

BNP Paribas Open

Sunday, March 10, 2024

Steve Johnson

Press Conference



KOOLHOF-MEKTIC/Johnson-Paul

6-2, 7-6

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. Steve, first of all, congratulations on such an incredible career. Well done.

STEVE JOHNSON: Thank you.

Q. Your dad was a great tennis teacher. He's a legend in Orange County. You've had this magical relationship with him. If you could say something to your father at this point, what would it be?

STEVE JOHNSON: Yeah, no, I mean, there's a lot of emotion there. You know, this is a tournament where I came a lot as a kid with him, you know. So for me this has always been home for me, as a kid from Orange County, and now I live in LA. This has been my favorite tournament since I was a kid, playing and then competing in it, watching it, just being here.

I have a lot to thank my parents for that, but that relationship with my dad was incredibly special. He was my coach forever, and sometimes in the sporting world, we see maybe parents-child coaching relationships not always pan out the way that they should or, you know, in theory.

I think that was the biggest piece that he, you know, the greatest piece of advice he could give me. He knew when it was time to step back and be a dad and, you know, let somebody else take over.

So for me, you know, he was somebody that I could call regardless of the situation, you know, tennis, life, whatever.

Yeah, needless to say it's been a really hard seven years. You know, I always wanted to be a tennis professional, and I never wanted to do it alone. You know, not saying that I didn't have -- I had, you know, a lot of support, but obviously I wish I could have looked to see my dad in the stands, you know. But I know he's watching, you know, very proud of my career and, you know, the family that I

have.

It's just, you know, he gave me a lot and I just wish I could share moments like this with him.

Q. I'm sure that your dad is super proud of you. Congratulations on everything. As a professional athlete it's always hard I think to get to this decision, but you seem to be pretty settled and happy with where you are. Just that process that you had to go through to get to this decision, was that hard? Was it pretty, you know, eye-opening for you?

STEVE JOHNSON: Yeah, look, I mean, it's kind of crazy to think I've done this since I was two or three years old, and today is the last day I'll compete as a professional.

The tennis aspect I'm still in love with. I love competing. I love going out there and playing. Physically I wasn't at 100% the last, anywhere near that, like, the last 18 months. That took a big toll on me. My mind telling me what I need to do and my body not letting me.

So I ended up kind of getting some stuff done, taking three months off at the end of last year, after the US Open I tried to play as much as I could but I really couldn't. I played two tournaments, I think. I took three months off through the holiday season.

You know, I didn't miss it. You know, I didn't miss hitting. I didn't miss all the little stuff that it takes to be great. You know, I had to do the rehab every day and the working out. All that stuff, it just became more of a chore than something that I have enjoyed to do for, you know, since I was 16, 17, 18 years old. That part was really hard.

Physically playing, you know, this year I played Dallas. I won the match. Qualified, so I won two matches, and my body felt so bad. I just know, like, what it's going to take for me to get back to whatever I can get to, I don't know what that number could have been, and I just didn't have it in me physically, mentally, emotionally.

I mean, as you know, this game is very selfish. So being home and, you know, trying to do the rehab and working

out and rest, recovery, all that stuff that it takes 10, 12 hours a day and having two kids and having all this stuff, just my priorities shifted.

I say I'm very happy right now, and content, sad. There's a lot of emotion. But I've been retired for, like, an hour (laughter). It will probably hit me a little harder maybe in a few days when I really am like, okay, not going to Miami, not going to Europe, not going to the French, that kind of stuff it might hit me a little different.

Yeah, as of now my body, I'm just mentally drained, emotionally drained. This has been an unbelievable week, a stressful week, draining week just trying to get to see so many people, friends and family that knew my dad or knew -- I've grown up here, so I have a lot of -- this is just home for me. It's been an awesome week, and yeah, something I'll be thankful for forever.

Q. Awesome career.

STEVE JOHNSON: Thank you.

Q. Have you thought much about what you would do differently if you were starting again today?

STEVE JOHNSON: Probably learn how to hit a backhand a little bit better (smiling). But other than that, no. I think that's something I would be very proud of in my career is I felt like I rectified any mistakes or anything that I could have had in my power. You know, I really felt like I didn't leave any stone unturned. I leave the sport sitting here with no regrets.

But yeah, from my career, I don't think I would change a thing. Everybody goes through this roller-coaster ride. I would obviously love to change some moments in my career or a few months or six months or a year stretch maybe where it wasn't going so well. But that all adds to, you know, the resilience, the dedication, the determination.

