

# BNP Paribas Open

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## Ben Shelton

Press Conference



B. SHELTON/J. Mensik

4-6, 6-3, 6-4

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

**Q. So what was that like to look across the net and see, like, a younger version of yourself? I don't know if it's a younger version of yourself, but a big guy. You're three years older than him.**

BEN SHELTON: Yeah, definitely, an interesting comparison, but I see what you mean. I was just in the locker room talking to somebody saying, yeah, this is the first time I've played someone who's younger than me and not around my same age. Like, I've played Carlos and Holger who are like a year, and Arthur Fils, who's like a year and a half.

But three years younger, it's really impressive what that kid is doing and brings to the table as an 18-year-old. He's definitely pretty far ahead of where I was at 18 years old.

**Q. Did you use that? Do you think there was a way of using that against him? Do you think your experience came into play in, like, the second set or the third set, or was it just like a...**

BEN SHELTON: Maybe a little bit down the stretch. I thought I did a good job of amping up my energy at the right times and getting the crowd behind me. I definitely felt like the momentum shifted towards the end of the second set. I don't know if that's experience or just, you know, being here in front of an American crowd, I had a lot of support.

Yeah, I think it's kind of a different feeling playing someone who's younger than you. It's important that you try to flip the script and not have it feel like this guy is coming after me, but no, I'm still coming after him.

You know, that's the mindset I try to have when I play older guys. Like, I'm the underdog or the young guy coming after them. It's important for me when I play guys younger than me to not feel like they're coming after me.

**Q. I wanted to ask you about the trio of Tommy, Taylor, and Frances. You had a chance to play all of them now. You've spent some time around them, especially in Vancouver, where you got to see probably the lighter side of that group. I wonder if you talk about what that environment is like, especially kind of on the humorous side when you guys are behind the scenes and also what kind of influence they've been on you.**

BEN SHELTON: Yeah, I think we're all pretty good friends, not just from Laver Cup but just being out on tour. We go to dinners together for one another's birthday every once in a while. Fritz usually has the best -- sorry, Fritz's girlfriend usually knows the best restaurants in the cities that we're in. So he's a pretty good guy to go to dinner with.

But yeah, I think we have a great group of Americans, not just including those guys, but others as well who I like hanging out with. There's always good banter. Foe was just in the locker room giving me a hard time about saying some words in Spanish, because two of the guys on my team are Argentinian so I'm hearing the Spanish all of the time, some words come out every once in a while in Spanish, and he's just giving me a hard time for it every single day.

It's a lot of jabbing back and forth, but they're all great guys.

**Q. Is there an advantage in that just because they're close and they support each other? It's not like they're not talking to each other in the locker room. Do you feel like that whole group tries to pull each other up?**

BEN SHELTON: Yeah, I think it's a balance, right? At the end of the day we're all still competitors, and when we go out to play against each other, whether it's Tommy in Dallas or Foe at the US Open, Fritz here last year, there's not the friendliness or -- I mean, obviously we're respectful but on the court we're competing, and we're competing at the highest level as, you know, all of us have shown.

But I think off court is something a little bit different than on



court, and there's definitely a balance.

**Q. You mentioned the crowd a little bit, how you work with the crowd a lot, we see you interact with them. How important is that for you to have a crowd behind you? Does it affect your match in any way?**

BEN SHELTON: I don't know how much it affects me. I think it's a positive for me to have a crowd behind me, especially when things are going great, things are going great. But when things aren't going so well, like, I wouldn't say they were going terrible, but losing the first set today, to have that crowd behind me or supporting me and kind of urging me on later in that second set before I got the break, I think it's a huge plus.

But coming through the college system I'm used to it being on both sides. Sometimes you go into a hostile environment, and sometimes the hostile environment is behind you.

So I enjoy playing in front of big crowds, whether they are with me or against me.

**Q. You mentioned the Argentinians on your team. Movement guy, right?**

BEN SHELTON: Yeah.

**Q. Bringing him on and working with him, what has that been like? Was that you, your dad?**

BEN SHELTON: Yeah, he's been a huge addition to my team. He was at the USTA a long time ago, and he was kind of -- his group was Tommy, Taylor, and Frances from, like, 13 to 17, something like that. And then he went and worked for Tennis Australia and he was kind of just transitioning out while I was looking for a strength and conditioning coach.

He's been a huge addition to my team. He's helped me a lot on the movement side, he's helped me on the strength side. He's just one of those good guys to have in your corner who shows up to work every day, he loves his job, and is just truly a team player.

So, you know, all three guys that I have in my corner on my team have really, really helped me in the last year.

**Q. Speaking of your colleagues or players close to you, Abedallah Shelbayh, he's your former college teammate and he's been coached by your father back in college. How do you see his progress he made last year?**

BEN SHELTON: Yeah, I think it's been really cool to watch. The year that we both turned pro we were actually supposed to live together. And he's doing great. He's another young kid with a lot of skill, a lot of ability. From what I've seen he's been working really hard lately. Cool to see his success. I'm not sure what his rank is up to now. I think he's top 200 though.

**Q. 180 or something.**

BEN SHELTON: Okay. Yeah, so I think that he'll continue to rise. Actually, I didn't see him here. Did he play here?

