

Davis Cup Finals

Sunday, 24 November 2024

David Haggerty

Mark Woodforde

Feliciano Lopez

Alex Hughes

ITF Press Conference

CHRIS SMITH: Afternoon, everyone. Thanks very much for coming.

Just going to kick off with a few thoughts from Dave on the week and how things have gone. Then we'll go down the line and have opening remarks from everyone and then open up the floor for questions.

Dave, over to you.

DAVID HAGGERTY: Great, thank you. Thank you for being here. It's been an incredible week of tennis. I think you have all had a chance to see a great atmosphere in the crowds. The fans, we have set some new records again this year.

For us, it was special to have both the Billie Jean King Cup and the Davis Cup at one point, 20 teams on site. Quite a few of new firsts that have happened.

When I look at Davis Cup, we again had fantastic attendance. We had 65,000 fans over the week, which last year we had 60,000, so a great increase.

I think one of the most important things that we saw was that 43% of the fans that were here in the stadium traveled internationally, came from the countries that were participating in the competition, which is a significant increase. I think it shows that year on year people have really enjoyed being here in Malaga, and it's built strength to strength.

It was a record year for the number of teams that we had playing in Davis Cup, as well as Billie Jean King Cup. So we have continued to increase. I think we had 159 teams this year competing in the competition and more than 800 players on the men's and women's sides competing in the competition.



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That's really been the strategy of Davis Cup and Billie Jean King Cup. They are the World Cup of Tennis. We want to grow the sport. We want to take tennis to every nation and having that many nations participate maybe at lower levels but having the chance to participate in the World Cup of Tennis.

With that, maybe I'll turn it over to Alex to add a few more things.

ALEX HUGHES: Not much to add, to be honest. I look after the operations for Davis Cup and Billie Jean King Cup. I think from our side, operational side of view, we couldn't be happier with how things have gone the last couple of weeks. It's been a tremendous success.

So, yeah, from that side, I think, again, don't want to bore you with statistics, but if we look across our social media channels, our broadcasts, look at our sponsorship, everything is increasing, everything is improving.

Yeah, just as an overview of the event as a whole and the Finals concept, very pleased.

CHRIS SMITH: Mark and Feli, if you want to jump in from a player perspective of what you have seen on court this week? Mark?

MARK WOODFORDE: Well, again, the excitement from day one, the event, we have had global representation, and then the excitement that that really began on day one with the matchup between Spain and The Netherlands and obviously Rafa's retirement.

But it's the excitement and the atmosphere that is there every day. We take a look at the crowds, and they're there. They're watching this level of tennis that is exceptional. You know, for me, it's trying to see Davis Cup with consistency, and, you know, I think we're just building, you know, year after year, some very good momentum moving forward with the quality of teams and the players themselves.

FELICIANO LOPEZ: Yeah, of course, the representation that we had this year is amazing. Every nation came, you



know, with the strongest team that they have. We have seen some of the best players in the world competing, representing their countries. That's, you know, the ultimate goal when you play Davis Cup.

I like to say something, you know, I think we all have to thank you, Malaga, and the region, because they made such a tremendous effort. You know, we had some flooding here on Wednesday last week, and the work has been done. It's been amazing, you know, for having everything ready for the players.

So it's been three years, cooperating with Malaga and with the region of Andalucia, and this year I think we owe a special thank you to them.

CHRIS SMITH: Thank you, guys. We will open the floor for questions.

Q. I would like to know, from a president if it's possible, how is possible that the president of ATP, Gaudenzi, a few days ago, said that he would like to come back to the best-of-five in Masters Series finals, because for him, the most important tradition says that the most beautiful matches in tennis are in five sets. You, in Davis Cup, you still play best-of-three. Second question is the new format do you think is a step with another format with the final solution?

DAVID HAGGERTY: Well, thank you for those questions. I'd suggest you ask Andrea his view, because he made the comment. I'll happy to speak for Davis Cup.

I think we have spoken to players and captains. That's why we're the best-of-three sets. We think it makes sense. Especially in the Finals when you're playing matches sometimes, Italy will play today, they played yesterday. So that's why we think the best-of-three sets is fine.

I have not been, and I don't think anybody here can tell me a match that wasn't compelling either in Billie Jean King Cup or Davis Cup, and we had one best-of-three match it was almost four hours. I think from a fan perspective, we want to make sure they have an enjoyable experience and for the players and for their health, as well.

I think that's how I would respond to that. As far as our format, we are very pleased with the Final 8. I think this year demonstrates and builds on the strength of last year and the year before. We think it's very compelling to have the eight teams in the Finals, the camaraderie that the teams have, the atmosphere, the locker room setup that we have is phenomenal.

