

Billie Jean King Cup

Sunday, 12 November 2023

Team Canada

Captain Heidi El Tabakh

Leylah Fernandez

Marina Stakusic

Eugenie Bouchard

Gabriela Dabrowski

Rebecca Marino

Press Conference



just able to have more and more confidence in my game and just to keep going for my shots and being more and more offensive, taking the ball earlier and earlier.

Q. Congratulations, all. It's been a joy watching you all week and fully deserved victory. Leylah, last night when we spoke you didn't want to speculate what it might feel like to be in this position as a winner. Now it's happened. Could I ask how it does feel?

LEYLAH FERNANDEZ: I'm tired (smiling).

No, no, I'm joking. In reality, I'm extremely happy, ecstatic. You know, it's the first time that Canada has ever won the Billie Jean King Cup. I can finally say this: We're world champions, and we rightfully deserve it.

We worked really hard the past years, and, you know, I think every year, as I said before, we just keep improving. It's showing on the tennis court. It's showing in competition, individual competitions. Now it has shown in the biggest stage in the world.

Q. A question for Gaby. I was wondering if you could put this win into the context of your career and how winning this feels compared to, you know, winning your slam titles.

GABRIELA DABROWSKI: Thanks. It means so much. It's an incredibly special moment to share with everyone sitting here and our team also waiting for us back in the locker room. Everyone's put in literal blood, sweat, and tears over the years. Like, literal blood, sweat, and tears. It's felt like on one hand like a huge relief, but in the most positive way that I could say it. It's like a weight has been lifted off our shoulders.

I feel like we have shown up, been a top team for many years now, but then to be able to put that into action, the last couple of years we lost to the eventual champions twice, so I think also having this format has made it even more possible for us to be able to get this title. I love how we have this World Cup of Tennis type of event. I think team competitions are really important for our sport.

L. FERNANDEZ/J. Paolini

6-2, 6-3

Team Canada - 2

Team Italy - 0

THE MODERATOR: We'll take questions for the champions of the Billie Jean King Cup Final, Team Canada. Questions, please.

Q. I saw some of you practicing on Tuesday, and I remember watching Leylah's practice in particular. I was just wondering if there was anything a bit different, even on Tuesday, did you feel as though these trophies might be in your hands come today? To Leylah in particular, did you play any differently this week? You were taking the ball so early, today in particular, but I was wondering, is that something a little bit that you're trying to introduce to your game?

LEYLAH FERNANDEZ: No, that's always been part of my game. My coach, who is also my dad, has introduced me to be very offensive, has taught me to be very offensive.

On Tuesday, it was probably one of my first days here in Seville, so it was just a little hard getting used to the court. I was probably a little bit bamboozled with everything. (Laughter.)

Yeah, I was probably a little bit bamboozled, but I was able to get my bearings, and then I just kept working hard. I also have a great team around me who made it fun. I was



So to come out on top, yeah, absolutely, just feels amazing, and to share it with these women is just phenomenal.

Q. One for Marina. Can you just sum up what it feels like to win a title like this at this stage of your career and to have the week you have had, as well? Is it something you could have ever imagined at the start of the week?

MARINA STAKUSIC: It's definitely not what I imagined coming here, but as the week went on and just training with these girls all the time, I knew that we all were gaining confidence and we really believe in ourselves.

It all ended up paying off in the end. It's been an incredible week, and I'm super happy I got to spend it with these women.

Q. Just to sort of follow up on that, you said you weren't expecting this, but sort of what were you expecting when you got called up? Did you know you were going to be playing in the No. 2 singles position? Like, when did that come about?

MARINA STAKUSIC: It came about, like, just before we started playing. I didn't know. I just came here trying my best, trying to play well, to have a positive attitude, to just enjoy it.

So, yeah, I ended up figuring out just two days before we started.

Q. Congratulations. Of course in about 10 days it's going to be the Davis Cup Finals, and the Canada men's team are going to be defending their title. They won for Canada for the first time in history last year. Your team has made history today for the women's team. Is there going to be a time when you guys get together and maybe celebrate this all together, both men and women's team?

LEYLAH FERNANDEZ: Hopefully. (Laughter.) We all deserve it, don't we, huh?

Q. You deserve it, although you look a lot better because you get the Billie Blue jacket. (Laughter.)

CAPTAIN HEIDI EL TABAKH: I mean, in theory, that would be really fun. We'll see.

Q. What kind of welcome are you expecting when you get back home?

CAPTAIN HEIDI EL TABAKH: Some of us are not going

back home. I think everyone is going on vacation from here.

LEYLAH FERNANDEZ: We honestly have no idea where we're going after tonight, so...

CAPTAIN HEIDI EL TABAKH: I think we might celebrate a little bit tonight before we all get on flights (smiling).

GABRIELA DABROWSKI: Tonight is our homecoming. (Laughter.)

Q. A question for Heidi. I was just wondering, could you just say a word about Marina's performance this week? Was there any part of you today that considered switching up the singles at all after yesterday? You got some other great options in your team. Sort of why, you know, why keeping the faith in Marina?

