

Davis Cup Finals

Tuesday, 21 November 2023

Team Finland

Captain Jarkko Nieminen

Harri Heliovaara

Otto Virtanen

Press Conference

HELIOVAARA-VIRTANEN/Galarneau-Pospisil

7-5, 6-3

Team Canada - 1

Team Finland - 2

THE MODERATOR: Welcome, everyone. Let's start the press conference with Finland. We will start with questions in English.

Q. Harri, we saw how happy you were on the court, but could you just sort of put today into words, coming out, seeing those fans, hearing the anthems, how the day unfolded, and then ultimately clinching it in the doubles? Can you tell us about your emotions?

HARRI HELIOVAARA: This is why we play tennis, absolutely. I play for the emotions. That's the best you can, highs and lows. Today was definitely one of the highest days of my career in terms of emotions.

We have a great team. Well, we knew beforehand there was going to be a big Finnish supporter group. Still, you never know how good it's gonna feel until you actually experience that on court.

I mean, we were unlucky that Emil couldn't play today. But at the same time, we had a breakfast this morning with this guy next to me, and I told him we might need two points from him. After I saw the singles, I was pretty sure he was going to play unreal doubles as well. It was a treat to be on court.

Can't ask for more. This is, like I said in the beginning, this is why we play, and those emotions are something that I can cherish for the rest of my life.

Q. Jarkko, you have been around a long time. How



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are you feeling, the emotions that you're going through? And I'm sure in your playing days you would have loved to have been in a situation like this?

CAPTAIN JARKKO NIEMINEN: Yeah, sure. We tried many times (smiling). I was on the team, I don't know, about less than 20 years and couldn't make it.

Now we're here. I'm in a different role, but I always loved being part of the team, playing for the team. Now I'm here just to make the guys feel good and play hopefully their best when it counts. They are doing it really well. Yeah, as Harri said, life is all about experiences, yeah, and these kind of moments.

Yeah, these kind of moments, it's very easy to remember the rest of our life or at least when it comes to tennis memories.

Yeah, now the trip goes on. Obviously it's a great moment now today and it's still not time to celebrate. We have chance to go even further, and with this great feeling and confidence, it's really nice to step on court on Friday.

Yeah, as I said, it's incredible, the whole journey with these guys since I started as a captain. It's amazing team.

Q. Otto, how much did the crowd help you in your efforts today? For Harri, as well, I guess you've got another blog to write?

OTTO VIRTANEN: Yeah, well, every time I'm playing with a Finland shirt and playing in front of these fans, today was just amazing. We are not in Finland but we feel like we are in Finland and everybody is there and everybody is having fun. We are having fun on court, and off the court it's just amazing to be here.

Yeah, I think it makes, I would say, a small impact on my game how the fans react and support me, all the team after every point. I think it's a big support for me personally.

HARRI HELIOVAARA: And thanks for telling everyone about my blog again, like last time. Of course if I wasn't here, I'd be writing a blog text already telling about what

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happened today, but I will do it later today and it's going to be an enjoyable experience.

Q. Well done. I'd like to ask Jarkko Nieminen if this is the best win for Finland since you beat Italy 4-1 in Reggio Calabria and you were one of those won it, and you won both singles. Is this the biggest for Finland ever?

CAPTAIN JARKKO NIEMINEN: So now we have so many big wins, it's tough to say what is -- obviously this is the biggest stage Finland we have ever been, yes. So in that sense, yes, it is the biggest by far.

But yeah, as a player, that was one of the biggest wins at that time and for that team as well. I still, yeah, it's very easy to remember the whole week there in Italy.

But yeah, obviously biggest stage, biggest win. Yeah, still chance to win more.

Q. Jarkko, could you give us an update on Emil, please? How close was he to playing today? Is there a chance he plays on Friday?

CAPTAIN JARKKO NIEMINEN: There is a chance. I'm not a physio or doctor, so I don't really want to go to, like, what kind of diagnosis he has in the shoulder.

But yeah, really tried. Emil hit in the morning. Really tried until the end, and it was just not realistic for today.

I can't say, as I said, I'm not a physio or doctor. I don't know what two more days does for the shoulder, but obviously we hope for the good.

Q. Jarkko, two things I want to ask you. Every player believes they can win and they want to win. But did you expect to win? The second part is if the team keeps on going, will there be any chance that the players from the past from Finland like Olli Rahnasto, Aki Rahunen, and Veli Paloheimo might come in and come in for support?

CAPTAIN JARKKO NIEMINEN: Yeah, it would be great, I'm sure. I know they support. I don't know if they were here. I try not to have -- we try not to have, like, too high expectations what comes to results.

We have the belief that we have high goals, but it doesn't help to, like, expect that everything always goes well. We expect that we have great team spirit. We expect that it's going to be a great atmosphere tonight. We always, yeah, just try to work hard.

Yeah, no, we obviously expect more great experiences on Friday.

Q. A question for either Otto or Harri. Have you played much doubles together before? Otto, did you just say to the captain, I want to come back out and play doubles after the singles?

OTTO VIRTANEN: We have such a good team that Jarkko always tells everybody be ready to play and everybody is ready to play. Absolutely, when everyone or anyone steps on court, he gives all out. Yeah, I'm ready any time that duty calls on Finland T-shirt.

Yeah, Harri can tell more about what we have.

HARRI HELIOVAARA: Yeah, for me, of course it's captain's decision who plays, but of course he listens to me there. We had a clear, like, thought in mind that if Otto is going to play a great singles match, there's a good chance he's going to play doubles as well.

I can tell a secret: We have never, ever practiced even one point together in doubles before today. And the first, yeah, first time we ever played was today (smiling). Yeah, we went through the signs, went through the tactics just like 15 minutes before the match.

But that's sometimes what works the best. Let it happen. No expectations. Just do your best. Be a good teammate. We did exactly that.

CAPTAIN JARKKO NIEMINEN: I think if there is a chance that a singles player might play or one of the players who plays singles might play doubles, then it's like it was today, really go a little bit or a lot with the flow.

Otto had a great flow in singles, performing great. Then it was, at least to me, was pretty clear that I ask how he feels mental and physically, and he answered immediately that, yeah, he's ready to decide the tie with Harri. As Otto said, everybody, we're ready to play doubles.

Q. Finnish sports, Finland had great sports, athletes. I mean, Formula 1 drivers, fantastic. Ice hockey, cross-country skiers and skiing. Where is tennis based as a sport in Finland? How many sports do you have ahead of tennis, if we start with skiing? Do you have an idea how popular tennis is in Finland and how many people, more or less, you know that they belong to the Finnish Federation, if you have any number almost?

CAPTAIN JARKKO NIEMINEN: Well, I know the sport is a little bit bigger tomorrow than yesterday after this. That's

good thing (smiling).

But yeah, it's many people play tennis. Not so many people compete. We don't have too many pro players, so it's a popular hobby sport, but it's not one of the traditional sports in Finland, as you mentioned a couple of those that we have had success throughout the years.

But yeah, now tennis is getting bigger and bigger. Even before our success, tennis was getting a little bit bigger. Now tennis is getting more attention. Davis Cup team is getting more attention. For sure more girls and boys will start playing when they have something to look after. Just that you're able to see more tennis on TV or in the newspapers helps, and you have idols like these guys.

Yeah, but it's still not one of the biggest sports but hopefully in the near future. I can't say any numbers. Sorry, I don't have those numbers. Somebody from the Federation has.

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