

Billie Jean King Cup: USA vs Belgium

Friday, April 12, 2024

Orlando, Florida, USA

USTA National Campus

Team USA

Jessica Pegula

Press Conference

J. PEGULA/S. Costoulas

4-6, 6-2, 6-3

USA - 1

Belgium - 0

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. Tough one out there. Could you just start us off talking us through the match.

JESSICA PEGULA: Yeah, really difficult conditions. It was super windy. She came out I feel like playing at a pretty high level. I was a little nervous and kind of unsure what to expect. Had no idea of how she played really or what to expect.

I mean, I expected her to play well just because she has nothing to lose. Still had chances where I was up 4-2. She hit two aces, a second-serve ace, ace out wide. I feel like if I would have got that game, even though I wasn't playing my best, I was going to be able to at least scrape out that first set. Unfortunately that didn't happen and I had to fight back a little bit more this time.

Yeah, it was a tough match. I don't feel like I played my best, but was able to figure it out there in the end.

Q. As you started to get more accustomed to her game, was there anything she was doing that surprised you?

JESSICA PEGULA: She was serving really well, serving a lot better than I thought. Serving I think better than my captain, our coaches thought from looking up her matches beforehand. She was definitely serving well and hitting her spots. I think that was something that kind of surprised me



early on. Even though I had several chances to break, break points, she was hitting very good serves.

She was just steady. She was very cautious of when she would attack. She made me play a lot of balls. I was getting a little frustrated. The wind pushing me back, windy conditions. Maybe I'm missing too many short balls, stuff like that. A lot of little things.

I thought she played well, super solid, and made me have to really figure out how to win points there.

Q. You talked on court about the team, they were able to rally you. What was the team saying to you?

JESSICA PEGULA: Yeah, I mean, it was tough. I felt like I came out really flat. Even though, again, I was up in the first, I still felt flat. Maybe that was nerves or the situation, whatever. It just felt a little weird.

I think they did a really great job of just keeping my spirit kind of up. Of course, I was never going to give up or anything. At the same time I think I did start to play pretty well there for a few games.

I think they did a good job of, Stay on her, stay on her, make her keep having to play at this level the entire time. Even when I was down in a game, it was like, Keep winning these points, keep taking something out of her tank to win this game.

I think that really helped me, yeah, get through.

Q. What did Lindsay throughout the match, especially toward the middle when you were still trying to fight back? Tactical? Mental?

JESSICA PEGULA: It was a little tactical, a little mental. She was just trying to get me, You have to shift your energy, you have to get your energy up, get you the energy this game.

We did kind of talk a little bit strategy. Nothing crazy. But the wind was really shifting back and forth. Just be aware when you're with the wind, you got to make sure you get a



little extra spin, cover the ball. Basically giving myself really good margins and stuff like that. Just keep working the point and not trying to go for too much. Especially if I was with the wind, the ball was flying on me a little bit.

It was a little bit of both. It wasn't too mental, not too much strategy. It was kind of the same points of keep your energy up, let's go, keep fighting, come out good with the serve here, whatever it was at the time.

Yeah, she did a great job I think of keeping me super locked in the entire time.

Q. Seems like you came up with some special stuff in the middle of the third set to pull away. Painted three lines I think. Great backhand pass. Do you remember the point in the match?

JESSICA PEGULA: Yeah, I do.

Q. Was that kind of intentional to think I got to step on the gas and put pressure?

JESSICA PEGULA: Yeah, I just wanted to keep putting pressure on her. She was playing really well. No matter the game, the score in the game, I just wanted to keep pressure on her, make her have to work really hard to hold.

She might hold, but I think mentally that drains you. After a really long time of fighting to hold so many times in a row, then maybe you'll get a couple free errors when it gets later in the set, or maybe she gets a little tight or gets tired. I was just trying to stay in every single point and do the best I could.

Yeah, that was a big point obviously. I think maybe all the previous games where I worked really hard to stay in those games, that point kind of turned. Maybe I got lucky, but I feel like the momentum kind of shifted my way a little bit after that.

Q. Can you talk about the boys on the bench.

JESSICA PEGULA: That was a nice surprise. I didn't expect to see them. It was great. They were bringing so much energy. Obviously knowing them, they're definitely bringing energy. It was great they came out and supported. I heard they were kind of in town. I saw Chris Eubanks the other day, so I knew they were here training.

That was great. I'm so glad they got to come out. It was a little bit after the rough start. I was like, Oh, God, I don't want to lose this match with all of them right here.

But they did a great job of bringing energy and getting me

through. The entire team did.

