We won a lot of matches together. We lost a lot of matches together. But we enjoyed the world together.

I am delighted that my nephew Stephen is here, a new father 10 days ago. My lovely daughter-in-law Florence. Thank you, darling.

My sons Prakash and Vikram, the real jewels in our family. As they've grown up, they've helped me navigate through a changing world. They have unknowingly perhaps taught me to be a parent. They are the real blessing.

To my Shyamala, my wonderful and incredible wife of 41 years, I am truly grateful and thankful that we could share this miraculous journey together. You made the joy in our lives better than ever, and the pain in our lives painless.

Not to worry, we're just getting started, we're going to go the distance.

To my fellow Indians in India and around the world, I can't thank you enough. You welcomed me into your homes from the big cities to the small towns, and your growth was my growth, alongside India's growth. You shared my joy and my sorrows with me.

To everyone in this amazing country, I can only say if your plans call for travel, come visit India. Come visit my India so that we may show you the same wonderful warmth, hospitality and generosity you showed to me when I came here 52 years ago.

May the U.S. and India continue their friendship and help unite a divided world.

My dear friends, I am humbled and honored to join this incredible and exclusive group who have brought glory to our sport. Our sport has given me everything in life. It has taken me places I never thought I would go. It has allowed me to meet people I never thought I would meet. It has given me more things than I could have possibly imagined.

May it always be a part of our lives and always bring families and communities and countries together. More than anything else, I'm happy to say India Day is back in New England (smiling).

Thank you and God bless you.

BRETT HABER: It's time to introduce you to tonight's second inductee coming from the contributor category, Richard Evans.

(Video Shown.)

BRETT HABER: To be sure, Richard is one of the game's great storytellers. His son, like all sons with their fathers, has heard all of his stories.

Ashley Evans, come up to join us induct your father into the Hall of Fame.

ASHLEY EVANS: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. What a pleasure it is to be here today. Very proud to be standing here, introducing a man who some of you may know as a tennis commentator, his easily distinguishable British accent describing incredible battles on courts all

around the world, point by point, match by match.

You may also know him as a journalist and an author, depicting scenes through his descriptive comparisons, statistics and storytelling, his words flowing across the pages of tennis magazines, newspapers and books, circulated around the world.

But me, when I look at him, he is Dad, a man who I've admired for as long as I can remember. Hardworking, motivated, a man who has dedicated his life to his craft and to this sport.

From the stories that he's told me from the time I was very small to the story that he actually told me last night that I'd never heard before, he's got a bunch. Through these stories, the characters, the scenarios, the detail, his words truly never cease to amaze me.

A true encyclopedia he is to this sport, a perspective from the inside of this sport for over 60 years. From the early days of his career, as a foreign correspondent, right up to the present day, he has had an incredible ability to make the reader feel as if they're not just reading a story, but they're witnessing it with their own eyes, exactly how it unfolded.

Fueled by curiosity and a lust for adventure, no country is too far for him, no tournament is too hot or too cold. If there's a story, you can count on the fact that he is going to be there for it, and he's going to tell it.

These characteristics to me exemplify the highest level of what journalism should be: being a guardian of the truth. I feel proud to have been a part of 26 years of his legacy so far, knowing that now it will be a legacy that will live on forever in these beautiful walls.

I'd like to thank the Tennis Hall of Fame for allowing that opportunity. Now it's my absolute pleasure to introduce and present my dad, Richard Evans.

RICHARD EVANS: Thank you, ladies and gentlemen. I think you got a little glimpse of why Lynn and I are rather proud of our boy. We certainly are.

I'm proud to be here in this amazing place. I want to thank before I forget, because I'm going to forget names, the people who put all this together: Dan Faber, Patrick McEnroe, Katrina Adams who was such a great leader of the USTA for so many years, and Kim Clijsters of course, and the person behind the scenes who makes it all work, Anne Marie McLaughlin.

