

Billie Jean King Cup

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Billie Jean King

Press Conference

BILLIE JEAN KING CUP

BY  BNP PARIBAS

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Billie Jean.

BILLIE JEAN KING: Okay. A little bit of a whirlwind today. I'm sure for you, too (smiling).

Q. Obviously Team USA, Team Ukraine facing off today. A lot of people are thinking about Ukraine in wake of what happened. There's a lot of things that extend beyond tennis. What is your message to Team Ukraine? I'm sure you want this to be a great match, but what is your message?

BILLIE JEAN KING: First of all, I had the privilege of just meeting the teams, each one of them, in their locker rooms. I was able to talk to the Ukrainians. We talked about the future as well, how can we help, not just now.

The one thing, I didn't know if they knew, they might have, we will be probably over a million or at least at a million among different people. Obviously the tennis community has been unbelievable. The four majors, which obviously the US Open is a part of, has stepped up. Also the ITF, which is where I call it Fed Cup still, sorry, Billie Jean King Cup. How many shades am I turning (laughter)? That's ITF. Also the WTA, the Women's Tennis Association, and the Association of Tennis Players, which is the men, the ATP, they've all contributed. Iliana Kloss, my partner in life, and I contributed 50. The sponsor here, BNP, came up with 50.

We're about a million. Hopefully we'll be over a million. I know it's not a lot, but it's better than nothing. It's going to hopefully help them in some way.

The players told me in the locker room, I knew this before, but it's going to go to the Ukraine Crisis Relief Fund, which is run by the Global Giving people. That's who they've told us.

You know how you think: I want to give, but is it going to get to them? The players, the Ukrainians, Olga, the captain, said this is where it's supposed to go. They know it will get to people who need it.

Do you guys know Chef Andres? He's also there. Iliana

and I are going to give to him, as well, because we know him personally. We know the food will get to the people. That's the most important thing.

I think it's really tennis for peace really. Anything we can do to help in peace, help get behind people. It just shows you how the Ukraine president Zelenskyy, he's an amazing man. I don't know if any of you know, but he's a comic, as well. Used to have the highest rating comedy show, which I had no idea until I saw some clips.

He's amazing how united he kept people. He talks straight. He said we're united, like a fist. I think of sports, how we go yay when things go positive. I really appreciate his words.

I think anybody can get help from the way he speaks, the way President Zelenskyy speaks. I can't really believe it's happening. I feel so sorry for the players and everyone in Ukraine and others because immigration, taking families in. It's so cute, though, when you see at the schools where they have immigrants, where the kids come and hug them. I'm thinking if we could just think like that, it's so sweet.

I'm glad we can be a part of helping Ukraine and the people of Ukraine obviously. I don't know, I hope it will end soon, but I don't think it will.

Is there something else I could have answered? That's thinking out loud off the top of my head.

Q. 50th anniversary of Title IX. From your standpoint, I'm sure you hear a lot about still some inequities.

BILLIE JEAN KING: I could tell you one, for sure. High school. Girls in high school still don't have as many opportunities as boys did in 1972. That's a sweet one to get started in.

Three something behind in scholarships. Everyone thinks we're ahead or we're hurting the men's teams. It's not true. It's football that takes all the scholarships. If you have to be equal. Unfortunately, they're starting at a hundred less than the women because we don't have a football team.

Anyway, what else?

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

Q. I was going to ask you, how would you rate where things are 50 years in?

BILLIE JEAN KING: Oh, wow.

Q. How would you like to see, whether it's the NCAA or schools, adjusting the way they approach it, maybe adjustments in the law?

BILLIE JEAN KING: We've got challenges with the NIL - name, image and likeness - coming up. Hopefully a lot of companies are thinking about equality there when they give to the athletes.

I don't want to lose any sports over any of these. Then we have the transgender challenge, transgender athletes. We have to make sure they can play, but it's also not fair if they're winning everything. Not fair to the others. We keep trying to get more and more data. I talk to scientists all the time. Something that testosterone is enough, they shouldn't be allowed to, there's a big group on that. The other side think we have to do a lot more studying.

Let me say 'I want', I want every person to have a chance to play. How do we figure that out? That's the way I would approach everything. Just like we're trying to increase the wheelchair tennis, for instance, get more people in. The US Open is going to be doing that. They're going to have a much bigger draw. We need to do that.

The top eight, if they get so many points at the majors, they never leave. That's not right either. You need more competition with the wheelchair players, and Paralympians are big. They got equal prize money at the Olympics this year. Am I right? I think I am. Please tell me if I'm wrong because I love learning from you guys.

