

United Cup

Friday, 29 December 2023

Sydney, New South Wales, Australia

Team Canada

Captain Adil Shamasdin

Felix Auger-Aliassime

Leylah Fernandez

Stacey Fung

Press Conference



STACEY FUNG: It's nice to be back in a team atmosphere. I played college tennis. Just to be back with other players, coming together to represent Canada, super exciting. Obviously being here with Leylah, Felix, Steven and Adil, just really excited for this week.

THE MODERATOR: We'll open it up to questions.

Q. Leylah and Felix, regardless of how far you get, you'll both have top 10 matchups against Maria and Stefanos. How valuable is that in the lead-up to the Australian Open?

LEYLAH FERNANDEZ: It's extremely important. We've been training extremely hard in the pre-season. To be able to get the opportunity to have some match play against top-10 players in this format, it's going to see where we are with our level, if it's high, what we need to work on, get ready for the Australian Open.

FELIX AUGER-ALIASSIME: Likewise, it's great to see where your level is first week of the year. I think everybody is usually kind of anxious, like you want to have a good start. I think I've been a victim of that in the past.

You kind of get a bit excited like you want to show what you've been working on, play your best tennis from the first week. It doesn't always happen that way. The season is long.

I don't panic too much if it doesn't go that way. Of course, you envision it's going to go well, you're going to play well.

The first week actually everybody is pretty pumped, giving their best effort to try to win.

Q. Adil said you are looking to do some damage. I guess you don't consider yourselves underdogs in any respect.

FELIX AUGER-ALIASSIME: Not at all. I don't think so. I think what we've done in the past in team events. They just won the Billie Jean King Cup. We were Davis Cup champions more than a year ago. I think we have nothing really to prove as a country, what we can do. We want to keep winning, and we want to keep showing that we're here to stay. All of our players, the ones that are here, the ones that are not present, in Canada, they're elite players.

THE MODERATOR: Welcome to the press conference of Team Canada playing for the United Cup for the first time.

How excited are you guys to be in Sydney and how much are you looking forward to the United Cup?

CAPTAIN ADIL SHAMASDIN: Yeah, thanks for having us. We're super excited. It's the first time that Canada has been out here for United Cup. Yeah, we're happy to be here. We have a great squad out here. Yeah, looking to get through and cause some damage.

THE MODERATOR: Leylah, your thoughts?

LEYLAH FERNANDEZ: It's amazing. I'm extremely excited to be part of Team Canada. I love playing for Canada. To have the chance to play United Cup is truly an experience. Hopefully we can do well.

I just know that we're going to have a great time off court together, so that's always a plus.

THE MODERATOR: Felix, your thoughts being here in Sydney?

FELIX AUGER-ALIASSIME: It's an exciting format. I had the chance to play the older format with the ATP Cup. This is a new experience. It's nice to have the girls play with us, play some mixed doubles. It's exciting.

I think it's great for the fans as well to get that experience of seeing both men and women play at the same time, the same days. So looking forward to it. I believe in our chances. We have great players, players that have won matches, titles before. I think we have good chances of going far here.

THE MODERATOR: Stacey, a great opportunity for you to be a part of this.



Q. What is the advantage of playing in a team competition in a lead-up to a slam as opposed to one of the singles tournaments? Is there any advantages?

LEYLAH FERNANDEZ: Honestly, I don't know. It's the first time I'm playing a team competition leading up to a slam.

What I do enjoy about this is the positive energy. I get to ask some advice from my team members, have some good time on court. I think also I'll learn from them. It's not just going to be me and myself in this tournament. I get to share the wins and the losses with them. We get to pump ourselves up even more.

I get to use that leading up to future tournaments, and this time it's for the Australian Open. We'll see how it goes. I just know that it's going to be an amazing experience.

Q. Felix?

FELIX AUGER-ALIASSIME: Yeah, for me what I like, I had the experience two years ago where in these events you can actually lose a match and still end up winning the tie and end up winning the whole competition. I actually lost two matches when we won two years ago here (smiling).