Q. On a lighter note, what do you do with all your kits that you wear on court throughout the year?

JESSICA PEGULA: What do I do?

Q. You keep all those, right?

JESSICA PEGULA: Oh, yeah. I have way too many match outfits, for sure. I give a lot of them away. Then some of it I do like sponsors and sign them and give them to sponsors and stuff.

Honestly, I give a majority of my stuff away.

Q. To who? A foundation?

JESSICA PEGULA: I do Vania King's foundation, I think it's Serving Hope. I'll just give her bags of stuff. Some stuff I give to other kids in the area.

Actually I have a bunch of stuff in my car here that I need to give to the USTA. A bunch of shoes and stuff. Sometimes I give to Goodwill. It's kind of a bunch of different stuff.

It's crazy, we get so much stuff. I've mentioned to adidas so many times, that's who I'm sponsored by, I wish you had a better way we can donate because you give us an excess of things that I don't really need. Maybe one day they'll come up with something.

Q. Have you ever kept something that you loved so much?

JESSICA PEGULA: If there's practice stuff that I really like or like a cool jacket or something, then I'll keep it and be reusing it. I practice stuff I reuse a lot.

Honestly, the match clothes, not much.

Q. You keep the USTA gear?

JESSICA PEGULA: I keep this, like the tracksuits and stuff. I actually always have these outfits because I played United Cup, a couple team events with the colors. The colors are the same. Actually these are the same outfits I wear at United Cup. Same stuff I wore from last year, as well.

Q. You've talked about the team atmosphere, how much you love that. Are you conscious of the bench? You mentioned it pulled you through. How much does it mean to you to have that support?

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

JESSICA PEGULA: Yeah, it means a lot. I mean, I love it. I feel like maybe I should have kind of fed off their energy a little bit sooner in the match. I think that would have helped me. I think I came in a little flat. I was even telling Maddie, I didn't even look at you guys. She was like, You should have looked at us, you should have looked at us.

It was kind of like I was trying to stay focused, but at the same time I felt like I came out of too flat. If I was able to feed off of that a little bit quicker, I would have reacted a little bit better. You're not used to that when you're playing singles a lot.

In the past and this week, I've honestly always loved a team atmosphere. I feel like it always brings out the best in me, the best competitive side of me.

Yeah, I love it. I think it gives you an extra confidence boost. I love when the guys are there, too. Guys are so much more I don't know... They talk so much more crap. They're so much more confident and out front with it.

I always feel like I gain a lot of confidence around especially some of the teams, World TeamTennis, United Cups. We're mixed a lot with guys. They'll tell you stuff. You're like, Yeah, yeah, yeah, you're right. You know what, I am better than this girl. Like your positive inner voice gets a lot more positive and confident.

I don't think girls are quite as much like that, so it's nice being able to feed off the guys in that sense.

Q. This is such a big win because you got the USA off to a 1-0 start. Lindsay's first. You were under a lot of pressure.

JESSICA PEGULA: It did feel like a lot of pressure.

Q. Can you take us through are you exhaling now, think about it more later?

JESSICA PEGULA: It's funny. It did feel like a lot of pressure. I didn't really think about it being Lindsay's first as well. The fact that we didn't really know them, everyone assumes we're going to win. We hope we do. We're going to do our best.

I was telling Emma a little bit before for her debut, I was like, You kind of just have to take everything you think you know from the tour and throw it out the window of BJK Cup. It doesn't really matter what they're ranked. Nothing kind of matters. I don't know. It's like you're starting from zero. We saw that tonight. I've been on teams where I've seen that happen to our teammates or to myself, where

girls play way above whatever their WTA ranking is.

It definitely felt like a lot of pressure, again with a lot of unknowns, not knowing them, not knowing how they play. Hopefully Emma can get the job done tonight. It's still going to be tough tomorrow having to hopefully go for the win. Hopefully we can do that.

Q. Does it resonate with you when you hear instead of your name a lot of times 'USA', see it on all the posters?

JESSICA PEGULA: Yeah.

Q. Is it more a spirited kind of thing or pressure?

JESSICA PEGULA: I think both. I think there's a lot of spirit to it where it can really lift you up and make you fight and compete in kind of a different way because, again, you're not playing for yourself, you're playing for something much bigger. I think in that way it's great.

I think sometimes it can be more pressure having teammates or having people that you want to prove that the U.S. can win or you want the U.S. to do well. Whatever country you play for, you want to represent the best you can. The easiest way to do that is to win matches, to win all these events that we can play.

Yeah, I mean, it's a different kind of pressure, I would say. But I think it's really great when you also can come through and win for USA, as well. It's a great feeling. Yeah, just a little bit different, but it's there.

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