When it comes to, you know, looking at what else we could

do, we did listen to the players, we did listen to the nations.

One of the things we have always wanted to do is balance the tradition of Davis Cup with some innovation of the Final 8. So as you know, next year the September round, which has been four group stages, will become home-and-away stages. That will give the nations the team to celebrate their stars and whoever they get drawn against coming to their nation, or for those nations that have to travel, so it really gives us what we feel is the best balance of the competition.

Q. You said, Mr. Haggerty, that you will grow the competition. Can you please make an announcement where you take it from here? Where is it going to be next year? Will you repeat the format that the Billie Jean King Cup and the Davis Cup will be played together?

DAVID HAGGERTY: Thank you for the question.

So this year, we really, as Feliciano said, we are really pleased with Malaga helping us, because our plans had been to have the Billie Jean King Cup in Seville. Because of situations, we weren't able to do that, and with less than six months we were able to work with Andalucia and Malaga to relocate the Billie Jean King Cup.

So we essentially picked up what was going to be in Seville, and we moved it here. So it was a great chance for us to see, for the first time, the World Cup of Tennis together and what would be the highlights, what would be great about it, and also what are the operational challenges, if any.

So I think we are still, between our two teams, looking at what that could be in the future. For both competitions, we have a number of bids that we are working through in the final stages, and we will announce where we will be next year. I say not a problem, because we have a couple of great, two, three great offers on both sides of what we can do.

But I think we wanted to also be able to understand what happens when we have them together before we make any decisions. But again, in due course we will be announcing both hosts, whether it's the same or where we go with Davis Cup and Billie Jean King Cup. Thank you.

Q. David, why did you change the date of the draw? It's going to be today, but you change December 2nd. I don't know if it's with a site or something like that?

DAVID HAGGERTY: Sure. So as you probably know, the draw varies when we have it. So we have chosen to have it on the 2nd of December. You know, no worry about that.



We will announce, because we know that the nations need time in order to plan their first ties.

So we will have it on the 2nd of December. We'll make the announcement at that point and know who's playing and where they're playing.

Q. I know that fitting in the calendar for Davis Cup it's never easy, but I'd like to know how can you manage to have always the best players? You have slams, ATP Masters 1000 mandatory, so they protect their best events, so I think ITF as well should protect the best events there. If I think Billie Jean King Cup this year maybe Czech Republic maybe didn't have the best players, some are missing from Davis Cup. I'd like to know if you think what you can try to do to always have the best players, I know it's not easy, and if maybe you can link it to the Olympics, I don't know, I don't say announce the player, but to guarantee to yourself to have always the best, because it should be your goal, I think.

DAVID HAGGERTY: Thank you for the question. I'm happy to start.

So the calendar is a challenge, right? Because you have many stakeholders with various views of what it should be. Our most important view in our perspective is player health and welfare and player flow. So we want to have the calendar be the best that it can be for the players.

One of the ways we are able to do that is to provide certainty. They know when our Davis Cup weeks are. They know when the Billie Jean King Cup weeks are. They can plan that into the calendar for the next year.

There are lots of conversations going on between the seven stakeholders about the calendar, different changes. This year the Masters events went to 12 days. Lots of different changes.

I think we, together with the other stakeholders, will continue to look at ways that make sure that the key events like Davis Cup and Billie Jean King Cup are appropriate within the calendar.

MARK WOODFORDE: I think we, Feliciano and I, could probably jump in there and just say as past players that have competed religiously for your country that it is an honor. It's not necessarily about -- you know, you start the year off, you map your calendar out. You know, there are many players that will put an asterisk to representing their country.

It's not necessarily about ranking. It's not necessarily

about prize money, but it's the honor of representing your country. Don't forget that most of the year, individuals are playing for themselves. But this is an opportunity to play for your country and see those colors, whether it's wearing a team uniform, and that's what I think we're trying to continue with and build.

Yes, there are some other events, it's not that they are distractions, but other events that players have options with, but we hope that, you know, that the marquee players and even some of the lower-ranked players will continue to yearn to represent their country.

Q. Could we, like, finalize a kind of problem on this side? In the past, I knew that if I'm a player, even I'm No. 2 in the world, maybe I will have a chance to play two, three, four final in my career of Davis Cup or Billie Jean King. Now I know if I'm No. 3, every year of my career if I play in September, probably I will qualify my team for the Final 8, so I could really say this year yes, this year no. For example, I'm Italian. Our feeling is Jannik Sinner is winner this year, we hope, the second Davis Cup. Next year, maybe after another tough season, another 80 matches, you could say, you know what, I don't feel like playing the Davis Cup. So it's not a criticize. It's just my curiosity. I think, I hope that we will have every year the best players in Davis Cup.