Title IX wasn't for sports anyway. Everybody thinks it's about sports. The reason for that is we're so visible. I think it's great. It shows we have a platform that people notice and we can help.

But it's an education amendment. Before 1972, let's say you're a woman that wanted to go to Harvard and get a medical degree, they only allowed 5% of the class to be women. They have classroom quotas and school quotas.

I knew people that couldn't go to Stanford. Sorry, we reached our quota. That just blew the doors open. A lot of schools went coed from being single gender because it's federal funding to private or public high schools, colleges or universities. When the schools realized that they didn't want to miss out on 50% of the money or all of it, a lot went to coed.

If you look back in the '70s, a lot of schools that were single gender went to coed because they wanted the money. Follow the money, you can start to figure things out.

Senator Birch Bayh, who I got to know, one of my heroes, the three women are my heroes as well, for Title IX. Patsy Mink, she's the mother of Title IX. Dr. Bernice Sandler was looking for employment under the government with Lyndon Johnson, found there is a loophole that could hurt women. She went to Edith Green, who was the congresswoman in Oregon and helped her come up with what Title IX should be. Those three women and Senator Birch Bayh are the reason we have Title IX. They're my heroes and hero.

Senator Birch Bayh, who I got to know, told me that in the 37 words that equal Title IX, there's the word 'activity.' They hesitated whether to leave that in or leave it out. They kept hemming and hawing. Because they left the word 'activity' in is the reason we have sports. If they had taken that word out, we would not be in this case.

What happened because of Title IX? The women in the '96 Olympics won everything because we had Title IX since '72, even though it's taken years and years and years. But it provided the coaching, the competition. That's the reason we can have a draft for the WNBA. It's a reason we can have the draft for the soccer. So Title IX changed the landscape of everything in this country because of that.

Also I think it's given women confidence. I think men who are fair-minded, they think it's great, especially if they have daughters. It's one of the all time things that ever happened in the 20th century for women. Probably third most important probably. We had the vote. The vote in 1920 was only for white women really. Let's just say it like it is. The civil rights bills that were passed in the mid '60s were absolutely amazing. Then '72 with Title IX was huge. Those to me, they're long-lasting, keep improving.

Q. This is the first tie for this competition on U.S. soil since it was named for you. Kathy Rinaldi and the Americans spoke this week about inspiring the next generation of players, how important it is to have events like this in this community, these communities, for grassroots tennis. What are your thoughts on that?

BILLIE JEAN KING: First of all, I was here in Asheville - what year was it - four or five years ago. Isn't this the third one? I don't know, I was here one of them. It was fantastic. Gladys Knight and I sat up there. My friend Kay Lovell (phonetic), who lives here. Got to sit with them. It was wonderful. Iliana was here.

Usually I find it's the stars like seeing the Ukraine versus United States of America play. First of all, you see people represent their country. There's something very special about it. There's nothing like it.

Usually they're the inspiration a lot of times, the motivators, to get people into our sport. We had four million new people during COVID. I hope we keep them. Tennis is the best sport for health. People who play tennis, the Mayo Clinic has just done a study, we live 9.7 years more than those that don't exercise. We are the number one sport.

The great thing about tennis is you use all of yourself, your lower body, upper body, and you have to use your brain a lot.

What they do, the U.S. team, is they get kids, especially from the U.S., anyplace in the world because you never know, they inspire you. When I was a little kid I looked up to the players. Of course, I love history. I used to know everybody. So they inspired me.

But the real true heroes and heroines are the people on the ground. Let's take Asheville, the greater area here. It's having access. It's having public parks. It's having coaching. Coaching is vital. Coaching is huge. Teaching. Even if you get the children organized, you're so important because sometimes you can't coach. If you get them organized, find a way to get them to the competition.

My brother, who played 12 years of professional baseball, can you imagine my family? My dad is a firefighter, my mom is a homemaker, then started working. They're working three jobs so we could play our sports. Randy and I were getting everything free. We had free coaching, we had the public parks in Long Beach. Yet it was so stressful.

Can you imagine parents have got one child that's got to get to tennis, and the other child has to get to baseball? My brother and I say how brilliant my mother is. The burden was more on her than my dad. My dad would take us, too, when he could.

The point is it takes a village. We had the Long Beach tennis patrons for me. That changed everything. They helped pay for entry fees I couldn't afford, even though it was \$2. I remember my parents saying, You can't play that tournament, we can't pay the entry fee. The Long Beach tennis patrons said, We'll pay for it. Then you want to go back east where all the tournaments were in the old days.