I always felt like I was a competitor. So for me, every time I stepped on court I hoped the other person knew that they were going to get a dogfight that day. Regardless of outcome, I was going to be a bulldog out there.

Q. Is there more golf in your future?

STEVE JOHNSON: Yeah, hopefully. I would love to play a little bit more golf. You know, I'm going to get away from tennis for a little bit, practice-wise and competing and all that stuff. Hopefully I'll squeeze it in. But a 3- and a 10-month-old keep me quite busy at home. I probably should get back so my wife can have some free time, and take over some more duties around the home.

But for me, I'm just going to go back, relax, and hopefully the body will feel good and kind of wake up in the mornings and not feel so crummy sometimes.

Q. Any thought beyond the initial period and maybe had a vision of what life will be like in the future? How good does it feel to maybe play a more active role in the family and be around more family and friends?

STEVE JOHNSON: Yeah, that was kind of the biggest eye-opening thing for me, just the family aspect of -- end of last year I was playing tournaments, winning matches, and I wasn't enjoying it. You know what I mean? It just felt like a job. This has never felt like a job for me. We play tennis for a living.

That was kind of a pretty big eye-opening thing for me at the end of last year of like, I'm winning these tournaments but at night I'm like, I wish I was home doing the bath or getting the kids ready for bed. That kind of stuff. That was hard for me.

In the future, I love this sport, I love everything it's given me, both good, bad. That's what creates these special moments.

I would love to stay in tennis in a certain capacity. You know, I think, you know, it's such a wonderful sport that's given me so much. Hopefully people will say I gave back as much as I possibly could and hopefully brighten people's days or anything in that, or saw a kid smile when you sign an autograph, all that kind of stuff.

That was important to me. Hopefully always give back and now I'll have more time to do that.

Q. Who was the most fun to play against?

STEVE JOHNSON: Whoever I beat. (Laughter.)

You know, I loved competing against the American guys. I know that sounds kind of weird. You don't like playing Sam or John or Tommy or Reilly and these guys. Older Americans, younger Americans. It's fun to compete against them because those are, I felt like, was my contemporaries, and you always knew it was going to be a battle and when that match was over, somebody was going to have lost.

Those moments were important for me because life is more important than tennis. You know, even though John and I or Sam and I had these knockdown, drag-out battles, the next day our kids or we would go to breakfast together or dinner. It didn't affect our friendship, you know, the

competition. I think that was very special for me.

Q. Steve, could you say the toughest stroke you've ever faced, the toughest player, and also if you had to step back, what has the sport taught you, the prime lesson you have learned from tennis?

STEVE JOHNSON: Yeah, I think the toughest stroke, John's serve. I mean, he's got, I don't know, 17,000 aces, whatever the number is, and 2,000 of them are against me, I think. I played him 15 times or whatever it was.

For me the toughest player was Roger to play against. Just because I played Novak only once, Rafa once. You know, but to see how Roger played me once, the second time I played him, you know, I almost beat him here, lost 6 and 6, had some chances, and then the next time I played him, the differences he made in his game, beat me like a drum.

You know, I left the court thinking, like, what he was able to do from the last time I played him, I think it was only like six, eight months prior to now, how he changed his strategy and what he did, was one of the most remarkable things for me. That he's just so far above pretty much everybody else in the world, you know, at not only being a tennis player but tactically, you know, how he could get me into situations where I was in big trouble.

Q. And the lesson?

STEVE JOHNSON: Look, I think tennis is a massive character-building sport. From a kid you call your own lines, you get to where I went to college to having a team and having to earn the respect of your teammates and coaches there, and then coming out to tour, doing the same thing.

You know, tennis is a great character builder. You know, we see a lot of great tennis players out there, but, you know, we have a lot of great character guys in the locker room as well.

You know, it's really cool to see people from all corners of the world, you know, play this one sport and have the same, you know, characteristics of what it takes to be a professional.

Q. Talk about Peter Smith.

STEVE JOHNSON: Peter, yeah, I have known him since I was a kid. The Southern California tennis community -- the tennis community in general is very small, but especially in Southern California. Him and my dad were very close.

I always wanted to go to SC. He took me from that awkward kid, tennis player, to where I got to the tour, and, you know, continued on and I really hit my stride and found my footing in the game of tennis at SC.

More importantly, you know, he's like a second father to me. He's somebody that means a whole lot, and I'm very thankful that he's still a huge part of my life.

You know, seeing him in the stands on Monday was very meaningful to me, obviously, going back to my dad's conversation. You know, he's the closest thing I have to a dad. So to have that embrace with him was very special.

(Applause.)

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