

Billie Jean King Cup

Tuesday, 12 April 2022

Team USA

Captain Kathy Rinaldi

Jessica Pegula

Shelby Rogers

Press Conference

BILLIE JEAN KING CUP

BY  BNP PARIBAS

by Billie Jean?

JESSICA PEGULA: I think it's always an inspiring event to play. We were talking yesterday. We feel like it's always an honor obviously to play with your country.

I didn't play in Asheville last time, but I'm super excited to be here. I know they got quite a bit of crowd from last time. That's really exciting to know.

Also Kathy was telling me some of the junior players come in and get a chance to be part of it, which I think is very inspiring. I remember last time I played when it was Fed Cup, there were girls that are playing on tour now that were there as young girls watching us play, really excited to meet us.

I think it's always great to inspire the next generation and keep that going because it's such an honor to play.

SHELBY ROGERS: Last time I was here in Asheville I was actually spectating, here supporting the team. I was still injured. I'm kind of drawing from some of those feelings.

Like Jess said, we take a lot of inspiration from other American players. It's been a dream of mine, and a lot of others, too, to play for your country.

It's an amazing feeling to be here playing for Team USA. That's from since I was a little girl. It's really cool to be in a position where we can inspire other players. I think being able to meet later with Billie Jean King, get some inspiration from her and continue that, is really special.

CAPTAIN RINALDI: The impact that these players have on the next generation is quite remarkable. They probably don't even realize what it means. When we bring our junior Billie Jean King Cup teams in for them to be able to spend time and to be able to speak with these players, it gives them a sense of belief in themselves, it gives them a sense of belonging. These girls are absolutely incredible with the young players. That's how we grow the sport.

To be here in Asheville and to have a tie like this in a community like Asheville is really inspiring, just impacts

THE MODERATOR: Thank everybody for coming. As you can see here, we have a few members of the U.S. Billie Jean King Cup team, Captain Rinaldi, Jessica Pegula and Shelby Rogers.

Questions.

Q. Welcome to Asheville. Just wondering, have any of y'all talked to members of the Ukrainian team? I know they're going through a pretty tough time with the war over there. Just wondering if you've communicated with them at all? What has that been like and what are their thoughts?

SHELBY ROGERS: We saw them obviously yesterday. We all came from kind of the same place in Charleston. They left at the same time as all of us.

I traveled with Des. I think we all seem pretty excited to come here and play. We're excited to put on a good show for everyone. I know they're going to have a lot of fans here as well, which is really exciting. I think it's going to be a fun weekend.

CAPTAIN RINALDI: I also spoke with Olga Savchuk, the other captain, last night. Saw some of the players. Really want to make sure they feel supported and welcome.

We're excited they're here with us in Asheville. We're excited to be back in Asheville. Looking forward to speaking with more of the players. I saw some of the players in the gym and in the lobby. We have dinner tonight all together. We're really looking forward to it.

Q. More of a broad question about the competition. This is the first tie for this competition on U.S. soil since it was renamed in honor of Billie Jean King. Jess and Shelby, what do you think having this competition here can do to inspire the next generation of players as you yourselves might have been inspired

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everybody at the grassroots. That's what it's all about.

Q. Kathy, there have been a few roster changes since the original announcement. What is your assessment of the team?

CAPTAIN RINALDI: I love my team. I tell you what, it's absolutely incredible. Jessica is coming off a couple of phenomenal years. She's had her highest ranking. Shelby has been on the team as well. They're both playing incredible tennis.

Ali Riske brings so much to our team. Then we have two rookies. It's always exciting for a captain to have rookies because they're super excited to be here, great team players.

The camaraderie has already been incredible. I couldn't be more proud to be captain of this team with these five remarkable young ladies.

Q. Kathy, what do you remember from your previous times in Asheville? Shelby, you've said you've been here too.

CAPTAIN RINALDI: Incredible memories. The crowd really stands out. We're sold out. We're really truly hoping with this unique tie that the support will be there. I know that Ukraine will also have some support.

Just how we feel welcomed. The hospitality is incredible. We love Asheville. It's such a great city. The restaurants, the shops, but especially the people. We're just so happy and proud to be back here. So thanks for having us again.

SHELBY ROGERS: The atmosphere last time was great. I just remember sitting there cheering with all my American flags, obviously wishing I could have played, but happy to be here to support the team at the time. It's nice that I can have a chance now to go out there and compete.

But it's such a special city. I mean, the first question that you asked, he said 'y'all'. That's amazing for me. So nice (laughter).

THE MODERATOR: Y'all have another question (laughter)?

Q. With switching surfaces, obviously in Charleston last week, then on hard court before that. I'm not sure if y'all have had a chance to play here yet. What is that like making the transition back to back weeks?

JESSICA PEGULA: It's always a tough transition from clay to hard, hard to clay. We all knew that going in. This

surface, it's different. We haven't had a chance to hit on it yet. We're about to now.

We all play well on all surfaces as well. We were only on clay for like a week. It was green clay. Going into red clay after this, it's all different. It's never really going to be the same. Even when you're on a hard court week to week, it's always different. We're all used to it.

I don't think it's going to be a big deal. We can play the next three days to get ready, which I think is plenty. We're all in the same situation, too, which means there's not a lot of excuses when it comes to that. I think we'll be fine.

Q. For the players, on tour every week you're playing with your flag next to your name. How different does it feel when you are in a national team-type environment? How does that feel different?

SHELBY ROGERS: It's definitely a lot different. You have different pressures and nerves and goals. But it's really cool that you can all work together for this one goal and cheer each other on.

I think we all really enjoy if one person is playing, you're playing, whatever, just supporting each other. It's so much fun to come together and work towards that win at the same time, talk about strategies over whatever as a team. It's really special.

JESSICA PEGULA: I think it's totally different environment than what we're used to. Every week, pretty much the whole week, we're competing against each other whether we're from the same country or not. That can be stressful in a way. This is a nice break. It's pressure, but it's a different kind of pressure we all like because we never really get a chance to do that this much.

To me, I love it. I think it's so much fun to come together as a team. You connect in different ways, whether it's strategy, thinking about how they think about the match, versus how you think about the match. Having Kathy here, different coaches, not just your coaches. I think it's a very different atmosphere. But I enjoy the change for this week.

THE MODERATOR: Then I can get y'all to practice (laughter).

Q. It's a \$50,000 donation going to the Ukraine crisis. What does that say about the tennis community, reaching out to support what's happening over there?

CAPTAIN RINALDI: I think it's incredible. When we've gone through the pandemic, again, when you look at tennis, we're really a true family. We come together when

things are tough. We've always come together. I think it's quite incredible.

The USTA has definitely done a great job of the outreach as well. The ticket sales, every time someone buys a ticket, a portion of that goes to the Ukraine relief fund. We couldn't be more proud of that.

Like I said, we're a true family. At the end of the day, we come together. We're opponents on the court, but we're allies and friends off the court. We really do care for each other and we pull together when times get tough.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, everybody.

CAPTAIN RINALDI: Thank you.

SHELBY ROGERS: Thanks.

JESSICA PEGULA: Thanks.

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