I want to say how glad I am that some members of my

family are here. My two nieces, Claire Schultz and Elizabeth Campbell. Elizabeth managed to get here from the West Coast yesterday, which is quite a feat. Of course, I wish my mum and dad were here, but they helped me. My mother I think gave me the confidence to have self-confidence by saying I was wonderful all the time.

I'm not sure I believed it, but it was certainly part of the reason why I was able to start a career very young at 17 and a half. I'm sure all parents realize how important it is to tell their offspring they are wonderful, whether they always think it or not.

My sister Margaux, who died a little while ago, helped me bring me up. I wish she was here, too.

I also want to mention Patricia Turner, Professor Turner, which leads me into Arthur Ashe for the simple reason she has led the UCLA Arthur Ashe Foundation Legacy for many years. She's now retiring from that post. I'm so glad she made it here.

Arthur was a special player to me and to millions, but especially to those of us who knew him. I was lucky enough to go on three tours to Africa, the third one was South Africa, which was hugely controversial, and only happened through the great work of Owen Williams, the former No. 1 player in South Africa, and Arthur's great friend and agent Don Dell.

We had the most fascinating visit at the height of apartheid. Arthur did so much to break down a little bit of that barrier. Something that struck me, one of the young people we met said, I'm looking at the first free black man I've ever seen.

That struck me. That's what Arthur did. He went and he became a legend in the game. His final against Jimmy Connors was the greatest Wimbledon final I ever saw because tactically he changed everything to enable himself to beat Jimmy Connors, which he wouldn't have done if he played in his normal style. You know how difficult that is in the Wimbledon Centre Court?

Anyway, let me tell you a story of why I'm here, how I got here.

It's a cliché, but life is all about timing, isn't it? Everything. This story I'm going to tell you would not have happened if it had happened a day earlier or a day later. I was demobbed, as we say in Britain, from the British Army, having served two years national service. My previous employer, who started me off in life professionally, got me a job on the London "Evening Standard." I was to be the rugby and rowing correspondent.

I walked into the office for the first time, this crazy old newspaper office of clattering typewriters and copy boys running around, on the Friday before Wimbledon. Amidst the chaos in the corner was a gray-haired, bespectacled, erect figure, the editor of the newspaper. He was called Charles Wintour. You might not have heard of him, but I expect many of you who heard of his daughter, who is Anna Wintour.

They were in a panic. They had to find someone to right Althea Gibson's copy on the Monday at Wimbledon. She'd done it the year before with another member of the staff who couldn't do it. They had 48 hours to find someone.

As I walked in, Charles Wintour turned towards me and said to the sports editor, You've got this young man joining you today, give him to Althea.

That changed my life. You would never see me here if he had not said those words, because I would have been covering Henley, which is rowing. You call it crew in America. Instead I found myself on Monday, never having covered tennis before, on the Centre Court of Wimbledon in the press box with this magnificent champion at my side. It was a privilege to work with Althea Gibson, needless to say. That's how I got into writing about tennis.

There were all sorts of people who helped me through that long path which has been so rewarding. Certainly Jack Kramer was one of them. I don't know why there's no stadium named after Jack Kramer. Certainly in California, they ought to be ashamed of themselves. He was the godfather of professional tennis, kept the whole profession alive in dark days before Open tennis. Jack was terrific to work for. When I joined the ATP, he was my boss for a few years. He was one of the people who helped me along the way.

Yesterday I was sitting watching the matches, and I was thrilled to see a plaque to Ted Tinling, who was so much more than a tennis designer, although he was the best ever in tennis. He was 6'7" of wit and intelligence and a unique personality, as I'm sure that those who wore his dresses will confirm. Yes, Tracy, Martina, Chris, Rosie? They all wore these dresses which were just very special because Ted was a huge personality in the game.

I'm going to stick my neck out now. I don't know who is going to run the women's tournament here next year, but it's great that the women are coming to the International Tennis Hall of Fame. I hope that Ted Tinling's name is attached to the tournament in some way, if I may dare suggest that, because no one deserves to be associated with women's tennis more than Ted Tinling.

