

Billie Jean King Cup

Friday, 14 April 2023

Team USA

Captain Kathy Rinaldi

Jessica Pegula

Press Conference

J. PEGULA/S. Kraus

6-0, 7-5

USA - 2

Austria - 0

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. Kathy, what are your overall thoughts on the two matches tonight?

CAPTAIN RINALDI: I was just talking to another reporter about that. Really just so proud of Jessica and Coco. They really played well. I thought their opponents played extremely well tonight. They raised their game, and so did Jessica and Coco. They couldn't have played better. It was wonderful. Great start.

Q. Jess, you obviously had a good start in your match, then it felt like she settled in. How did you feel you were able to raise your game late in the second set?

JESSICA PEGULA: Yeah, I mean, I figured it's always like that, especially with a 6-0 set. We had a lot of really close games where it could have been a lot closer. I always know, I mean, Kathy said (indiscernible). Even first game I had to dig myself out of some holes there. You have to expect that playing somebody maybe not ranked as high.

She hit the ball big, was going for her shots. I think I expected her to play a lot better. I wish I could have served it out at 5-3 because I thought I played a pretty solid match up until then, but I didn't. I was able to play a couple really good games to close it out.

I'm happy with the way I competed, didn't get frustrated, was able to pick up my level when I needed to.

Q. Had you played her before or did you watch any

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tape?

JESSICA PEGULA: I watched some video on her. There's not really even a lot of great video on her. She played a lot of ITFs, so it's a lot of stream videos. It's hard to tell sometimes.

I think what we thought was going to happen happened, at least strategically. I think the in the big moments I stuck to that really well. I think the serve with the heavy conditions is really important. She started serving better in of the second. I thought I could have maybe served a little bit better consistently, but I think I served well when I had to, which is always good.

Yeah, I've never seen her practice because it keeps raining all week. It's been really tough to scout these girls.

Q. Does it feel like a different atmosphere as opposed to just a WTA Tour event?

JESSICA PEGULA: Yeah, I get so much more nervous playing in this format. It just feels different. It's not what we're used to doing 99% of the time throughout the year. It's so different.

Yeah, the atmosphere just feels crazier. I feel like this format, I just told Kathy, it evens everyone's level out so much. I think that's why you see some upsets, you see these crazy matches.

Yeah, you just always have to be ready in this format. It's fun. It's definitely a different atmosphere and it's nice to mix it up.

Q. Jess, talk about how proud you must be with the mental toughness it took to close that out.

JESSICA PEGULA: I mean, I think it was even better that -- tougher that I didn't serve it out and then was able to bounce back. I think that is even harder. I'm glad I did that, although I still would have loved to close it out.

She played well. It's the first game where I played a couple bad points and she had a couple good returns. That's tennis. It happens all the time. It's definitely going to

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happen in a tournament, it is going to happen in this format, it is going to happen in a set. I'm glad I was able to bounce back.

Q. How great is the team chemistry? How much fun are you having out there?

JESSICA PEGULA: Yeah, it's so nice just to get to know the girls on a so much more personal level, finding out details of where they're from, what they're doing, where they grew up.

We were trading stories with juniors from some of the younger girls the other night. It's just refreshing. I think it changes the perspective and makes you realize that we were all young girls with a dream to play pro. Now we're here and we're together.

I think, like Billie Jean has been saying, it's all about relationships. I think that's really true. I think it's really cool to share these moments. Maybe one day we'll be similar to her, looking back, visiting this next team, trading stories.

It's been very fun.

Q. Make believe Kathy is not there. How great is to it have Kathy as a captain?

JESSICA PEGULA: Kathy, she's so laid back but also so competitive at the same time. It's fun to have that mix where she's ready to go at any second, but at the same time I don't ever feel like she's putting pressure on us as a team or individually. She's always just there for us and wants to make everything as easy as possible.

She knows we have a long year, we see her throughout the year. When we come here, I feel like you like to keep it the same. You want to keep the momentum going, keep everything the same. I think she does a really good job of that.

Q. How do you foster that team chemistry, Kathy?

CAPTAIN RINALDI: Well, it's not difficult with this group of ladies. Like Jessica said, I see them throughout the year, know them, know their personalities. A lot of them I've known since they were super young and have seen them grow, kind of know what makes them tick, all their personalities, know their backgrounds, their families. That's really nice.

It's just such an honor to be in this position. It's something that I don't take for granted. I enjoy it every single day. They inspire me.

These weeks are extremely special, as she said, because you really do get to know each other on a different level. I hope these weeks are special for them because they were super special for me when I played.

Q. Over the course since you've been captain, what are some of the key things you've learned that have made you such a successful captain?

CAPTAIN RINALDI: Well, like you said, team chemistry is really important. As Jessica said, I really just try to be organized, try to do all my homework ahead of time, and try to take as much pressure as I can off the players, but at the same time I am competitive. She's right. I definitely want to win another Cup. I'm definitely not satisfied with that.

I think it's not about me, it's about the players. I think that's what's really important to me. It's not about me, it's about them. Just try to make it the best week of the year for them, or the best two weeks of the year for them. I really do try to do that.

We do team bonding activities, make sure that it's really important these weeks I think, as she said, to try to keep the momentum going. I'm not here to change anything, I'm here to work with their coaches, work together to support them, support them for the following week and the week after that.

I really enjoy working with the private coaches and their coaches as well. It just creates this incredible atmosphere, and for the players, too.

Q. Is it important to have Billie Jean King, Rosie Casals and Chris Evert?

CAPTAIN RINALDI: We had a blast last night. We had the past, present and future all in one room. It was really fun.

JESSICA PEGULA: It was crazy. They were telling stories.

CAPTAIN RINALDI: I had them all come up and tell a story.

JESSICA PEGULA: That was actually really cool. I was just talking to Danielle. I was like, Wow, they're talking about changing the entire game, creating the game, creating the WTA, like fighting Communism. There was a lot of depth in there.

I'm thinking, That wasn't that long ago. It's really insane that that's where it all started, different generations of this

whole process to where we are today. I think it's just super inspiring and really makes you appreciate these weeks.

CAPTAIN RINALDI: Let's go USA.

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