

BNP Paribas Open

Friday, March 15, 2024

Wesley Koolhof

Nikola Mektic

Press Conference



KOOLHOF-MEKTIC/Granollers-Zeballos

7-6, 7-6

THE MODERATOR: First of all, congratulations, Wesley and Nikola. I know this is already your third title after re-pairing together since 2020. What's working so well for you?

WESLEY KOOLHOF: A lot of things (smiling). No, I think from the first moment we started playing again in Auckland this year, things just, yeah, clicked, connected. It's like we, yeah, didn't have a break for, what was it three years or something?

No, I think we're just playing very good, we complement each other very well on the court.

So far it's been very good. We won a lot of tough matches, especially in the beginning of the year, a lot of match tiebreaks. Here also I think we played four or five unbelievable high-level matches in tough conditions.

Yeah, it's tough to say one or two things which are working very good. I think overall every performance has been very good. Hopefully we can, yeah, keep it up for the remainder of the season.

THE MODERATOR: Anything to add?

NIKOLA MEKTIC: Nothing to add. Just going to...

WESLEY KOOLHOF: Enjoy me speaking?

NIKOLA MEKTIC: No, I'm enjoying your speech. Yeah, nothing smart. I will need 10 seconds to say something. So go with second question.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. Like you said, you have been here before, you won this title in 2019. How does it feel to pick up a second one? What is it about this place that works well for

you?

NIKOLA MEKTIC: It feels almost unreal. When I look back to the last season, how things, like, where my mindset was and everything, it really looks unreal.

It's like I got some special energy again when Wes asked me to play again. I really feel like I want to give 200% of myself, you know, not only for myself, for him, and for this team and everything.

So far it's really working. I'm really happy how we're playing.

Q. Have you tried to talk him out of retiring after the season?

NIKOLA MEKTIC: No (smiling). Too early still. I'm waiting for a good moment. (Laughter.)

Well, actually, now I have one reason maybe, one reason why maybe he would like to continue. It's just to see his picture again next year here. It really would be disappointing not to come here, not to see your picture on the wall. It's a really good feeling.

WESLEY KOOLHOF: You can send me a photo. (Laughter.)

Q. You were just talking about your mindset or how you felt last year at Indian Wells. Can you elaborate more on that? How were you feeling 12 months ago and where your head space was 12 months ago?

NIKOLA MEKTIC: Maybe not 12 months ago, but comparing to my previous seasons when I was doing really well, being in top and always kind of going up, then especially, like, the first part of the season was still right, but as we progressed in the season, it was worse and worse, and I was just losing a lot of confidence and belief that I can, you know, sit here again and have this speech.

Q. Wesley, you guys getting back together this year, how did it actually come about? It sounds like you asked him.

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WESLEY KOOLHOF: Yeah, in the end of last year I decided, kind of around US Open time, I would think, and yeah, told myself, yeah, next year will be my last year.

Then I was, like, okay, the situation with Neal was good. I mean, we were playing well. Dropped a little bit in the ranking. We couldn't have gone much higher like we did in the first year anyway.

No, I think we still had a good partner with Neal and played some good, decent tennis. End of the year, like I said, I think I needed, like I did in 2022 when I started playing with Neal, just, yeah, change things up a bit, asked Neal to play. I also changed my coach at that point just to bring in some freshness and new look at some things. That worked very well for me personally. I went from 15 or something to No. 1 in the end obviously.

Then I thought to myself maybe it's a good idea to do that again. It was nothing personal, nothing against Neal at that point. I just needed something new to be able to continue one more year, to give it one more push.

So it was like, yeah, let's try to do something else, do something new. Obviously have a little list of players who you like to play with. I would love to stay on the deuce side my last year, not gonna switch to the ad side. Had a little list.

Even though his ranking was not great at that point, I think around 40, 45-ish, I was like, okay, we did great in the past, even though he dumped me after that 2020 season. That was okay, all was forgiven and forgotten (smiling).

No, I asked him back, and he said yes. Yeah, that's how it actually ended up. Not a very crazy story or something. Just how it sometimes goes in doubles.

Yeah, main reason for the switch with Neal was because it was my last year and I wanted to do something new. No expectations, just start over and go for it one more last time.

Q. Seemed like it was a good decision.

NIKOLA MEKTIC: So far it's been an unbelievable decision.

WESLEY KOOLHOF: Yeah, never know if I would have done the same with Neal or something, but in the end he also went with Mate Pavic in 2021, they won everything in the first, whatever, eight months. Yeah, can't really be pissed about that decision. Hopefully we can do the same.

Q. You mentioned it in your speech, I think you said your godfather. Could you tell us more about him and what he meant to you?

NIKOLA MEKTIC: I mean, he's family, somebody I know my whole life. Yeah, just promised myself to dedicate something big, because when he passed away end of 2022, things, like I said, started kind of not so good for me.

I always had this in my head to just honor him for just being such a great supporter and such a great fan. He was, like I said, no matter the time, no matter the time zone, he would always find a way to watch my matches. Every time I finish, whether I lose or I win, I get the first message from him. I'm happy that could get this one for him.

Q. Do you mind spelling his first name?

NIKOLA MEKTIC: His first name is Andrija, A-N-D-R-I-J-A.

Q. I have a question about the box today, because I was sitting right under them, and I heard the most crazy things that they were shouting at you guys in support. Who were they? Was it just your team always or some special guests this time?

NIKOLA MEKTIC: I mean, I'd say our team is my fitness coach, my tennis coach, and his tennis coach. I don't know if you can put Botic in here.

WESLEY KOOLHOF: Botic. Poland Davis Cup, my coach, also Davis Cup captain of Poland, Mariusz Fyrstenberg. He's always helping with the Davis Cup. Yeah, he stayed around, stuck around. He's a very energetic guy anyway. He also helps out with everything, with the tickets with the doubles, whatever you need.

NIKOLA MEKTIC: Then the rest are just very good friends that are here this week. They're not with us all the times. I don't know, like, I honestly don't really pay that much attention to what's being said in the stands all the time. I don't know.

Q. It was very funny.

NIKOLA MEKTIC: They were cheering a lot.

WESLEY KOOLHOF: You can send me a tape if you have the tape running. Very energetic team. They live for it, as well. They support us throughout every match. It's nice to, yeah, give this one back to them.

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