On the theme of women's tennis, for another person who had a big impact on my life, was Gladys Heldman who published "World Tennis Magazine." With Billie Jean King and Rosie Casals, who is with us here today, created the WTA in the face of enormous odds. Certainly Gladys had a great influence on my career, as well, because she asked me to write for "World Tennis Magazine."

Then the other big personality in my life who gave me a chance in American journalism was Eugene L. Scott. Gene, we miss you. He published "Tennis Week" for many years. I really enjoyed writing for him.

So it has been a long journey. I wish I had time to tell you all the names of the great tennis writers I've written with in press boxes around the world like Rex Bellamy, of course Bud Collins who is of this parish as we say in cockney land. Almost, down the road. Bud was unbelievable. Allison Danzig. Writers of a previous age in America. All used their talent to write about tennis, which is a sport which needs to be promoted at every level and written about with as much talent and style and enthusiasm and passion as those of us who love the sport can muster.

So thank you very much for greeting me here today. I hope to see you down the road.

BRETT HABER: Time now to recognize the first Asian man to be awarded induction into this Hall of Fame in the player category. He grew up a barefoot young man playing football and field hockey in Calcutta. Today he's being given the highest honor in tennis.

Leander Paes calls himself a rebel with a cause. Take a look.

(Video Shown.)

BRETT HABER: Leander says as a kid he loved watching Martina Navratilova play on TV in black and white at the time. When he grew up, he would have the opportunity to team with Martina to win the Australian Open and Wimbledon mixed doubles titles in living color. We're pleased to welcome in living color the living legend, Martina Navratilova, to present Leander for induction.

MARTINA NAVRATILOVA: This is nerve-wracking. Pressure. What an amazing setting. It is truly a privilege. I'm so happy that not just one man from India but two men from India won this award. First two Asian men to do this. Better late than later, but wow. Astonishing.

Leander Paes from Calcutta, 18 major titles, eight men's doubles, 10 mixed doubles. Career Grand Slam in doubles, in mixed, with very many different partners. 55

doubles titles in all. We won two together, four finals. Leander was on the floor more than he was running because of me. Olympic bronze medalist in singles. The only Indian medal in tennis ever. Played in seven Olympics, seven. I think you could play this year again.

Proudly represented India in Davis Cup as a player and captain. Holds Davis Cup record for most doubles wins of all time: 45. World No. 1 for 37 weeks. He received India's highest sporting award in 1997, the third highest civil award in 2014 for his outstanding contributions to tennis.

But those are just numbers written, very small font. I think Leander plays tennis the way most of us would like to play. He's got that off-speed serve, big forehand, slice backhand that lands exactly where you don't want it to land.

Then the fun really starts when he comes to the net. Big forehand volley, feathery touch. Reflexes like a leopard. He runs every ball down, if he can. If he can't, he dives for it. The passion that the man has for the sport is indescribable.

If all else fails, he smiles on the court, then everybody's heart melts. He was an artist on the court, an amazing athlete, a virtuoso. He wielded the tennis racquet like an orchestra conductor wields the baton.

Leander, it was truly my honor to play against you; I enjoyed it a lot more when I played with you. You have done your family proud. You have done our sport proud. Most of all, you've done India proud. Congratulations.

Right now I would like to invite your daughter to come present your induction.

LEANDER PAES: I was taught to be fearless on the tennis court, but this... Wow. I counted more than 200 Grand Slam wins right here.

I was born to a Bengali mother who was five foot nothing, captained India in basketball. Mother had intuition, quick-twitch fibers. She was a great leader. I was born to a father, 6'3", who was a doctor of medicine, dotted every I, crossed every T. He was the center half of the Indian 1972 Munich field hockey team. My dad won a bronze medal in 1972.