CAPTAIN HEIDI EL TABAKH: Yeah, look, it's been an incredible week. It was a close decision, obviously. It's never an easy decision deciding which player gets to play.

You know, I mean, we waited basically till the end of the week to see how everyone is doing. But look, I mean, I was nervous for Marina. When I first put her, I was thinking what am I going to tell her when she's nervous? I was preparing all these things in my head of what I could possibly say. And then after she hit the first return, I'm, like, All right, I think she's good (smiling).

I think it's fair to say that a champion is born this week. She exceeded everyone's expectations. But with that said, I'm very, very, very proud of her and the way she showed up for her team.

I'm also incredibly proud of every single girl that's sitting here. It's been a pleasure sharing the court with them all week, and everyone who is here currently has been a huge asset to the Canadian team throughout the years. We wouldn't be here without every single one of them right now.

Q. Heidi, what do you think this might mean for tennis going forward in Canada, maybe girls who are picking up racquets for the first time?

CAPTAIN HEIDI EL TABAKH: I mean, I hope so. I hope we inspire a lot of young girls and young kids to pick up the racquet and say, One day we could do this.

We're one of the leading sports in Canada right now, and, you know, because of what these girls did, I hope that we continue to inspire and motivate young kids, yeah.

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

Q. A question for Leylah. I know this is about the team today, but I just wanted to talk about your sort of personal form over the last month or so, winning the title in Hong Kong and playing like you did this week. What's changed and for that form to come about? How confident are you that maybe this run of form can lead to even more next year?

LEYLAH FERNANDEZ: Well, honestly, not much has changed. I just kept working hard, and I knew that at some point and I was hoping extremely soon that things were just going to fall into place, and it did. It started a little bit earlier in the summer.

Slowly but surely I was finding my game. And then after the US Open, again, like, I was just feeling more and more confident on court, confident in my own tennis game.

Finally it paid off in Hong Kong. Coming here, it has given me a chance to represent my country at a highest level and to share the courts with these amazing women who can inspire me, who has inspired me, and who has motivated me to do better, to reach for higher levels in my own game.

You know, I think because of them I was also able to grow as a player. That has given me confidence for the preseason and hopefully the 2024 season.

Q. Marina, the first set in your match was pretty crazy in some respects. You were 4-1 up, I think, and then you lost four games in a row. One of those was on a double fault. I'm thinking, what a mental challenge this is now. How did you recover from that blow?

MARINA STAKUSIC: Um, Coach? (Laughter.)

I just tried to stay calm and just be in the present moment and not focus on what's happening on the outside. I think I was returning when I broke her back for 5-All, and I was just trying to stay aggressive, control the points. And, yeah.

Q. A question for Rebecca. When you started your Billie Jean King Cup career with Canada, I imagine you'd hope to get to this stage, but it was probably a fair way from that at that moment. Could you give me an idea of what was the scale of the mountain at that time and how this team has come to be standing here as world champions?

REBECCA MARINO: Oh, gosh. I can't even remember when my first tie was. It was probably 2011, I think. We were playing against Serbia. I remember it was, yeah, I was just very overwhelmed because we were playing an

away game in Serbia.

So to come from that moment, I believe we lost the tie, as well, so from my first one, losing that tie to suddenly being world champions, it's like a huge turnaround over the course of the last, I guess, 12 years. I'm really proud of the women who are sitting beside me, the work they have put in to get us here. It's been such an effort, and I appreciate everything that you have all done. So thank you.

Q. This is for both Eugenie and the team as well. If I can start with you, Eugenie. Obviously you didn't play today, but I saw at various points this week you doing the Macarena on the bench. Leylah was doing it, too, amongst others. I just want to ask you about how it feels for you to be a part of this winning team. Is there any immediate plans to celebrate, as well?

EUGENIE BOUCHARD: I also did the Macarena with Gaby, I think, who was leading me. I was actually following her, because I wasn't even sure how to do it (smiling). She's, like, That's what happens when you play tennis for 20 years. You don't learn other skills. (Laughter.)

It's been so fun. These girls are really fun to be with, and we all believe in each other and are able to relax. This morning when I came into the locker room, everyone was in such a good mood and everyone was so relaxed. I was actually almost a bit surprised. It was finals day. I love the atmosphere of this team, and it gave me so much confidence in the girls that were going to play today.

It's great. It's special for my career to be able to add this to my résumé personally. I'm proud of all these girls. Proud of the decade of Billie Jean King Cup ties I have played for Canada, playing in the Olympics, as well. All these times I get to play for my country has been super special. This is just, like, the cherry on top to be able to say we're champions.

And, yeah, immediate plans to celebrate, I think the captain is in charge of that. You'll have to ask Heidi what we're doing.

CAPTAIN HEIDI EL TABAKH: I think I'll probably go have a fun dinner, maybe a couple drinks. Young ones got to go to bed earlier. (Laughter.)

EUGENIE BOUCHARD: It's 18 in Europe, right? (Laughter.)

(Applause.)

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