FELICIANO LOPEZ: It's a good point, but I think Jannik Sinner is the proof of how much he's willing to represent his country. He came here last year. He won Davis Cup after, you might know better than me, 40 years, 40 to 50, 47 years since Italy, they haven't won Davis Cup.

He won it, and he's back in Malaga again after such a long and tough season. This is the proof of how much it means for the players to play Davis Cup.

No matter how many changes we will make in the future, it's up to the players and their will to represent their country. I think he made it very clear. It's up to the players. We try to accommodate Davis Cup and Billie Jean King Cup to the calendar, and we have been making a lot of changes. We have been, you know, listening to the players.

We have their feedback. So that's why we are going back to the home-and-away format in 2025, so we give the players the opportunity to play at their countries twice a year. But the main point here is that it will be always up to them to play, so no matter how many changes we will make.

ALEX HUGHES: I think I will add one other point I think is relevant. We have been very lucky this year. Having the



Olympic Games in Roland Garros and the Paralympic Games there, and now obviously the Finals here in Malaga, I'm looking back and I'm thinking we had Andy Murray retiring at the Olympics and obviously Rafa Nadal retiring here.

I think right there you have two legends of the game, two of the best that's ever played the game. I don't think it's any coincidence that they have chosen to retire in these events, in a team environment.

So as Mark said, as tennis players, they are very fortunate, we live in a landscape where they are very well remunerated financially. When they come to reflect on their career and look back on what they have achieved in the game, where do they choose to retire? They have chosen to retire in a team environment surrounded by their colleagues and representing their country. I think that's significant.

Q. For Mr. Haggerty, ITF is thinking about to move the last date of the Davis Cup Final to another continent or country, like China, as an example, and it depends of what money, calendar, or what?

DAVID HAGGERTY: Thank you. The ITF's responsibility is global. We are responsible for 213 nations developing tennis around the world. For instance, this year in September in the group stage was the first time that we hosted the Finals in group stage in China to take tennis to a continent that's important in a country that's important.

What drives it, the decision-making, will be a number of factors, but the most important factor is making sure that there is great visibility for the competition, that we continue to grow strength to strength. So it's not about money. I mean, that's an important element, but it's not the driving element. The driving element is how do we continue to build the Davis Cup and the Billie Jean King Cup. That's what drives our decision.

Q. Good afternoon. A question for Feliciano. There were a lot of comments about the farewell ceremony for Rafael Nadal. Were you a bit caught by surprise that Spain exited so early the tournament? Was the ceremony initially planned for Tuesday, or did you have another day in mind initially?

FELICIANO LOPEZ: Well, I'll try to be very honest with you. I think we should focus, all of us, in the fact that Rafa chose Davis Cup, you know, to be the final tournament of his career instead of keep talking about his farewell ceremony.

Honestly, we did our best. So I think we should put the

focus more on the fact that he chose, you know, Davis Cup as his final tournament.

DAVID HAGGERTY: Maybe just to add to that, Rafa is an amazing player and has a legacy of tennis that he will leave behind, inspiring millions of players around the world to play tennis, to continue to play. We felt it was very important to listen to what Rafa wanted and how he wanted to be celebrated.

That's exactly what we did. We took his lead, and we delivered on that. People can have whatever opinions they want of whether it was right or not, but to me, the most important thing was we delivered a ceremony that was what Rafa wanted, and being who he is, was a great evening, and it was much appreciated.

Q. I would like to touch on another subject, and that is the contract with Kosmos, which ended obviously last year. I would like to know if you could probably give us some information how the case with the Court of Arbitration for Sport is standing and when you expect any sort of resolution from there? Or has it already been reached and not been publicized? I don't know.

DAVID HAGGERTY: Thank you for the question. Not able to really comment at this point in time on that.

Q. Two very short questions. First of all, when do you think that the ITF, WTA, ATP, and managers and sponsors will sit once in a while all together at the same table to solve a big difference between all the circuits they have? Different five-setters, different everything. You know what I mean? Second question is is it true, there are rumors that the Pique organization is suing the International Federation for \$50 million? Is it true or not?

DAVID HAGGERTY: So let me start with the second first. I can't comment on that, on Pique. What I can comment on is your first point, which is the tennis stakeholders working together, having conversations about all the important things that matter to tennis, whether it's, you know, the format of best-of-three, best-of-five. You know, some of the stakeholders have their own views on what it should be and to make their events different.

But we do sit as a group. We don't sit enough, to be quite honest, and that's something that I can assure you that the ITF welcomes and we are proactive in engaging with the other stakeholders in tennis, because tennis coming together is much stronger than having everyone doing different things.

CHRIS SMITH: Thank you very much. We have to wrap it

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

up there. Thank you very much for coming, everyone.
Thanks, guys, for your time.

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