A few who remember that Olympics, Palestinian terrorists took Israeli athletes hostage, games were shut down for four days. The German Army was in the village. Civilians were not allowed in, the athletes were not allowed out. 10,000 athletes in the Olympics, as we know, are housed

along one street in alphabetical order. India was bang opposite Israel.

They boarded the windows, locked the doors, removed the televisions, and even removed the newspapers. I don't know what they were thinking, but I was conceived in those four days (smiling). I was born in June 1973. For any one of you want to do the math (smiling).

I grew up in Calcutta. I played street cricket and street football barefoot. I watched these two legends on a black-and-white TV. Chris Evert hit a ball clean. Every single ball she hit was clean. Her shirt was tucked in. Her favorite dress was pink and white, I heard.

Martina Navratilova, left-handed, served and volleyed. Picked up shoelace volleys, played aggressive tennis. I watched John McEnroe, Bjorn Borg. John McEnroe served and volleyed all over. Played speed tennis. Very attractive.

But in Calcutta I grew up playing football. At the age of 11 I went to a European football academy. On the 12th of May, 1986, those coaches told me I had to give up my Indian passport if I wanted to play for a European football club. Fair enough. But I knew my legacy was to play for the Blue of India.

On the 12th of May, 1986, I moved to Madras, now known as Chennai, to the Britannia Amritraj Tennis Academy. On that very same evening, Richard Evans was in Madras writing Vijay's book. There I was 11 years old, walked up to Mr. Evans and said, Good evening, Mr. Evans, I'm Leander Paes.

He goes, So what would you like to be?

I said, Sir, I just gave up my dream of football, and I'd like to emulate my father to win an Olympic medal.

This young man said to me on the 12th of May, 1986, If you work hard enough, one day maybe you can be a Hall of Famer.

It's my greatest honor to be on this stage with not only these legends of the game, people who have inspired me every single day of my life, not because you have only won Grand Slams, not because you have only shaped the world of our sport, but every single one of these people have shaped the world that we live in. I would like to thank you so much for giving this Indian boy hope. Thank you.

I would also like to thank Mrs. Amritraj and Mr. Amritraj. I did my holy communion with them. May their souls rest in peace. To Prakash, Vikram, Shyamala and your family,

you did good.

To Vijay, it's my greatest honor to have learned my tennis in your academy, under your guidance, and under the guidance of Dave O'Meara, who stands here today.

The academy was supposed to be built to build Davis Cup champions. Today we hold the Davis Cup record for the most number of doubles wins undefeated.

It's my greatest honor to be on this podium with you, Sir Richard Evans. For inspiring a young 11-year-old Indian boy who had no idea what a Grand Slam was about at that age. But you gave me a dream that we can win Grand Slams and become Hall of Famers, sir. I thank you for that.

Growing up as a kid, I used to polish my dad's medal every Sunday after church. Little dirty rag, tin of Brasso, polished it up. I always wanted one of my own.

My dad said I could only sit with him at the dining table if I won one. It's a different story than when I brought it home. He said, Now you got to be a doctor, too, because I'm one.

I went to one of the great universities in India and said I want to get a doctorate in the field of sport. That day when I took Dad to the induction ceremony, I didn't tell him I was going to get a doctorate. When we got to the ceremony, I walked in, there were 111,000 kids in a cricket stadium with their gowns and hats on. I got Dad up onto the podium. I walked up, they gave me a gown and a hat, and they gave me a doctorate. I was called Dr. Leander Paes.

Playing for 1.4 billion people could either be pressure or it could be wind within your wings. I'd like to thank every single one of my countrymen who supported me, who stood by me through all the ups and downs, and we've been through a few. But y'all were the inspiration, y'all were the support, y'all were even the strength to guide me through when I didn't believe.

But as my father always said to me, You believe in yourself, you work hard, you be passionate, not only to win prize money and not only to win trophies, but you do that to inspire the world. Thank you.

It's been my greatest honor to play for my countrymen in seven Olympics, to stand when the national anthem is playing in all those Davis Cups, and to prove that we Asians can also win Grand Slams and be No. 1 in the world in our field, be it tennis or anything.