These are the things. The local communities are everything. The schools, the communities, the people, it is unsung heroes and heroines. Those are the real ones.

I had Clyde Walker, my first coach. I talked to him every day. He died when I was 17. I wish he could have been with me throughout my career. These are the things that really matter. Relationships are everything. Relationships are everything.

So anyway, did I answer the question? I don't even know.

Anyway, you guys do one little word and I'm off and running.

Like, okay, Asheville, the local people. It's so important. The way you respond to the Billie Jean King Cup is amazing. When I was here last time, I thought, Wow, we should have all of them here. You guys show up. Show up and speak up. You guys show up. Showing up is really important.

I can't thank the community enough and the other communities that participate because without you, it wouldn't be successful.

Believe me, during COVID with no people in the stands, I think people finally woke up. To me, when I played, the audience was everything. The people that are physically there and the people that are watching on TV in those days, now it's all kinds of ways they watch, streaming and everything. Every time I played, whether there was one person in the stands or it was packed, I always thought, I got to bring it for them. I'm a professional athlete, an entertainer, I'm not just playing down the street.

I think it's a responsibility. I don't think most tennis players think that anymore. I don't know what they think. Have you asked them? I think it's a very important question. But they acted like they want to take tennis to the people. But you got Kathy Rinaldi who is great. She gets it. But she's also from the old school.

Those are the coaches that are going to help teach the players today to carry the torch forward and care about others. This is about all of us, not just me, me, me.

What happens usually in all sports, I remember telling Julie Foudy this, the soccer captain back in the '90s, '99 when they had over 90,000 people in the Rose Bowl. She and I would talk because she wanted to leverage, get more of what they wanted.

I said Julie, The first two generations of every sport, they say 'we'. By the third generation it's usually 'I'. 10 years passed, 15 years, I go, Julie, remember that little discuss we had?

Yeah, Kinger, I remember.

I said, What do you think?

She says, You're right.

Amazing how it shifts by that third generation.

Chris and Martina were our second generation. Amazing. We were so lucky to have them in our sport. The best rivalry ever. 80 matches they played against each other. It was almost even.

We mentored them like crazy. They helped tennis so much. And they played Fed Cup.

Q. Wanted to see what your thoughts were. You've seen the news with Ukraine, follow the story, see what's going on. How much does it mean to be here for this?

BILLIE JEAN KING: That's the reason I am here actually.

Q. What is your sense of how tennis and sport can make an impact?

BILLIE JEAN KING: You can always make an impact. I told the story, the epiphany I had. When I was 12 I was daydreaming. I thought everybody in tennis wore white shoes, white clothes, white balls. I asked myself, Where is everybody else? I made a promise to myself I'd fight for equality from that moment on.

I think that's what we're trying to do. I talked to the players in the locker room. They were asking me questions. The juniors, we had the juniors for Billie Jean King Cup from the U.S. about these things.

But sports can be so powerful if we use it properly. You can also use it in a negative way. If we can stay positive and help others, promote peace and promote the good things in life.

But we also have to act a certain way on the court. I must say I wasn't one of the best ones on that one. No, but I think we have some serious challenges right now in our behavior.

I think we need to think, What can we do for the people of Ukraine? What can we do for the rest of the world? Right now obviously the focus is on them, and it should be.

Talking to them in the locker room, we were just trying to figure out how we can continue to help them even after this Billie Jean King Cup. So we're going to exchange

information. It's about relationships, again. You have all these relationships, then you start exchanging addresses, then things start to get better.

It can be very influential. I think with Asheville doing this for the third time, it can become more influential, especially in the area. I think the people here have been so wonderful and so supportive.

The players feel it. They were telling me in the locker room. They know it. They feel it. They appreciate everybody here and how much they've supported it.

Also raising over a million dollars to give to the Ukrainians. They call it the relief fund. It's the Ukraine Crisis Relief Fund, and Global Giving are the people managing it. They're the ones who told us I think what to do, right?

We heard it from them, which is important. Haven't you always wanted to give money to things, you go, Is it really going to get to the people? At least we know here it will. That makes me feel the best actually, that it's going to the right place. And we'll continue after.

Sorry, I interrupted.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, everybody.

BILLIE JEAN KING: Anyway, I hope it's a great match. Thanks for being here. I always appreciate the media and the photographers and everybody because in the old days we didn't have social media, so I want to thank each and every one of you because I know that your story is not told, so thank you.

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