

Billie Jean King Cup

Tuesday, 12 November 2024

Team Japan

Captain Ai Sugiyama

Moyuka Uchijima

Nao Hibino

Shuko Aoyama

Ena Shibahara

Eri Hozumi

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Good morning, everyone. Let's start our press conference with Team Japan for Billie Jean King Cup.

We will start with English questions. Please raise your hands.

Q. Hello, everyone. Welcome to Malaga. Nice to see you. Nao, Japan have seen a great rise in recent years in Billie Jean King Cup. How much are you looking forward to your first experience at the Finals?

NAO HIBINO: Yeah, playing in Billie Jean King Finals is one of my goal when I was kid, so I'm so honored and grateful to be here.

Q. You were one of the stars at the qualifiers. You had a wonderful experience in the qualifiers, some wonderful victories. How much confidence do those performances in the qualifiers give you heading into the Finals?

NAO HIBINO: Yeah, I beat two great players at the -- when was it? In March, was it? April, yeah.

Yeah, I'm feeling great on the court. Surface suits me, so I'm looking forward to play and I'm ready to play against them.

Q. We're looking forward to seeing you play, as well.

NAO HIBINO: Thank you.

Q. A question for the captain. You have a great record



so far as Japan captain. How much are you looking forward to leading your nation at these Finals?

CAPTAIN AI SUGIYAMA: Yeah, two years ago we start from the Asia Oceania regional event and we won five matches there, and also playoff against Colombia and Kazakhstan in April.

So players are really putting out so much energy to play Billie Jean King Cup with tough scheduling, but their performance is really great, and then, yeah, with the team spirit, it's so good.

Yeah, we are really looking forward to play. Yeah, we just think about one step, one match at a time, and we're looking forward to have a great time.

Q. Undoubtedly it's a blow not having Naomi here, but I imagine the team spirit you just mentioned, the hope is that that will be enough and the quality you've got to cover the absence?

CAPTAIN AI SUGIYAMA: Yeah, since Naomi got injured, she really wanted to be here, but unfortunately she couldn't be ready for this BJK Finals.

Yeah, with these players, Ena is playing for singles instead of Naomi, but, well, we have a great team spirit, and yeah, teamwork is really special for Ena. Yeah, we have great teamwork. We want to fight, and I'm really looking forward to, you know, play with these girls.

Q. Ena, you've got a brilliant record when you play for Japan. Can I just ask what does it mean when you put on that Japanese jersey and play for your nation and your team? What does that mean to you?

ENA SHIBAHARA: Yeah, it's such an honor. It was one of my dreams to play for my country. Well, for me it was actually my grandparents' dream for me, as well.

So to be able to play with my Japan flag on my shirt and to fight for my country is such a great honor.

Q. Shuko, Romania the first opponents. What are

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your thoughts on playing Romania?

SHUKO AOYAMA: Eri and I played against Monica Niculescu just two weeks ago. She's always fighting until the end. So I think it's tough opponent, of course, I think all teams. So we just try to keep fighting, and yeah, with teammate, yeah, so we try to, yeah, all.

Q. Moyuka, you have had a brilliant season, I think five ITF World Tennis Tour titles. How do you reflect on your 2024 so far, and how keen are you to finish it off in style here?

MOYUKA UCHIJIMA: Yeah, I think I had a great season this year, but it's not done yet. So hopefully we can finish the season strong with Team Japan. Let's see how it goes (smiling).

Q. Eri, what's it mean to you to play for Japan and be here at the Finals? I imagine you're sort of raring to go?

ERI HOZUMI: It means a lot for me. I'm very honored to play for my country here in Malaga.

Yeah, I'm really looking forward to play first round against Romania. It's tough opponent, but I'm try to fight with this team, yes.

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