

Davis Cup Finals

Friday, 24 November 2023

Team Australia

Alexei Popyrin

Press Conference

A. POPYRIN/O. Virtanen

7-6, 6-2

Team Australia - 1

Team Finland - 0

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. Congrats for the win. If I heard you correctly, you said you were kind of rattled with the audience today, especially the away fans for you. That means the Finnish fans. What was it like starting the game, playing there in front of that audience?

ALEXEI POPYRIN: Yeah, I think the majority of the fans were Finnish, apart from our little corner that we had behind the bench. You could hear that during the anthem. Most of the stadium was singing along, and that kind of gave you the chills.

It's nerves that I have never experienced before in my life, the nerves playing the first tie, the first rubber of a Davis Cup, winning my first live rubber of a Davis Cup. I just had to keep my head steady and just really focus on my serve and try to capitalize on opportunities when they came.

Q. It's interesting to hear you talk about the nerves and staying steady, but could you explain how you do that.

ALEXEI POPYRIN: (Smiling.) It's something that I have been working on a lot, this year especially, working on my, like, calming myself during tense moments, during times I'm nervous, realizing when I'm nervous and accepting that I'm nervous, and really trying to just tell myself, trick myself into just staying calm and just focus on what I have to do point by point, technical-wise, and when I'm serving.

It really worked. It really helped me out today. It just goes to show that the work that I have been doing throughout the whole year paid off at the end of the year, basically.



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Q. Going back to what you just said about the moment with the anthem and all that, so having gone through all that now, what did it actually feel like being in the midst of the match and then when it was finally over?

ALEXEI POPYRIN: Relief after it was over (smiling). You know, I think to get, like I said, to get my first live rubber win, it's something special and something that I'll never forget.

And it was extremely difficult. He's a really good player. He's a player you don't expect much, don't expect him to just give you the points. He serves big and plays really aggressive. When he's on, he can beat anybody.

I think he showed that in the first set on his serve. He was really aggressive, played really well. But to just get through it was really good.

Q. We may have no chance to talk to you later, so we don't know of course if Australia is going to win and who will win between Italy and Serbia later. But let's say that Australia wins. You have to play either Kecmanovic probably, in Serbia, and either Sonogo or Arnaldi. Can you tell us, the three of them, what do you know about those three guys so that we can keep your answers for tomorrow just in case?

ALEXEI POPYRIN: You want me to give you a scouting report on all of them? (Laughter.)

Q. You may have played against them, or you may know them. Kecmanovic, Sonogo, Arnaldi. Just give me an idea.

THE MODERATOR: Sorry, please.

Q. You played a hot match the springtime in Rome against Holger Rune. Some tricks with Rune. But Otto Virtanen is also Nordic country player. He didn't do that kind of tricks like Rune, or what do you think about it? A little bit different guy.

ALEXEI POPYRIN: They are extremely different. One guy is big and plays big. The other guy is one of the fittest and



fastest players on tour. They're extremely different, and Holger is a top-10 player, top-5 player.

Virtanen, I don't if he's cracked the top 100. He's got potential to, but at the moment, Holger is on a different level. And I came really close to beating Holger in Rome.

Yeah, that's it.

Q. I just wanted to know what your first reaction was when you received the news that you were going to play your first live rubber. What was the first thing that came to your mind?

ALEXEI POPYRIN: I had some butterflies at first (smiling). Then it's all, we got to work. We scout our player. I've played him before. I knew what to expect, and it was just something that I just go out and I had to perform for my country. And I did that.

Yeah, at first a little bit of nerves, but after that, the day before I got told, it was all we got to work and really cracked down on what I had to do, and I went out and I performed the way I was supposed to.

Q. There has been some talk that the Davis Cup nowadays isn't the same as it maybe was in its glory days. You really had a breakthrough year. You have two ATP Championships under your belt. But immediately after this game, you said this was the biggest match of your career. Can you tell us a bit about the meaning of the Davis Cup and this win for you?

ALEXEI POPYRIN: No matter what format you play, you're playing for your country. At the end of the day, it's everybody's dream to play for their country and to represent.

For me, it's to represent the green and gold. I was born there, I was raised there. All my first coaches were Australian. I looked up to Lleyton, looked up to all the older Aussie legends.

To be able to put on the green and gold, to be able to go out there and play for your country, no matter the format, if it's this Davis Cup or the old Davis Cup, you give your all. It's nerves, it's pressure, you're playing for everybody back home. It's something that nothing will ever compare to.

Winning a 250, it won't compare to it at all. So for me it really was the biggest moment of my career to get the first live rubber win, to get one foot into the final. Yeah, for me, it was something that I'll never forget.

Q. Following up on that, have you been a bit frustrated or disappointed in the past not to have played more Davis Cup, and how much of a priority has it been for you to make sure you were part of these squads?

ALEXEI POPYRIN: For me, I always put my name up. I'm always ready to play. And we believe in our captain. He goes out, he makes the decisions. I just have to be ready when my name is called.

And today I was. We'll see what the future holds, but honestly, all the boys that are in the locker room, all the boys that are in the team, we've got eight or nine players inside the top 100 who are capable of playing for Australia. Each and every one of them can go out and do the job.

For me to be able to go out and do it today, I'm personally very proud of it, and we'll see what the future holds.

Q. You spoke a bit about the nerves aspect. Firstly, Lleyton Hewitt would have experienced that in his time, so what was he saying to you to try and calm you down? Also, when you faced the set point in the first set, what were you working on? What were you telling yourself at that stage?

ALEXEI POPYRIN: Just the basics, what I always tell myself. You know, just focus on my serve, focus on the technique. When it's my serve, it's my ball. The ball's in my court, so I have to go out and do what I do on the practice court when I'm serving.

I did that. I was able to really put pressure on him on my second serve. I think he missed the return. I mixed it up a little bit. I went to his forehand on that point.

To take a little bit of risk is important, but yeah, I was just doing what I practiced and I believe in myself. I'm capable of it. Lleyton believes in me also. That's why he named me, so...

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