

Billie Jean King Cup

Friday, 15 April 2022

Team USA

Captain Kathy Rinaldi

Jessica Pegula

Press Conference

J. PEGULA/K. Zavatska

6-2, 6-1

USA - 2

Ukraine - 0

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. First win for Team USA on your end. Talk us through the emotions, how you felt out there.

JESSICA PEGULA: Well, obviously after watching Ali's match, it was very nerve-wracking. Was a long match with a lot of ups and downs throughout the whole thing. That was a lot. I just had to refocus on my match, what I had to do out there.

Yeah, I was seeing the ball well. I felt really good out there. I mean, there wasn't much to it. I think I was just trying to play my game and trying to be aggressive as much as I could, not lose focus throughout the entire match.

A little nerve-wracking being my first real match. I thought I held up pretty well. And Ali getting that win took the pressure off a little bit, as well. Yeah, that helped.

Q. It's your first win. What does it mean to you? Individual sport, but you're representing more than yourself.

JESSICA PEGULA: It's just a different dynamic than we're really used to playing week in, week out where we have to be pretty selfish about ourselves and our games.

The team, we've been having so much fun this whole week. Honestly, it's been a great week I think. No matter what happens, we always have each other's backs. That's really comforting to know that.

BILLIE JEAN KING CUP

BY  BNP PARIBAS

Also for me out there, like not to get frustrated that I miss a shot or something like that. I'm playing for something bigger than myself, so I think usually my attitude actually is a little bit better because, yeah, I guess pressure-wise that way I feel like it almost helps because I'm not getting upset. I have a team behind me. I'm not going to throw a fit on the court or something like that.

Yeah, in my mind I guess that's how I feel.

Q. Kathy, on Ali's tiebreak, longest singles tiebreak in Billie Jean King Cup history. What is going through your mind as that set was unfolding?

CAPTAIN RINALDI: I'm basically playing every single point with Ali. Yeah, I just try to stay calm on the sidelines because I think that helps the players the most. Everybody is different. Just basically knowing what to give, when to give energy, when to kind of maybe sit back a little bit.

But Ali was absolutely incredible. Obviously so much on the line. These matches mean so much to all these girls. So you could see the nerves on both sides of the court. She fought through it. She played incredible.

As Jess said, I kept telling Ali, We've got your back. She gets that win and it allows Jess to go out there and play freely.

It's been an incredible couple of days of practice. As Jess said, the camaraderie, it's just been a lot of fun. We've got a lot of really good practices in, as well, hard practices, but with a lot of fun.

There's no surprise that they both came out on top today.

Q. Kathy, what did you think of the atmosphere in general, the circumstances being what they are, a different situation?

CAPTAIN RINALDI: I thought it was incredible actually. I could feel the support from both sides. Obviously our hearts, the players' and the team, Ukraine have been in our thoughts and our prayers and in our hearts.

But we respect the competition as well. Once we're out

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

there, we're opponents on the court, but we're friends and allies off the court. That's what it felt like.

It felt like the players really left it out there today on both sides. That's all you can really ask for. I thought the fans were really incredible for both teams.

Q. Jess, when did you first sort of set this as a target, being a part of this team, but just Billie Jean King Cup in general? What does it mean to be part of the team for you?

JESSICA PEGULA: Yeah, like I've said before, it's a different dynamic. It's such an honor. I think all the girls on the team, like Ali said, she doesn't take it lightly. I think it's just such a special, special feeling. Until you really experience it, I don't think you feel it.

We were all on the court today crying, hearing national anthem for Ukraine, for us. You feel, like, all the emotions. That's the part that I think really, really hits you, that it's so much bigger than yourself. It's the coolest thing really we can do.

We talked to Billie Jean before the anthem and stuff. She's like, There's no better feeling. I think for a lot of the young girls, too, until you really experience that, you may not think much of it for whatever reason, but it's really special.

Yeah, just it's an honor.

Q. Do you remember when you were young looking at this, when it first came on your radar?

JESSICA PEGULA: Yeah, definitely was something I always wanted to do. I always loved team sports growing up when I was younger, playing different sports. We don't get a lot of chances to do that in tennis. We got to do it a little bit with the Olympics last year, I guess. Was it last year? Seems like forever ago. Same thing. We got to walk in the ceremony. You just can't put into words the feeling you get when stuff like that happens.

Of course, it was always a goal of mine. I'm glad I can be here and able to live that dream out.

Q. Jess, you'll go out tomorrow, No. 1 position. That's a big match, the first match. How do you feel about that?

JESSICA PEGULA: Yeah, it will be interesting. She was playing really well today. Again, it's tough playing her. She can hit winners from anywhere on the court. Take some inspiration from Ali, how she played her, competed today. I'm definitely going to go back to the drawing board,

change the game plan a little bit. Yeah, I'll be happy to go out there and compete again.

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