

# Billie Jean King Cup

Monday, 6 November 2023

Team USA

Captain Kathy Rinaldi

Taylor Townsend

Sloane Stephens

Peyton Stearns

Sofia Kenin

Danielle Collins

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Team USA, welcome. Good afternoon. We will begin with questions from the room.

**Q. First of all, welcome to Seville. We hope you are enjoying the city, from a local. Obviously this competition is named after Billie Jean King, which always has been a legend of this sport. She had a very famous quote, "Pressure is a privilege." I wanted to ask you if there is a different kind of pressure to a team event and if whether being a team event does help you take a bit of pressure off from the usual competition in the WTA.**

CAPTAIN KATHY RINALDI: I think obviously you're playing for something much bigger than yourself this week, and you're playing for your country, playing for your teammates. I think with that comes a lot of emotion.

Knowing these five great young ladies, they play with a lot of heart and a lot of emotion. It means something to them to be here, to always raise their hand and always say yes to play for Team USA.

So emotions usually run high, and I think you see which makes the competition extremely exciting to watch, because everyone is playing for a lot more than just themselves week in and week out. Tennis is such an individual sport throughout the year, so these times are really special, special weeks. As the captain, they are really special weeks. Yeah.

**Q. Kathy, I was wondering if you could just reflect on the fact that this is your last week as the captain. Alicia Molik was in here earlier. Also her last**

tournament. She was saying she feels the same going into it. Do you feel the same, or is it different knowing that this is your last and how much of a motivation is it to go out on a high?

CAPTAIN KATHY RINALDI: (Tearing up.)

TAYLOR TOWNSEND: There's a suicide.

SLOANE STEPHENS: Come on, now. Come on, now. We're going to be running all day at this rate.

TAYLOR TOWNSEND: We said that every time Kathy cries, we've got to run a suicide.

SLOANE STEPHENS: We are going to be running all day at this rate. Come on, now. (Laughter.)

CAPTAIN KATHY RINALDI: Obviously I know in the back of my mind I know that, but it's not about me. It's never been about me. It's about these players. That's what I'm going to miss the most is being with these players. Someone hit me. (Laughter.)

So, you know, it's going to be a special week. It already has been a special week. We are having a great time. We are working hard and having fun. We are going to be ready to go on Thursday.

I'm just enjoying every second like I do every other tie. So it's not the same in that aspect, because I know when the last day comes, that's it. I'm not captain anymore. But I know Lindsay will do a great job and step in. I'm happy for her. But this is a dream job to be with these ladies. That bench is special.

TAYLOR TOWNSEND: We should make him run for making you cry. He should have to run the suicide.

**Q. What is "run a suicide"? I don't know what that is.**

TAYLOR TOWNSEND: It's, like, when you have to run every line. Back and forth, back and forth.

**Q. Who is doing it the most?**



TAYLOR TOWNSEND: Every time Kathy cries --

SLOANE STEPHENS: We all have to.

TAYLOR TOWNSEND: But now he's doing it too.  
(Laughter.) So just think about the question you ask before you ask it. (Laughter.)

**Q. You all play big matches week in, week out, relentlessly from January to November and maybe even beyond. How does it feel in a team event? Is it more responsibility, more pressure because you've got all these teammates to look after? Or does it come as a welcomed relief? This could be for any of you.**

TAYLOR TOWNSEND: I think it's a bit of a relief, personally. I have always enjoyed the team atmosphere and the team environment, just because it's such a changeup from what we are experiencing for 10 months out of the year.

I know it's crazy to say that, my gosh, but I really enjoy it. It really makes it special to have Kathy on the bench and with us, and then great teammates as well. When you can really kind of come outside of yourself and know that you have a whole bench and a whole team and everyone looking to you, supporting you, you can look on the sidelines and know that you constantly have support. You're not out there by yourself.

It really is important. It means a lot. But then it also motivates you in a different way. I think that's really what shows up during this week and during this Final. You really see a different level of energy and a different, you know, just passion that you might not see sometimes as much, you know, throughout the year on the WTA Tour, you know, week in and week out.