In the end, like you finish the week thinking I played well, I won the final match, so you're full of confidence. In another tournament, I would have been out after the first match. I think that's a really good thing that happens in any event that we play, here with the doubles and mixed doubles, you can have a chance to, yeah, get like a payback or to get a second chance.

Q. Given the extra opportunity to play for Team Canada, how useful is this tournament in a lead-up to an Olympic year?

LEYLAH FERNANDEZ: Go ahead.

FELIX AUGER-ALIASSIME: Yeah, I think it's good. I had the experience to play in Tokyo with Gabby, who is one of the best women's doubles players we ever had in Canada. It didn't go so well for us, but it was one of my first experiences to have it.

I think it's nice that Leylah and I can play here. We'll see how it goes leading up to the Olympic Games.

I think going into this year with a different mindset than 2021. I wanted to go and see what it was like to compete. This year I take it way more as really an objective, something that I really want to prepare well for, like any other big tournament. It's nice to get a feel of playing mixed here and see how it goes.

Q. Felix, you talked about the success of Canada in recent years. What do you put the success down to? Is there something in the water over there in Canada?

FELIX AUGER-ALIASSIME: No, not exactly.

LEYLAH FERNANDEZ: Maple syrup (laughter).

FELIX AUGER-ALIASSIME: No, I think, yeah, I mean, the Federation invested a lot in the last 15 years to try to promote the sport, to try to get more opportunities, to try to invest financially in young players.

I was lucky to be a part of that group. Many players before. Milos on the men's side was the first one to really break through on the international level, the big scene.

I think year after year we kept improving. Players rising in the rankings, motivating each other. Also, it makes other players believe that they can do it.

Now you have not just one or two. You have many players that are also good, between 100, 200 in the world. I think that's great to see we have more depth than we had before.

It's very encouraging. I think, yeah, it's a combined effort of the Federation and the individuals, all the players that put in the work and did great things in the last years.

Q. You talk about team tennis. There's not much of it on the ATP and WTA circuits. Do you think the bodies could do more? Do you think there should be more team events? Do you enjoy it, or do you think it's good the way it is?

FELIX AUGER-ALIASSIME: You want to take that?

LEYLAH FERNANDEZ: Okay, I'll take it (smiling).

It's tough. I love team competitions. It's great. It's great for the sport, but it's tough because the year is extremely long. A lot of tournaments. Some players are tired. We need the break. It's hard to schedule these types of competitions.

I think what we can do is voice our opinions, say what we want, see what the WTA or the ATP players want, and hopefully the bodies can listen to us and just make it happen.

But, like I said, it's hard. The schedule doesn't really allow it. We try to enjoy ourselves as much as possible. We need to stay healthy. That's always our main goal, being healthy throughout the year so we can have a successful year.

Q. Felix, mixed doubles, can you remind how much you played over the years and your approach going into mixed?

FELIX AUGER-ALIASSIME: I'm not going to lie and say I played a whole lot of it.

Yeah, mixed doubles at the Olympics a couple years ago. I'm trying to remember growing up if I played any. Maybe once. Of course, it's not something we play a lot. I've never played in a slam, for example, in a slam.

I think in the end we make a bigger deal than what it actually is. We've all played good doubles, and at the end it's the same thing. Now the level, like the girls are playing really good that you have to almost play normal. You can't go into it with a different mindset than if I was playing like a regular doubles with a guy. I think you go in with the same mindset, trying to win, trying to hit your targets, and play normal.

I think that's also respect to everybody on the court. You try to play to win. You're not trying to play any games. We're all competitive, all just trying to win.

Q. Leylah, the format of this event lends itself to a lot of decisive mixed doubles rubbers. If you get to play those, you understand the importance of the mixed?

LEYLAH FERNANDEZ: Yeah, no, it's extremely important. I was lucky enough to play a couple mixed doubles the past few years. I've been playing a lot of doubles. That has always been fun.

As Felix said, I think a lot of women are actually getting stronger and faster. Sometimes we cause a lot more damage on court. I think it's just going to be exciting. I get the chance to play against, like I said, top players. Mixed doubles is extremely important.

For me, I'm just going to go out there with that mindset of we're out there to win. It's not just to get some matches in because we want to win.

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