**Q. No.**

BEN SHELTON: He didn't play here. Okay.

**Q. Ben, before college when you were playing different sports, I know, growing up, were you always the guy who would get the fist pump going and do that as you were coming up through the ranks before college or did that really amp up during college?**

BEN SHELTON: Yeah, I think college definitely helped ignite that, but before, I think it was being around the college atmosphere with my dad being a coach and just seeing that type of behavior, energy on a day-to-day basis is kind of what brought it out of me.

I always enjoyed from being a little kid, no matter what sport it was, just competing, and really getting into whatever I was going to do. My parents put an emphasis on only doing things if I was going to do it at 100%, and there was no reason of wasting money or wasting my time if I wasn't passionate about what I was doing. I think that passion comes out when I do things I love out here on the tennis court or any other sport that I'm going to be playing.

**Q. You mentioned after that you play pickup basketball in your spare time. A lot of players sort of like wouldn't go near that.**

BEN SHELTON: Yeah, definitely shut it down a little bit. I still go every once in a while. More just shoot-arounds or playing some, like, one-on-one. But when I was in college I was playing a lot at the, like, rec center at the University of Florida a lot of times with the track-and-field team. My number of pickup sessions have definitely slowed down.

**Q. Ankle rolling, good way to roll an ankle.**

BEN SHELTON: Yeah, roll an ankle, jump up going for a block and landing on your heel wrong. You go into practice the next day and you never feel like 100%. Yeah, definitely a lot less of that.

**Q. Do you think it's helped your tennis playing games like that, or doing different sort of stuff though is what I'm saying? Does that help...**

BEN SHELTON: Yeah, growing up I think that it definitely helped me improve as an athlete. Helped me become a more well-rounded athlete. If you look at the movement on a basketball court, someone defending and other things that are similar to the movement on a tennis court. It's a high-intensity game. There's a lot of running and I think it's good for endurance. When I'm playing nowadays it's not like I'm like, Oh, yeah, this is good for my tennis, I'm cross-training. No, I just do it for fun.

**Q. As you spend more time on the tour and see what it takes week to week to maintain a level to try to be consistent, do you marvel more when you look at some of the guys like maybe Novak, Rafa, they've been able to sustain that over such a long period of time?**

BEN SHELTON: Yeah, I think it's crazy because there's two big aspects of it. One, obviously the physical. You can be worn down, tired after weeks. I think scheduling is also really important with that, not being in the finals or winning a tournament and flying to another continent and playing right again the next week. I think that's important.

Then also mentally, it's, like, how motivated are you? What really drives you to go out there and play each week? Because I think it's easy to lose motivation when you've won so much or you're financially stable or you've accomplished some things that you want to accomplish, ticked off some goals. I think it's easy to get lackadaisical or kind of put on the brakes on striving to get better and improve things in your game day in and day out.

Obviously the greats are able to come back the next year and do it again, the Novaks and the Rafas, the Rogers, the Kobe Bryants, the Michael Jordans, like each year, it almost seems like they're getting better and continuing to improve. I think it's really mental.

**Q. You've been to Indian Wells now a couple of times. I wonder what you think of Indian Wells now. What did you think it was going to be, and has it kind of lived up to that or has it been different from what you thought it was going to be?**

BEN SHELTON: Yeah, I think really similar. It's obviously a beautiful place. Things are convenient here, not being in a big city for a change. Usually our tournaments are in bigger cities. I really enjoy it here. It's peaceful, it's a beautiful site.

Actually, the first time I was supposed to come out here was during COVID. I was going to play Easter Bowl. I think all flights got canceled like four days before I was supposed to come out here. I had gotten a wildcard. It was going to be my first time playing an ITF. I was pretty bummed about that, but after that I'm able to play in the big show here now.

**Q. Today you lost the first set. I saw your, like, making big gesture to get crowd excited, and then also at the same time what was in your mind at the time that how did you come back? What did you do to yourself?**

BEN SHELTON: Yeah, I mean, I knew the match was far from over after the first set and it only took one small chance or one look to be able to turn things around, and I was able to execute in the right moments to make that happen, and that's where that big gesture kind of came from.

You know, I think the momentum flipped a little bit with the way I was playing, but I was just trying to put an emphasis on it with how much energy I had, you know, going into the third set. Because it's easiest to have a letdown after winning a set, and I just wanted to make sure that when I went from the second set on into the third set I was playing with the same intensity and I didn't have that letdown of getting broken or missing a chance to break in the third.

**Q. Have you thought of the Olympics at all? Is that in your mind?**

BEN SHELTON: Yeah. Definitely thought about it a lot. I'd say now I'm leaning towards not going this year if I were to make it. I think it's tough in the tennis schedule this year. I'll be in Europe for two months leading up to Wimbledon, and then after, you know, I want to prepare and really get ready for the US Open. So having to go back to Europe to play on clay, a different surface, you know, it kind of messes up a few lead-up tournaments to the US Open that I would play if I wasn't playing the Olympics.

But, you know, 100% I would want to play in LA in 2028 which is on the same side of the world as the US Open and on the same surface, but I guess we'll just see. Who knows what happens this summer.

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