So I think that we all really look forward to this. We're going to bring our A games and A-plus-plus-plus for our Coach Kathy. We're really excited. Yeah, I think everyone is really looking forward to this, and I'm really happy to be a part of this team. It's a great team we've got here.

DANIELLE COLLINS: I have to say, too, a lot of us have known each other for so long. I have known Sloane since we were little in the Florida tournaments, and Taylor for a long time since teenage years, and gotten to know Peyton a lot better this year because she's quite a bit younger than me. Sonya and I got to be on the 2018 team together. So many incredible memories.

I think part of what's been so special playing for Kathy too is the fact that she's been involved in every aspect of

tennis, not just at the professional level, not just at the highest level, being here at Billie Jean King Cup and representing our country, but also in the junior days. We have all known Kathy since we were little.

She was at those tournaments with us. She was coaching a lot of us. She was driving the van. Making us breakfast, lunch, warming us up, helping us in every way she could, being a mentor to a lot of us too as we grew older.

I think that's what makes this week so special.

**Q. A question for Sloane. Obviously you're in a really tough group with Switzerland and Czech Republic. One of the things about U.S. sport, it sort of feels like you're never really the underdogs. Do you feel like that at all with the defending champions and such a strong Czech team? Where is that balance for you this week in terms of your expectations and ambitions?**

SLOANE STEPHENS: No, I think playing on a team is very different. When you get out there, the matchups, you never know who's going to play who. You never know who is going to come out and play and show up.

I think that's what makes the U.S. so good and so strong at every single tie is because we always have an A, B, C, D, E team that can always go out and kick anyone's ass. I think us being here, it being Kathy's last tie, we show up every single tie, but this tie we are playing more than ourselves, more than our country, we are playing for our captain. We want to make sure we get out there and do everything we can. I think this week you'll see a little bit more than normal.

CAPTAIN KATHY RINALDI: That's two suicides.  
(Laughter.)

SLOANE STEPHENS: Same guy.

TAYLOR TOWNSEND: Come on.

SLOANE STEPHENS: Everybody's running.

**Q. 50 years ago there was the 'Battle of the Sexes'. Today we are here, Billie Jean King Cup Final. Maybe if one of you can tell how did Billie Jean King inspire, in the past, inspire one of you?**

SLOANE STEPHENS: Our rookie has something to say.

PEYTON STEARNS: Yeah, it's incredible what she's done with the sport. I grew up, I wasn't a tennis player, I was a gymnast for the longest of time. I transitioned to tennis later than most.



I'm super happy for what she's done for us. We wouldn't be here right now if it wasn't for her.

**Q. I wanted to ask you about the surface, whether you feel it's fast or maybe more gritty than anything? It's a hard court indoors, but how do you feel about the surface and whether it fits you or not? Maybe Sofia who hasn't answered.**

SOFIA KENIN: In terms of the courts, I like the surface. It's great.

But I want to bring it back to Captain Kathy. We'll really miss you.

**Q. A question for Kathy. Just sort of picking up on what Sloane said. When you've got such a strong team and you've got five possible singles options here, when you're choosing your team, what's the balance between trying to guess what the possible matchups might be versus just looking at the form of the players?**

CAPTAIN KATHY RINALDI: Yeah, I think all of the above. Obviously very fortunate. You know, look at this lineup, right? They're all Grand Slam champions and Grand Slam finalists and a rookie that's having a heck of a year. I get a little angry when I hear people say "a B team." This is not a B team. It's an A team.

I think that's one of the most difficult decisions a captain has to make is because there are so many possibilities. But, you know, we're a team, and I've got great people around me. You know, I believe in every single one of these players. I have known them for a very long time. I know they give their all on court.

We are going to look at a lot of different options and a lot of different things and do what's best for the team, because everybody wants to win. Everybody is a competitor here.

Again, it's not just about one player. It's not about the captain. It's about a team and putting together a winning team. We'll do our best, that's for darn sure (smiling).

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