

Billie Jean King Cup

Wednesday, 12 April 2023

Team USA

Captain Kathy Rinaldi

Coco Gauff

Jessica Pegula

Press Conference

BILLIE JEAN KING CUP

BY > GAINBRIDGE

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. What has this process been like getting to know your team? I'm sure you know each other already in some ways, but preparing for a big competition like this...

JESSICA PEGULA: Well, yeah, I think we all know each other very well. I think we've all played with each other possibly on the team as well, maybe not the exact same people, but with each other at some point. Obviously Coco and I spend a lot of time together on the court as well.

In between tournaments, crazy schedule, I think we've taken a few days to just kind of, at least for Coco, me and Sonya, to be home and relax a little bit.

Yeah, we have some team things set up the next few days. Again, I think we spend a lot of time together. I just saw Danielle and Caty last week quite a bit in Charleston.

Yeah, I think we all know each other pretty well and are pretty comfortable with each other.

Q. Coco, unless you're playing doubles, you're used to individual goals, stuff like that. Has it been difficult to transition to this vibe of playing for a team? How exhilarating has it been? How much of a transition has it been?

COCO GAUFF: Not really. I mean, we all want to win. We all like to win. So we don't make that difficult for us.

Tennis is a unique sport. Even though you feel like you're on a team, when you step on the court, you're back in that mindset you are for the rest of the season.

If anything, the team environment makes it even more entertaining, even more fun because you do have teammates on the sideline cheering for you, and you're

cheering for teammates on the sideline.

So, no, I don't think it's been difficult. Like Jess said, we know each other pretty well on and off the court. Spend a lot of time with Jess. Spend a lot of time with Caty. Was on the team with Danielle and Sonya at different times before. So, yeah, we all know each other fairly well, so it's not that difficult.

Q. You're all Floridians now. This rain the last few days, possibly continuing, how shocked are you the weather isn't cooperating?

JESSICA PEGULA: It's a little bizarre it's raining so much. I feel like it's usually in the summer we get this kind of rain. This is like cooler weather and it's actually spring. It's kind of throwing me off a little bit.

At least from my side in Charleston I had a lot of rain delays. In Miami I had a lot of rain delays. I brought the rain (laughter). I feel accustomed to it now, so...

But, yeah, it makes it tough to get some practice in this week. But I think both teams are kind of in the same boat with that. Hopefully the weather will be good Friday and Saturday.

Q. Coco, it's very local for you. What does it mean to have a competition of this size in Delray Beach?

COCO GAUFF: It means a lot. I was super excited when I found out the tie was going to be here. I have a lot of family coming. Special to be in your home country playing, but even more in your home city. So I'm super excited for Friday and Saturday.

Q. (No microphone.)

COCO GAUFF: It's going to be the same. I'm not expecting anything different. They know how to behave at a tennis match. Also in Miami they were pretty much the same crew there.

Yeah, it's not going to be too different. They know to leave me alone when I guess I'm in that zone and everything. It might be a little bit louder since I told them they can cheer

ASAP . . . when all is said, we're done.®
sports

a little bit more in the Fed Cup atmosphere.

But, no, I think they've been to enough tennis matches in the past, even in juniors, so they won't be too loud.

Q. Kathy, oftentimes in this competition you come up against a lot of teams that you and the players might know really well. For a team like Austria that you haven't played, the U.S. hasn't played since 2004, how is it different to scout or get familiar with players that you all might not see as much?

CAPTAIN RINALDI: Yeah, I think it comes back to just concentrating on our games, preparing as we would for another tie. We obviously know their No. 1 player, she's quite a good player. We definitely have scouted her.

Yeah, we've been preparing as best we can with the rain. So have they. It's about competing on that day, concentrating on what we do best. Whatever we see as we go on, we can make tweaks, but we're going to go out...

We can't take them lightly because we know what can happen in Billie Jean King Cup. We respect them. We can't underestimate our opponents. They've come here, they've got one team with one goal, as well.

We know that Billie Jean King Cup play can bring out the best in players. So we're expecting them to be at their best, and hopefully we're at ours.

Q. I always thought the 'Fed Cup' was a pretty boring name. Now we've got rid of that. It's got a great name. Talk a little bit about Billie Jean because you grew up when she was in her pomp?

CAPTAIN RINALDI: Yeah, I mean, Billie Jean, she's amazing. She's amazing to this day. She always makes time for everybody. She's always texting me, she's always supporting. She goes above and beyond.

Besides that, what she's done for all of us sitting up here, for all women, it's quite incredible. So we're very appreciative.

We're excited when we see her. She comes and supports us. She supports everybody. Now that her name is on there, she can't show too much to the American team, but we know where her heart is, I think (smiling).

Yeah, we're excited to see her.