My stepmother, Juliana, bought me my first tennis racquet. It was a wooden one. I learned how to play with wood

racquets, hence the chip and charge, hence not being able to hit a ball clean, hence keeping the game simple and just using my God-given gifts of speed both with my feet and with my mind.

I'd like to thank my mother Juliana for being the glue in our family, for bringing us together, for keeping us there and showing us what's important in life. You're one special woman. Thank you.

I played for a team in Washington, D.C. called the Washington Kastles. Billie Jean King started World TeamTennis in 1973. A lot of these greats played it. But I had no idea the magic I was going to feel when I met Mark Ein. Mark, please stand up. Mark; his mom; his wonderful wife, Sally; two kids, Charlie and Chloe; and the whole community of Washington, D.C. took me in. We not only won the World TeamTennis championship six times, but we went undefeated for four years, the longest winning streak by any professional team in sporting history.

The work that we did with community and what World TeamTennis stood for was really special. We had people from grandparents, parents, men, women, children, coming out and playing and supporting us.

Mark, you taught me we refuse to lose. You might get us once, but you ain't getting all of us. We played every night as a team. One night maybe I lost, but Serena Williams won. Maybe one night I lost, but Martina Hingis won. Maybe one night I lost, but Venus Williams won. Not a bad team, huh?

I think my greatest blessing is not just my quick volleys, not just those 10,000 hours, three million perfect repetitions, but my greatest gift was to pick the best partners in the world.

I love you, Martina. You inspired me as a kid. You inspired me on Centre Court of Wimbledon. You inspire me today.

Standing on this podium accepting this beautiful medal, didn't script this one, while we were doing the autographs earlier today, Richard Evans was signing on my face. I got Richard Evans' medal (laughter).

I would humbly like to bow my head and thank the International Tennis Hall of Fame for doing such an exemplary, amazing job of capturing the history of our sport, honoring athletes in our sport.

And I would not like to rest here today, I would not like to rest on my seven Olympics, 20 Grand Slams, God knows how many Davis Cups, but I would like to pledge my

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

collaboration, my effort, my passion to honor Captain Dan as I know him from my favorite movie "Forrest Gump." Patrick McEnroe, who I learnt so many things from on the court. I wish I had a double-handed backhand. One of my greatest regrets in my life was that I didn't get to play doubles with Patrick McEnroe.

My first mixed doubles partner at Wimbledon, Katrina Adams, who walked up to me and said, You are playing with me. Seems to be a trend, huh?

I would like to collaborate and really take the International Tennis Hall of Fame global. How? Through the TeamFAME program, through being legendary. Our sport is the most global sport in the entire planet. Our sport is the most competitive sport on the entire planet. We've got great champions, who I have the honor to share the stage with today. We've got great people who document our sport.

But I would like to take the legendary all across the world 'cause my dream, now that I've retired from tennis, is use my vehicle of tennis and collaborate my brand with all these champions to inspire 250 million children across the world in the next 15 years.

I know it's a big number, but I feel the world is in a vulnerable place today. My personal feeling is our sport of tennis, which is the first sport that had equality in prize money for women as for men, equality in scholarships for women as for men thanks to Title IX, equal opportunity as for women as for men. Just like Prakash said earlier, equal opportunity for us cats, too.

I think the International Tennis Hall of Fame is one of the greatest institutions in the world. They do great work. Whether it's through the Chris Evert Learning foundation, whether it's through the Andre Agassi school, whether it's through any of these legends, I humbly request that we use our sport of tennis to inspire 250 million children across the world over the next 15 years and make our world a better place to live.

Thank you.

BRETT HABER: On behalf of everyone at the International Tennis Hall of Fame, a giant well done to Leander, Vijay and Richard. You have all brilliantly described what it means to be inducted into these hallowed halls. We can't wait to see what the next chapter holds for you.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

