

United Cup

Thursday, 28 December 2023

Perth, Western Australia, Australia

Australia

Captain Lleyton Hewitt

Alex de Minaur

John Millman

Matthew Ebden

Ajla Tomljanovic

Storm Hunter

Ellen Perez

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Welcome, everyone, to Team Australia press conference. We'll start with a couple of introductions first and then we'll open the floor. First we will start in a row. If you could, Lleyton, we will start with you. How excited are you and how are the preparations going for Team Australia?

CAPTAIN LLEYTON HEWITT: Yeah, very exciting. Obviously coming into a new season. Yeah, we're very fortunate to be the host nation and for these guys to get the opportunity to play at home. Big event, but also get the crowd support. Only a couple weeks out from a Grand Slam, as well.

Yeah, I think everything has gone to plan so far.

THE MODERATOR: Ajla, how excited are you for the event?

AJLA TOMLJANOVIC: I'm really excited to be here. Especially last year didn't go as planned for me. To be back here healthy and ready to compete with the team just gets me really excited. To start an event first week not just for yourself but for everyone on the team, as well, is just really nice.

THE MODERATOR: Alex?

ALEX de MINAUR: Yeah, like everyone is probably going to say, we're very excited to be here, happy to be in Perth. Looking forward to start competing.

THE MODERATOR: John? I will change it up a little bit. How has it been, team dynamic with Team Australia? You've all played alongside a lot of times in the past but having both men and women on the same team, how has



it been for you, the dynamic? Are you enjoying it?

JOHN MILLMAN: Yeah, it's always good. Always good to mix it up, isn't it? I think our women in particular have had really strong years, obviously Storm great work in the doubles and Ellen also. I think we're really strong in that department.

Ajla, we all know the level she can bring. I said this yesterday, it's always hard to come back from injury, and to see her work hard, get back, show some of that winning form is awesome to see.

I'm really looking forward to cheering on the girls. And from the boys' side, obviously I've known Mattie for a long time. We've played here a couple of times. Kauguly (phonetic) and Espin, it's a long time ago.

Alex, probably throughout my career seen him grow from being an Orange Boy to now being Australia's No. 1 tennis player, really knocking on the door to that top 10. He's been one of my closest mates. To do this dance one last time with him is going to be a lot of fun. Then we've got Lleyton. Lleyton has been instrumental throughout my career.

Couldn't think of a better bunch of people to go out and represent the green and gold. It will be a lot of fun.

THE MODERATOR: We will go to the Perth locals. Storm, how has it been for you here with Team Australia and how are you expecting the crowd and the whole event to be for you this week?

STORM HUNTER: Yeah, super excited to be here in Perth, in my hometown. I've never played in front of my friends and family ever in a live match. So to be able to be here, it's very, very special.

Yeah, to be playing alongside Matt, who's also a Perth local, it's very special for us. And to have the Australian team here. We went to Rottnest Island together as a team yesterday, which was a lot of fun.

Yeah, I think we're ready to go tomorrow, and super excited to have Lleyton on the side as well obviously. He's inspired us from us being little kids watching him on the TV and to have him on the sidelines. And watching the boys in Davis Cup, they've been amazing over the last few years. To share this experience representing Australia with the men and women, I think it's very, very special and unique.



We're really going to enjoy this week.

MATTHEW EBDEN: Yeah, I know all the team has been waiting all year to come to Perth. Johnny especially from Queensland. (Laughter.)

No, I'm just really happy to be at home. It's only a few weeks ago since we were all in Spain together, the guys. It's been a real quick turnaround. To get another week to start the season at home in Australia, be the host nation, home crowd, home support, nothing better. Couldn't ask for anything more than that.

Yeah, I've played in this arena a few times for Hopman Cup over those years when it was here. Now with this fresh, added event, all the extra dimensions, I think the Perth tennis community is ready for Team Australia to compete here and bring this world-class event to Perth.

THE MODERATOR: Ellen, everyone talked about the preparations, how ready they are, how excited they are. But now first tournament of the season, first match against team GB, how do you think your team is ready for that?

ELLEN PEREZ: Yeah, I think we put in a good preseason, we've come into this December-January time with some amazing results. I think we're ready for sure. I think especially having the team we have on the bench and supporting and being there for one another, I think that will go a long way. And yeah, definitely backing our team in.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. Lleyton, you seem to have the most well-balanced team, especially in your group. How do you see it?

CAPTAIN LLEYTON HEWITT: It's a big call. Bloody tough group, to be honest, probably the toughest group there is.

Yeah, first of all we've got to worry about Great Britain, obviously. Going to be two really tough singles matches. Hopefully we can go out there and get the job done in those singles, but we'll be confident in the mixed if it comes down to that as well. Team USA won it last year, very strong, obviously, especially on the two main singles players.

So we've just got to give ourselves a chance. If we can go out there and do well tomorrow, and, you know, that gives us a chance to hopefully get through to the quarterfinals.

Q. In your role as captain, how are you sort of coming in here? What are you doing in terms of advice, at practice, at hit-outs? What's your role at

the moment?

