

# Billie Jean King Cup

Tuesday, 7 November 2023

Team Australia

Captain Alicia Molik

Storm Hunter

Kimberley Birrell

Press Conference



BIRRELL-HUNTER/Erjavec-Milic

7-5, 6-7, 10-5

Team Australia - 1

Team Slovenia - 2

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Team Australia, please.

**Q. Storm, could you just talk us through your last 24, 36 hours, however long it's been since you left Cancun? What your schedule was and how you felt today playing and winning a match at the Billie Jean King Cup?**

STORM HUNTER: Yeah, it's been a busy 24 hours. Obviously as soon as I finished in Cancun, tried to get, as soon as I could get here, the flight options. Ended up landing at 8:00 a.m. this morning, 8:30 a.m. this morning.

Bags didn't arrive, so that made it a bit tricky, but I had some racquets on me and I was prepared to play today. I had my outfit, my shoes, and mentally I was ready to go if our team needed that.

Yeah, it was obviously, yeah, a quick turnaround, but for me, representing my country is the greatest honor and honestly the most amazing thing I can ever do with my tennis career. I want to be ready and prepared whenever possible.

I'm just really proud of Kimbo and I today. Obviously we went down to 2-0, and to come out and play the doubles, even though we lost the tie, it's still really important to try and get a win on the board.

Yeah, it was a tough match. The girls actually came out, played really, really well. They're young, had nothing to

lose. Kimbo and myself, we did a really good job just hanging in tough and, yeah, ended up getting the win, which was awesome.

**Q. Storm, just a word on becoming World No. 1 and what that means to you. Is that something you ever imagined for yourself? Was it a dream of yours?**

STORM HUNTER: Yeah, it's still, to be honest, hasn't really sunken in. It's crazy. I honestly didn't think this would ever happen to me in my life. It was kind of a dream that just always was there but kind of seemed impossible, to be honest.

Yeah, it's definitely been a whirlwind few days. It's very exciting, but I'm kind of here to focus on our team. It's not about me this week. It's about getting Team Australia to do as best as we can, so that's something that, yeah, I'll be able to celebrate once we finish here. But for now it's just doing my part for our team.

**Q. Alicia, could you just talk through the day from your perspective. There was some suggestion in the Slovenian camp that maybe they were surprised by some of the singles selections. They were perhaps expecting Kim to play. Could you just talk through the sort of reasons behind your selections and just how you felt the day went.**

CAPTAIN ALICIA MOLIK: Yeah, look, both Ajla and Dash, you know, really proven Billie Jean King Cup players in the past and experience. For Ajla, she's had a bit of an interrupted year. For Dash, she's made a comeback through the middle portion of the year. But they're fully fit.

In fact, it was a really difficult decision, because everyone's level was incredibly high between Kim, Ajla, and Dash. So it was an incredibly difficult decision.

But, you know, sometimes you do have to rely on experience. I think, you know, in the early stages of both matches, you know, it was incredibly even. I feel like more so for Dash. The score didn't really reflect the closeness of her matchup.

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

But they played exceptionally well on this surface. I really feel like they used this court to their advantage, the Slovenian team. Yeah, the selection wasn't any surprise to us but it might have been a surprise to them.

**Q. One for whoever wants to take it. The Slovenian bench was incredibly loud. There was a lot of energy coming from them and from the crowd as well. Just wonder what impact does that have when you're playing? Because obviously they were here, I think they said in press, they were here with something to prove. Could you feel that on the court as well?**

KIMBERLY BIRRELL: Yeah, actually, I think we really enjoyed the atmosphere out on the court. I think playing in a country that is neither of our home country, yeah, it's always interesting what the atmosphere and how many people are going to come out to support us.

Yeah, I think the more people, the better. We really thrive in environments like that. I think Aussies are kind of, we do well as the underdogs, too. I think, yeah, we found it totally fine. If anything, we enjoyed the atmosphere that they brought, the team brought.

**Q. I would like to ask Alicia, do you think now that you made the mistake that you put Ajla and Daria in the match? Because the Slovenian captain said that he hoped that you will put Ajla and Daria to this match. They were afraid of Kimberley.**

CAPTAIN ALICIA MOLIK: Ah. Well, he got his wish, didn't he?

No, look, I think it was a really positive step, because I mentioned before, you might have missed it, but just that in the past, both players, you know, are fit now. The level that they have been able to produce in the past during national competitions, both Dash and Ajla, either with a lot of tennis under their belt or not, they have done some pretty special performances here at the Billie Jean King Cup in the past. You know, it was an incredibly difficult decision between all of our players.

Although rankings don't reflect it, I think our three, the playing group, were incredibly close. So I believe both of our players would win today. I thought Dash would win. I thought Ajla would win. I thought they'd both win in straight sets. Didn't turn out that way.

**Q. Alicia, obviously you have been so strong in this competition over the past few years. I was just wondering, you sort of played, I don't know, you sort of talked it down a little bit in the press conference before the tournament about the sort of preparation**

**and not having all your team here, but just wondering now just how frustrating has it been with these overlapping events not to be able to have the best preparation you possibly can in your last tie as captain?**

CAPTAIN ALICIA MOLIK: Yeah, not frustrating at all, to be honest. Look, from my perspective is, the captain, to have the players ready. The most important thing for players is to be match-ready. Not just to be spending hours on the practice court but in match situations under a lot of pressure.

Of course that's what Storm and Ellen have been doing. In between all the weather in Cancun, they have been on the match court constantly throughout the whole week. So there is no better preparation than that, so I'd almost have them late and match-ready and a lot of sets under their belt, a lot of difficult matches under their belt.

You know, circumstances are what they are. It hasn't really bothered us to our detriment. There is not many players that would put their hand up to play three-and-a-half hours after coming from a 17-hour trip to get themselves ready to play. That's just how keen our players are.

We always knew that would be the circumstance, you know, months ago. So it wasn't a surprise, actually, that the players have come late. We sort of actually were banking on it, that they'd perform well at the Finals, because they had that kind of year. It kind of came to fruition, to be honest.

**Q. Alicia, leading into Thursday morning's clash with Kazakhstan, what are going to be your words to the team ahead of that? Because that's going to be a pretty great tie as well.**

CAPTAIN ALICIA MOLIK: Yeah, I mean, it's a do-or-die one, isn't it? It's all our nothing.

One of the best players in the world in that team, Rybakina. We have to go all out, have to bring our A game. Ellen arrives tonight, too, so we are at complete, full strength in terms of our Australian team. Now it's just working out, again, our best chances against what we think will be their best team that plays on Thursday.

I mean, sometimes it's good actually when you need to win because there is no other option. You really are forced into a corner. I think sometimes in tennis when you have less options, it really creates those decisions of urgency and really separates the good players.

That's our challenge for Thursday. It is a big challenge for us, but anything is possible.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