Q. Coco, what was the decision on not playing Charleston? Did you just want to have more time at home because you were in Miami? What went into

that?

COCO GAUFF: Well, I knew I wasn't going to play Charleston at the beginning of the season. It wasn't a decision based off of Miami Open or anything. It was just a scheduling decision. I wanted to play Stuttgart, which will be right after this. Yeah, it was a decision I made before the year started.

Every player has their kind of schedule that they make, then everything changes. Maybe if I lost early in doubles in Miami, I maybe would have tried to play.

But, no, I knew in the off-season last year that I wasn't going to play Charleston.

Q. (No microphone.)

JESSICA PEGULA: I mean, I think you always kind of feel it. Especially at the beginning when you do the walkouts and everything, I think it's always pretty emotional.

Like Coco said before, when you go back into the setting of you and another person across the court, you do sink back into that: I need to win this match. This is what I do 99% of the year. I think you always come back to that.

Of course, I think you're always kind of balancing your emotions of playing for a team and your country and not just yourself. I think that's always different for everybody.

I always quite enjoyed it. I think it's a fun atmosphere. I love playing on a team. I love team events. For me it's extra motivation and extra fun, but I think everyone's different.

I'm not sure what you guys would say.

CAPTAIN RINALDI: Well, when I played for my country, it was some of the best weeks of my career actually, the most fun weeks of my career, just getting to know the players on a different level, having that one goal. Also knowing that they were there to pick me up or I was there to pick them up.

Like Jess said, it's extra motivation. When you're playing for your country, for teammates, you're going to fight. You don't want to let anybody down, that's for sure, rather than it's just yourself. You're playing for something much bigger than yourself.

Those weeks were always super special. Everybody was excited to be picked, disappointed when they, which is always the toughest role of a captain, is picking the team.

It brings back a lot now to be here as captain. It's just extra special.

COCO GAUFF: Yeah, I definitely agree with that. You do, like, especially in the walkouts when you're hearing your anthem being played, don't really hear it too often in tennis, to be honest, so it's not like a football game or basketball game where they play it before every game, so it adds a little extra sauce to it I guess. It does make you a little bit nervous.

But like Jess said, once you step on the court, once the warmup is over, you realize nothing has changed, it's just you and the lines and the ball. You don't even want to think about the opponent, to be honest.

I think if we take care of our end of the court, we'll be successful this weekend.

Q. Regarding Billie Jean King, this year the US Open is celebrating 50 years of equal prize money for men and women. For three generations of U.S. women's tennis, what does it mean to you to have Billie around at these events? What are your reflections on having the opportunities that you have, have continued to have, as a result of what she's done?

CAPTAIN RINALDI: Well, I'm the oldest. I'll go first (laughter).

Like I said before, it's incredible. I think each generation has gotten bigger and better for women. Billie Jean obviously played a huge role in that.

But then to have her around, I think you just really have to enjoy every moment with her. You always learn from her. She has so much energy. It's absolutely incredible. She's everywhere. She's still doing so much to push forward.

Just when I see her, I just really enjoy every moment that I have with her. I enjoy every moment that I have with these women.

I do my best for the women coming, the youngest ones, coming up, as head of women's tennis for USTA, to make an impact in their lives as that generation of Billie and many others have made on mine. I hope that I can continue to give back in that way, inspire. I think that's what we all hope to do, keep making our sport better and better.

COCO GAUFF: Yeah, no, Billie Jean, she's great. She's always, like Kathy says, so much energy. She's always pushing women's sports. I saw she was at the Final Four for the women's NCAA. I just love, like, what she does,

constantly pushing women's sports, not only tennis, but other areas in the world, too.

I think the way tennis has come, how far it's come compared to other sports, she definitely has a huge role in that in taking I guess the sacrifice when she did, what she did, for the bigger picture. I'm forever grateful for that.

Tennis, especially compared to other women's sports, I think we're leading in that, when it comes to equal prize money, fan base, all of that. I think I credit a lot of that to her.

So I am super proud to be playing in the Billie Jean King Cup, and hopefully we'll make her proud and do something for her legacy.

Jess, do you want to answer that?

JESSICA PEGULA: I don't have to. It was perfect. Not much from my side.

Q. (No microphone.)

COCO GAUFF: I'm not hosting anything.

CAPTAIN RINALDI: We haven't been invited for dinner.

JESSICA PEGULA: No, we haven't (laughter).

COCO GAUFF: I do have a team gift for them. I haven't given it to them yet, but I do have that.

JESSICA PEGULA: Oh, I don't have anything. She's showing me up (laughter).

COCO GAUFF: We were supposed to do something at Miami, but we never did.

JESSICA PEGULA: I know (laughter).

FastScripts by ASAP Sports