

Billie Jean King Cup: USA vs Belgium

Thursday, April 11, 2024

Orlando, Florida, USA

USTA National Campus

Team Belgium

Captain Wim Fissette

Hanne Vandewinkel

Sofia Costoulas

Marie Benoit

Kimberly Zimmermann

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Wim, do you want to start with an opening statement, talk about the tie, then we'll take questions.

CAPTAIN FISSETTE: All right.

So we're very happy to be here. It's always great to be in the United States. Great to be in Florida, especially this beautiful facility.

We have a very young team this week with Hanne and Sofia, who will play the first matches. We know it's going to be obviously very difficult, but we can always dream and we can always believe that, yeah, something magic could happen this weekend.

Anyways, I feel for the team it is already a great week, gaining a lot of experience. I mean, playing these matches against top 10- and top-20 players is just a great opportunity to gain experience at the highest level.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. Hanne and Sofia, when you were growing up watching tennis and starting to play tennis, Belgium had great players. What does it mean to you now to be in the position that they were once in, representing your country?

HANNE VANDEWINKEL: Yeah, I think as a kid I really looked up to them. They were an inspiration for me



watching them on TV.

Yeah, being there myself now is definitely a special feeling. I'm, yeah, really happy. It's all been a dream for me. To do it here in the USA against this kind of a team, yeah, it will be an amazing, amazing week.

SOFIA COSTOULAS: Yeah, I think what Hanne said, it really means a lot. We've looked up to all these great players. Yeah, it's great that we can be here at this age already, yeah.

Q. Wim, you obviously have experience coaching against the U.S. players before. What sort of perspective do you bring now to the team, such a young team? What do you feel you can give to them?

CAPTAIN FISSETTE: I mean, first of all, during the training week I tried to give a little bit of my experience the last 15 years on the WTA level. Also, of course, trying to make them believe, like, there are always opportunities, possibilities to win matches like this.

Of course, strategy-wise I think honestly for them, they're going to have to start, especially with their own game plan, but still I think I know the American players quite well, and I'll help them of course with the right strategy.

Of course, with my experience trying to help them mentally during the match, it's going to be, yeah, something completely new for them, playing a top-10 player, playing a top-20 player, but also playing with a big crowd, playing with television, having the ceremony before.

Try to guide them and support them wherever I can.

Q. Hanne and Sofia, because you are playing the highest-ranked player you've played in your career, does it feel like the biggest match of your career because of that?

HANNE VANDEWINKEL: Yeah, it's definitely the highest-ranked player I ever played. It will be the biggest match of my career yet. I try not to put too much on this one match and just try to enjoy it, try my best, and we see



what's possible.

SOFIA COSTOULAS: Yeah, I think for me the same: it's going to be the highest-ranked player that I've played so far. It's going to be a very good experience for me. I'm going to try to enjoy every single point and fight for every single point, then we'll see.

Q. Are you more nervous or excited?

HANNE VANDEWINKEL: Yeah, definitely another feeling than just a regular match in a 15 or 25K. I'm looking forward to it. It's more excitement.

SOFIA COSTOULAS: Yeah, me, too. I'm very excited. We have nothing to lose, so we can play free, yeah.

Q. Marie, you won some matches here. You beat Navarro here in Florida last year. What has been working better in your game over the last 12 months?

MARIE BENOIT: Like in terms of results, you mean, since then?

Q. Even in the last 12 months, you've had some great results. Do you feel like you have been playing the best tennis of your career in the last year?

MARIE BENOIT: Yeah, I would say sometimes a little bit on and off. Definitely I feel like I've gained experience, maturity. Every year you learn something new that you can take with you for the next upcoming tournaments, matches.

Yeah, obviously also last year being part of the team in October also helped me, like, to gain experience. I'm taking that with me and trying to improve myself. That's the way everyone try to grow and to get a better player.

Q. You're the only one on the team that has played Billie Jean King Cup or Fed Cup before. What have you been telling your teammates about the experience?

MARIE BENOIT: Well, it's the third time. I played once doubles. In a team, everyone has to give the best, like, in practice, outside of tennis. It's not only on court. I think everyone has to feel good to perform on court. I think the team spirit is very important, too.

Yeah, that's how we try to build each other and lift each other up.

Q. Kim, have you been able to have some fun being here in Orlando? Any Disney fans?

KIMBERLY ZIMMERMANN: Yeah, we went to watch an NBA match. That was quite a cool experience I think for everyone. Yeah, we're having a lot of fun outside of the court also. As Marie said, we're just trying to build up as a team and to be all together, try to push each other, lift each other up. Also I think a lot of fun at practice, yeah.

Q. Wim, could you tell us a little bit about each player. Some of the fans watching won't be as familiar with the players. Could you tell us about each player's strengths.

CAPTAIN FISSETTE: About 10 years ago, I was also coaching these two once in a while. Around 2015 when I was combining a coaching job internationally with some weeks also at home where I was coaching. I had the pleasure to see these girls play when they were like 10, 11, something like that. That's really special to have them here next to me.

Yeah, obviously they went their way, I went my way. I didn't always see the development. I saw the results, I followed the results.

To speak about Hanne, what's special is she's not only a tennis player but she's also in med school. She went a little bit different route. Yeah, she made her steps. She really went step by step since I know her.

She's physically a very strong player. She has good variation in her game. She has developed a big serve already. Yeah, definitely a smart player that can adapt well to the opponent.

Would you agree?

HANNE VANDEWINKEL: I agree (laughter).

CAPTAIN FISSETTE: Sofia, I would say she's more like a power player, power hitter, who likes to dominate from the baseline with very powerful backhand and forehand. Also really good serve.

But for sure also has, like, great hand skills, good touch, some good volleys. But I would definitely say, like, she's a big groundstroke player.

You want to add something?

SOFIA COSTOULAS: I agree (laughter).

Q. Tell us also about the games of Marie and Kimberly.

CAPTAIN FISSETTE: Marie is not a power player
(laughter).

MARIE BENOIT: Okay.

CAPTAIN FISSETTE: Marie is just super consistent. Very smart player. Like, she understands the game really well. Yeah, doesn't have the one shot to really, like, win the rally, so she has to build it up. She can make great angles. I think that's probably her specialty. Also has great hand skills with dropshots and good volleys. That's Marie.

MARIE BENOIT: Yeah.

CAPTAIN FISSETTE: Kimberly, our doubles specialist, one of the best backhands I've ever seen. Super powerful. Sometimes too powerful. Like, really big serve. I would say really big serve, big backhand. Those are her major qualities.

Sometimes, yeah, maybe a little bit chaotic there with her choices, but she goes for her shots.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

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