

Davis Cup Finals

Thursday, 21 November 2024

Team Australia

Thanasi Kokkinakis

Press Conference

T. KOKKINAKIS/B. Shelton

6-1, 4-6, 7-6

Team USA - 0

Team Australia - 1

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. Congrats. Given that you were hurt this time last year, can you put into context what this one means to you?

THANASI KOKKINAKIS: Yeah, it's massive. Massive for me, for the team. I played two years ago when we made the final, but I wasn't ready. I had a sinus surgery sort of a few weeks before that.

So this is the first time I feel like I have been able to be healthy and at least give the team a chance and put my best foot forward. Yeah, super happy to get that. Happy that Lleyton had faith in me again to put me in.

We have a very strong team. Any one of us could have played. Yeah, just tried to find a way. It was a grind out there, but yeah, super happy.

Q. Congratulations. Continuing with this, if you can reflect a little bit more about all you went through throughout your career, starting very young, suffering shoulder, your knee, illness, and now celebrating this way, representing your country, does it feel more special?

THANASI KOKKINAKIS: Definitely, definitely. Atmosphere is incredible. I think it's been pretty well documented sort of the troubles I have had throughout my career. I'm 28 now, but I feel like I've seen a lot. I came onto the scene young. I still feel like there is a lot of good tennis in me left. I feel like I can cause an upset and play big matches and have big wins, as I have shown this year.

So for me it's just about trying to be consistent and playing



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more events. I've always struggled with that. But it's, yeah, it's massive. Doing it for the country always seems to bring out a different sort of intensity and effort. Obviously it doesn't guarantee wins, but I know I'm going to give it my all and play with a lot more energy than I'm used to.

Q. Just talk through that tiebreak and the tension and the nerves and the emotion, eventually getting through it.

THANASI KOKKINAKIS: Yeah, I sort of didn't feel that nervous up until sort of 6-5 a little bit. That's probably the only sort of nerve-racking point I think I played.

Just kind of changed my mind on that one, but it was tough. Obviously started the tiebreak well, had two match points to pull away, and then he hit some great serves. It was kind of tit for tat, but it was who could blink first. Thankful I stayed the course and was able to win. I kept looking at the score ticking over, and I couldn't believe how long the tiebreak was going.

But if I felt like I had a missed opportunity, I probably would have been more down on myself, but he was serving some great serves when I went down. There wasn't a lot I could do.

Q. I think you've won every singles you've played in Davis Cup this year, I think your third one. Does it feel different when you're playing for the team as opposed to elsewhere? What do you attribute that success to?

THANASI KOKKINAKIS: My game is all how much intensity and effort and want I have. If I have all those three things, I feel like I have a chance to win a lot of good matches.

That's something I have struggled with in my career a little bit. But seeing the boys on the sidelines, seeing Lleyton, obviously an idol growing up, getting super fired up and in my ear keeping me going motivated, I think it's massive.

Yeah, for me, he's probably, I'd say, the best coach in the world for me. He kind of always tries to get the most out of



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myself, and he brings a sort of level and intensity and effort from me that I find it hard to replicate anywhere else.

For him, it's great playing for him, and as a captain, when someone like that tells you something, it's not too often you can say anything back because he's been there and done it all.

Q. Talking about the captain, you said Australia was a very strong team. Why did Lleyton choose you to play against Ben? You have very similar game styles. Was it for that reason or any other reason?

THANASI KOKKINAKIS: We didn't think Ben was going to play. We were under the assumption that Tommy was going to play. I hadn't seen Ben the last two days. I saw Tommy earlier at breakfast, so I thought he was maybe going to play. Warmed up with Taylor earlier. It was a surprise to me.

But, yeah, I have been practicing well. I'm not sure, you'd have to ask Lleyton, but for me I felt like I was hitting the ball really well in practice. I obviously played great in Valencia to help the team. So maybe he had faith in me, and I think he believes I'm better than my ranking, so that's probably why.

But as I said before, we have a very strong team. Everyone is capable. I had a lot of confidence anyone could have gone in there and put their best foot forward.

Q. When you were told that you had to play, was the night just the night before, and were you surprised, in a way, knowing that Popyrin had done great results this year, and also Thompson? And is this the most emotional match you have ever played? Do you remember any other?

THANASI KOKKINAKIS: I have had a few. I have had a lot of emotional matches. Some for good; some for bad. But to win a match like that for Australia is huge in the Finals.

Was I surprised? Not really, but I did think that everyone could do really well. I knew how I was practicing in the week, so I thought I had a good chance of playing. You're never sure. I saw reasons for me to play, reasons for Thompson to play, reasons for Popyrin to play. Popyrin's had a great year. Thompson's at career high, as well.

Purely by ranking and some of the wins they have had this year, you could make a case for any of them to play. For me, I know what I can do when I'm locked in and playing well, I thought I was practicing really well all week. Obviously I think Valencia gave them confidence, playing

well in the qualifying stages and having two good wins. Maybe they believed in me there. A lot of times they believe in me more than I do myself.

Yeah, they had faith in me, so was I surprised? I wouldn't say I was surprised, but I did see -- I saw reasons for everyone to play, so I wasn't going to be too disheartened if I didn't get picked.

Q. Congratulations. Just wanted to ask a bit about the matchup with Shelton. You said you weren't expecting really to face him, but when you started, it seemed like you were reading his serve really well in that first set and you were just on it. Can you talk about what it's like to face that serve and maybe how that evolved through the match when it seems like he did start to really hit his spots as it went on?

THANASI KOKKINAKIS: Yeah, I thought obviously apart from the first game that he held, I won six great games. So I was kind of on fire, returning, and I served really well and I was kind of on it.

I knew he would start to play better and find his rhythm a little bit more in the second set. I thought I was very unlucky to get broken first game of the second set. I thought I was probably the better player in the second set, as well. It was just the start that was unlucky.

And then third set was tit for tat. It was tough. He started serving really well, mixing it up. It's coming from not that high, but it's just he is so strong and has a lot of movement on the serve. He can go massive out wide or move it into the body. It's tough. He keeps you guessing.

I felt like every time I'd start to get a bit of rhythm on the return, he'd start to come up with a really good serve in that third set.

I mean, I have a good serve but he has a lot of variety on his, which made it tough. It was a little bit of a serving contest at times and just who could keep their nerve. Yeah, it's definitely a tricky serve, and that's why he's ranked where he is.

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