CAPTAIN LLEYTON HEWITT: Slightly different with everyone, because they have their own coaches here as well, their own private coaches. It's more just sort of overseeing everything, making sure the practice schedule is all worked out. And to be honest, it's, you know, a little bit, you know, getting that motivation on the side of the court during matches is probably my No. 1 strength. I'll probably look forward to actually being out there with everyone starting tomorrow.

They've all had really good preseasons. The boys, feels like we were just together only a few weeks ago in Spain at the Davis Cup. So yeah, hopefully we can put in a good performance.

Q. Strong aspect of the home crowd, it's expected to be, you know, massive tomorrow night with the numbers already. How are you expecting that to fuel the team?

CAPTAIN LLEYTON HEWITT: It will be great. I just really look forward to these people and the players enjoying it. There's nothing better than playing in front of big, packed crowds. I know from my experience always playing over here in Perth, the crowds come out in droves, always supporting our players. And I think the guys and girls are really going to feed off that in our first two matches. You know, you never know. Hopefully that puts us through to get us a better chance of getting to the quarters.

Q. Ajla, you mentioned about missing out last year and '23 and the disappointment of not being able to play a full season. Does that give you added incentive coming into this United Cup and your thoughts on playing Katie Boulter?

AJLA TOMLJANOVIC: Yeah, I think it just makes me more excited to be back. I think the month of January is always the month I want to do my best. That's never changed. Yeah, having a bit of time off just makes me more motivated.

And I think I've played Katie a few times. Last time on grass, if I'm not mistaken. But she's coming off of her best year. It's going to be a really tough match. She's got a big game. But yeah, I'm just looking forward to getting out there and doing my best.

Q. Will there be any added questions for Alex going in to play Katie?

AJLA TOMLJANOVIC: Alex will do his thing first, and then that will be enough, yeah. (Laughter.)

Q. Sort of bittersweet for you with what you announced not that long ago about this being a final

season for you?

JOHN MILLMAN: Yeah, definitely. I've been very lucky to do something I'm passionate about for a very long time. I love being in Perth. I loved to be in Brisbane. Don't take offense at that, you Western Australians. But, this is a second-best thing, to be able to be with the team is absolutely awesome.

I think, really, the next couple of weeks I just want to really enjoy those last few moments with the relationships that I've built up over the years, make the most of spending a bit of time with the captain, you know, who I looked up to when I was this tall, spending a bit of time with Mattie, you know, with Alex, with the physios, and the girls, and the girls (smiling).

But no, really, just make the most of that. And then, yeah, that's all she wrote, guys. Sayonara, the last dance. (Laughter.)

Q. Alex, a little while ago Katie said she feels it's a double bluff from you about not playing mixed, and if you were to play mixed, she won't be holding back and going for you.

ALEX de MINAUR: Well, you never know until you sign on the dotted line, come that mixed. I could be an option. I have played mixed in the past.

JOHN MILLMAN: With Katie.

ALEX de MINAUR: With Katie. So I know all her weaknesses. I've watched enough of her matches to know the spots to be attacking. But yeah, if we step out on court, it's just all business.

JOHN MILLMAN: My misses doesn't have any weaknesses. That's pretty brave of you to say that. You're in trouble. He might be sleeping on the pullout in my room tonight. (Laughter.)

Q. Storm, you said you've never played in front of friends and family. Does that add a different type of nerve for yourself?

STORM HUNTER: Not really, to be honest. I'm super excited. I think it's a very special moment. Obviously I grew up playing here, training here, with the dream of becoming a professional tennis player. And to come here to play in front of them and, you know, people that have been along the journey with me, I think that's probably the most special part about it is they have been there through the good and the bad and through being a 10-year-old driving up four hours a day to come up and back to the State Tennis Centre to do my programming and friends that have been my friends before I was a tennis player, so I think that's going to be very special.

And obviously, yeah, I want to do them proud, do Australia proud, but I'm honestly excited more than anything. It's going to be an amazing experience.

Q. Alex, you're on the verge of breaking into the top 10. Do you feel like you can match up with the very best players?

ALEX de MINAUR: Yeah, look, I think I'm coming off my best season and a year where I felt like a couple of things have clicked, and I have been able to accomplish a lot of what I set my mind out to, but saying that as well, I'm pretty close to breaking into that top 10. It is a goal of mine. It's not going to come easy.

I'm doing all the right things. Hopefully a good Australian summer can put the right step into the right direction, and hopefully I can accomplish that.

Looking forward to it. It's going to be a great start of the year. You know, I've got my team backing me. I'm excited for that.

Q. Lleyton, you've got such a great doubles pairing up your sleeve. How much of a weapon do you think that could be during this tournament?

CAPTAIN LLEYTON HEWITT: It's always good to have good doubles players in these kind of formats. I think we have a lot of options, too, in the doubles, to be honest.

Yeah, it's a crucial one, isn't it? The singles is so important in the end if you're 2-Love up, but then 1-All, it's all on the line with the doubles. So the doubles specialists players have played some big matches in the past and especially this year.

We'll have full confidence in them if it is 1-All, but also, the way that the format works, we want to go out there tomorrow and try and win 3-Love, as well. Gives us a better chance of getting through to the quarterfinals with the round-robin system. Every match, especially at the start of the round robin, is awfully important.

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