

Davis Cup Finals

Monday, 20 November 2023

Team Finland

Captain Jarkko Nieminen

Emil Ruusuvuori

Otto Virtanen

Patrick Kaukovalta

Harri Heliövaara

Patrik Niklas-Salminen

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Hello to everyone. Let's start the press conference with the Finland team. We will start with English questions.

Q. Welcome to Andalucia. I hope you're enjoying your time here. Jarkko, how gigantic, how historic is this moment for Finland? You have been carrying the Finnish flag for so long. Now you're acting here as captain. How historic is this moment for you guys?

CAPTAIN JARKKO NIEMINEN: Well, it's first time ever already. Last stage was first time on the men's side for Finnish men, so obviously it's huge. It's huge for our tennis culture, big for our team. I think tomorrow you're going to see a lot of people supporting us.

It's also, I think, record-breaking crowd coming here abroad to support us. Yeah, it's great that we're here, but also it's like competition is still on. It's not finished. We are happy that we're here. We try to go even further.

Q. Jarkko, you said you'd like to try and go further, especially if there is a big Finnish support. But is there maybe not any pressure on you because you are kind of new to this arena and the underdogs?

CAPTAIN JARKKO NIEMINEN: Well, for sure, no pressure. I don't think we have felt any pressure in any stage. We don't take it for granted that we're going to always perform that well. Instead of that, we try to work hard.

Most likely we're going to play better like that. We know if we can play our best tennis we have still chances to go



THE WORLD CUP OF TENNIS®

further, but obviously everybody has to play well. We are underdogs and against defending champion, so I think all the pressure is on their side. We just try to enjoy the moment and fight hard.

Q. Can you tell us about the profile of tennis in Finland, like where does it rank compared to other sports, and how much has this team's success helped to sort of bring it to the public's attention?

CAPTAIN JARKKO NIEMINEN: Well, many people play tennis, but it's still not one of the most traditional sport. Many people play, but not so many people compete especially abroad, if you think about juniors or adults so we don't have too many pros.

Yeah, things like this, all the attention that the team gets helps to make the tennis culture stronger. It's great that hopefully in the near future more young girls and boys will start trying to play tennis, and that obviously helps to get more stars from Finland.

Yeah, at least Davis Cup team gets a lot of attention and tennis gets more attention at the moment than before.

Q. What was the key against the U.S.? Do you think they underestimated you?

CAPTAIN JARKKO NIEMINEN: I don't know. You should ask them (smiling).

Yeah, we played great against them. It really came down to a few points. Was really tight, all the matches. As we have done multiple times, we have really -- I mean, they have really played well when it gets tight.

We have won most of the matches after tight situations, and that was one example of that. We had to beat USA to be able to go further.

Yeah, the guys have handled these situations great. I have strong belief that they can do it again.

Q. Harri, in your blog, the first entry, it says "Living the Dream," the title of your blog is "Living the Dream."

ASAP sports . . . when all is said, we're done.®

Is being here in the finals of the Davis Cup the very definition of living the dream for you?

HARRI HELIOVAARA: Well, thanks for reading my blog. There is not that many abroad who do that because it's in Finnish. I'm very happy that you do.

Yeah, the title of the blog is "Living the Dream." I think this is a great example of what it can be. We are together as a team living the dream but obviously personally as well.

That's why we play tennis, to be in these moments, to be in the big stadiums playing in front of our own countrymen or big supporters and trying to do history, trying to do something that you can be proud of when you're done with your career.

I couldn't be more honest in saying that I am living the dream, and I think we all are.

Q. A couple of questions for Emil. Firstly, I think you retired from a match the other week. Just wondering how you're feeling physically. Was it the shoulder maybe? Could you talk about your matchup with Felix Auger-Aliassime? I know you had that five-setter in Australia a couple years ago. How do you see that one?

EMIL RUUSUVUORI: Yeah, I did retire. It was the shoulder, like you said. We are still doing everything possible for making it on court tomorrow for the match.

Yeah, it's tough. We only played once. We practiced couple times here and there. But other than that, we haven't played. It's only that one match. But he has picked up his level, for sure. Was struggling more in the beginning of the season but now he won the title and he's back at the very top of his game, so it's a very tricky match.

Q. Emil, we're expecting big numbers of Finnish supporters here tomorrow. Just how excited are you about the prospect of playing on that court in that stadium in front of your own fans?

EMIL RUUSUVUORI: Yeah, I mean, we experienced it in Croatia in Split with much less people, and they were still able to make such a big difference I feel in the matches. Just constant support which we don't get abroad that much.

Here it's just many, many times more that amount of people, so yeah, it's interesting to see what kind of noise they can bring there.

Q. Emil, first of all, what can you take from that

Australian Open match? And the second thing is when you practice against a competitor and somebody who you're going to be playing on the tour, do you sort of keep things back when you're practicing? Are you careful not to reveal too much in your game?

EMIL RUUSUVUORI: That was a very tough match there. I mean, he's one of the best players out there. I think he made like quarters and lost a tough match against Daniil who then I think he won the whole tournament. Yeah, just big game, big serve on these kind of fast services, it's a very tricky opponent.

When you practice, I mean, yeah, you don't go out say things that you're working on or really try to show them. But you just play your game. But yeah, you don't go to the team and say that I'm working on this and can we do this and this. Yeah, probably everybody keeps it a little bit down.

Q. Otto, how are you feeling about being here this week in Malaga? How has practice gone? How excited are you for tomorrow?

OTTO VIRTANEN: I'm really excited for the week. It's been great so far. As we did really great in Split, I hope we can keep going the same way and just keep winning.

On and off the court, as a team, we are doing, like, we are all such a good chemistry inside the team, and it's just fun on and off the court. I think that brings the big wins for us.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports