

Billie Jean King Cup: USA vs Belgium

Thursday, April 11, 2024

Orlando, Florida, USA

USTA National Campus

Team USA

Captain Lindsay Davenport

Jessica Pegula

Madison Keys

Emma Navarro

Taylor Townsend

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Lindsay, do you want to start off with some opening remarks.

CAPTAIN DAVENPORT: Yeah. Thank you, everybody, for coming to support all of us at this wonderful event. We are very, very excited as a team. We've had a wonderful week here at the USTA campus.

These ladies have been amazing for me. My first time in this role and really couldn't have asked for a better week. Zero drama. They've all worked incredibly hard. They're all playing great tennis, too. So that has been the most exciting part.

Being able to be on court with all five and six of them with Clervie, who is not in the room, but... We've had a really amazing week. I'm incredibly grateful for all of them for not only being here but being excited about being here.

We're looking forward to the matches. It's been a great week of practice and we're ready to go tomorrow.

THE MODERATOR: We'll kick it off with questions.

Q. Lindsay and Emma and Jess, obviously not a lot of familiarity with the players on the other side of the net. How do you sort of go into that or approach that in this kind of competition?

EMMA NAVARRO: Well, it's kind of like any other match:



you're playing players that you've never played before and you're playing on, for me, I guess - unfamiliar court. Yeah, it's unfamiliar territory for me because it's my first year playing. But it's kind of something that you get used to in tennis, just dealing with being uncomfortable and being in situations that you haven't been in before, so...

Yeah, I'm excited to play. It's an honor to play alongside Lindsay and these amazing women. Yeah, I'm excited.

JESSICA PEGULA: Yeah, I mean, I think it's hard when you don't really know a player, yet Emma probably has been used to that since she's kind of shown up and playing these new players and beating everybody.

I feel like a lot of us, we kind of know everybody, we've played everyone. It's definitely a little weird for me not knowing much about girls like that.

I think, though, it can kind of be like that in these formats with the Billie Jean King Cup. Sometimes you play girls from a country that you don't play all the time and you're a little unfamiliar with.

Again, like Emma said, I think we're used to being very uncomfortable and having to adapt to certain situations. I think that's just what we're going to have to do.

Yeah, I think Clervie, our hitting partner this week, knows them pretty well. We've been going to her for a lot of info. We'll see how that, yeah, information holds up during the matches the next few days.

CAPTAIN DAVENPORT: We're going to hold her accountable (laughter).

Up on this stage, there's a lot of experience in a lot of different ways in a lot of different ties. I think we all know how players can sometimes rise and play their best tennis when representing their country. We're certainly expecting nothing less than that this weekend, no matter who's on the other side of the net.

They're a young team, maybe not quite as experienced as maybe some other players. Sometimes that works for a



young player when they're really ready to go.

My co-captain Jermaine (phonetic) has also done a lot of homework on these players. Our players will be ready to go at least versed on as much as we can give them on these players that they're going to face this weekend.

The other thing, we've been focused on ourselves, being on the highest level we can, get used to these conditions and just try to showcase our best talent possible out there.

Q. Emma, you talked about this as your first tie. If you can take us through what sort of the process was when you found out that you were going to be making your debut here. What has been putting the USA jacket on meant to you?

EMMA NAVARRO: Yeah, got the word from Lindsay that I'd have an opportunity to play. Playing for yourself as an individual, it's obviously meaningful and it's 98% of the job. Playing for a team, playing for something bigger than yourself, playing for your country, is really special. It kind of adds a different, I don't know, layer of pride and desire to do well, I guess.

So, yeah, I'm excited to just be playing on a team, be playing for the USA. It's an extreme honor. Yeah, I'm really grateful to be having this opportunity. Yeah, I'm excited to get it going.

Q. Maddie and Taylor, you guys have had some good results together as a team. How do you feel you gel, your game styles, on and off the court personality-wise? What do you think makes you guys as successful as a doubles pair?

TAYLOR TOWNSEND: I think this picture says it all (laughter). We're, like, Oh, yeah.

I mean, for me, it's been great. Madison and I have been on and off playing with each other. We had a great result at the French a couple years ago, making the semifinals there. Most recently we played in Charleston, which was fantastic, because we hadn't been on the court with each other in some years.

I know for me personally, her game style really suits how I play, especially in doubles, just being able to hit big balls from the baseline, big serves, sets me up. Makes my job easy. I really enjoy it.

But for me personally, it's always so important to have a friend, someone that you get along with, someone that you can kind of laugh and joke with, make it a little bit lighter.

You do have an extra layer of pressure, like Emma said, playing for your country and representing something bigger than yourself. You do want to perform. You want to do well, at the same time keeping things in perspective, keeping it fun, keeping it enjoyable, creating an environment that is suitable for us to play our best tennis.

So for me, having Maddie, really anybody on this team and on this bench, on the other side with me, it makes my job easier as a player.

I'm excited. I'm happy to be back on the court with her. We got some redemption from Charleston. It's great. I'm really happy that we were able to play a couple of matches and get re-familiar with each other on the same side.

Hopefully Maddie feels the same way. Take it away (laughter).

MADISON KEYS: Every time we go to play, I basically tell Taylor, I'm like, I will literally do whatever you tell me to, just whatever. You're in charge. I'll follow anything that you say.

That usually works out pretty well for us. We've known each other for a lot of years now. We've always been very close friends, so...

Like she said, you really want to be playing on that court with someone that you've known for a long time. Through moments of nerves or excitement, anything like that, you have someone who you know can help balance you out, is there for really anything.

It's always an amazing experience to be out there with Taylor.

Q. Jess, I wanted to know what affected your decision to play, to join the team. You've had a long season. Getting ready to go into a long stretch over in Europe. To fit this in, I imagine it's pretty difficult with the schedule. Lindsay had a lot of choices from the top hundred. You guys are a very powerful team. Can you just talk about what went into your decision to join the team, given all the other things you have going on this year.

JESSICA PEGULA: Yeah, I mean, as long as I was feeling okay, I wanted to play. I feel like I always do really well in a team atmosphere, in a team week. I felt like it would be really fun to kind of get a taste of that for this week before going off to Europe, where we have a really long stretch.

Obviously the proximity, close to home, it's not a far drive for me, also really helped and influenced my decision.

I feel like I'm playing some good tennis. When you start winning some matches, I want to keep playing matches and hopefully keep doing well and keep the confidence going.

Again, it's always an honor to play. I really feel like I always take something really positive from these weeks. So I wanted to kind of take that with me moving forward throughout the year, for any of us, to really kind of support each other and hopefully do really well, all of us individually, whatever we're doing.

I think I love, like, the camaraderie of that and being able to help and support each other. Hopefully we can kind of get - all of us - some momentum this week and really take it into the rest of the year. I think that would be great for American tennis, as well.

I'm always happy to join when I can. I was healthy and felt good, so that was kind of the reasons why.

Q. Your start of the year, you had some changes with the coach, wasn't as strong a start of the year as past years. Do you feel like that's starting to turn around? You won matches in the last few weeks. Has something changed and you feel like you're in the right way?

JESSICA PEGULA: Yeah, I feel like I played so many matches over the last two, three years, singles, doubles, a lot. I think I was just maybe a little burnt out and didn't start the year feeling that great or feeling super prepared with kind of a short off-season, with WTA Finals, going deep there.

I do feel like I've found my ability to compete on the court again. Even though I may not be feeling like I'm playing the best tennis I ever played, I think between Miami and Charleston, I've definitely won some really, really tough matches and kind of gotten that competitive streak that maybe went missing for like a month or so.

I know it was still there, so it was nice to fight through some really tough matches and get some really good wins. I think that will definitely help my year going forward. Hopefully I can just gain some more from this week.

Q. I'm struck by the amount of leadership we have in American women's tennis. I think there's 15 women in the top hundred in singles. Has that occurred do you? Do you feel like you're in a veteran role now with American women's tennis? People come to you and ask for advice? Is that a role that you're playing?

MADISON KEYS: I feel like everyone keeps calling me a veteran on the tour now. I guess I'm just assuming the role. In my brain I'm not, but I guess I have been out here for quite a while and been on Billie Jean King Cup teams.

I am always happy to see all of these young women doing incredibly well. I was very fortunate when I was coming up in the rankings that there was always a great group of women around me, who we really supported each other and helped out.

It was just really nice to also kind of be competing against each other, but helping each other. It was just a really nice environment to start playing on. It's amazing to see that it seems to be happening that way again.

I am happy to give any advice, if anyone is asking for it. At the same time they're all doing really well, so I don't think they need my advice.

But yeah, I think it's so great. I mean, even like our rookie Emma who's already doing fantastic. It's just really nice to see that the future of women's tennis in the USA is in very good hands.

Q. Taylor?

TAYLOR TOWNSEND: Next question (laughter).

I mean, I feel like a veteran. I mean, it kind of strikes me sometimes when I'm like, Man, I've been out here 11 years.

For me it's actually kind of a different mentality. I don't really see that because I feel like I'm just now starting in terms of having a child, coming back. I'm just restarting my career in a different way. It's a different mindset for me.

I'm now at 27, going on 28 next week, like my career-high ranking. I just feel like I'm hitting milestones in this second part of my career, quote unquote, that I haven't hit before in the last nine or 10 years being on tour.

For me, I don't really feel like I'm a veteran. I feel like I'm just kind of getting started and really getting my footing on tour. I had a lot of firsts over the past couple years, so I feel like it's been a new experience for me, like really experiencing the WTA fully for what it is. The scheduling, the traveling, really kind of fully immersing myself in that whole process.

For me, I'm always happy to give advice for people who ask for it. I'm not going to say, Hey, you need to do this. That's not me. But anyone who asks, who is inquisitive, for me in my experiences, whatever, I'm happy to give information and advice. Through the messages that I

push, my representation, how I carry myself, I try to be a pillar for people to look up to and see that things are possible.

For me, I don't really feel like I'm a veteran, but at the same time I am. I'm almost 30, so... It's crazy, I don't feel like it. Yeah, it's pretty cool just to be able to feel as though, even though I'm later in my career and later in the years, I feel like I'm kind of just getting started. I think that's pretty cool.

Q. On paper you guys are the heavy favorites. How do you get motivated to play when it looks like you are such a heavy favorite? How do you get motivated for this kind of match?

JESSICA PEGULA: We don't want to lose.

TAYLOR TOWNSEND: I mean, I think for me, I can speak for everyone on the team, being here is enough motivation. I don't think anybody would be here or told Lindsay we were going to play and agree to all of this if we weren't motivated to do our best and to win.

I can speak for myself and basically everybody on this bench. None of us show up anywhere just to be here, whether it's BJK, whether it's a tournament. We're not here to participate; we're here to dominate and to win, do whatever we need to do to get the job done.

To be here, to get dressed and put these jackets on with our names on it, 'USA' on the back, it's enough motivation in itself. Again, the pride for the country, to be able to represent our country, it being an Olympic year, everyone in high contention of being able to participate in that, there are a lot of things on the line.

For us personally, individually, as a team, there's nothing that we need to motivate us. I think it's all within us. It's our job as a team to pull it out of each other in those moments, whether it be on the singles court, the doubles court.

Now there are different rules where we can coach on the sideline. We can really be a lot more involved in being able to help the person on court being able to play their best tennis as a team.

Hopefully I'm representing the team well when I'm sitting.

CAPTAIN DAVENPORT: I'm not sure I should have told them that part of it (laughter). Got the most excitement earlier today.

TAYLOR TOWNSEND: I think being here, showing up, being able to put these jackets on, have this on our backs

is enough motivation for us to play our best tennis and get the job done as quickly and efficiently as possible so that we can all get back home and enjoy our three and a half minutes that we have at home before going to Europe (laughter).

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