

United Cup

Friday, 29 December 2023

Sydney, New South Wales, Australia

Team Germany

Captain Torben Beltz

Alexander Zverev

Maximilian Marterer

Kai Wehnelt

Angelique Kerber

Tatjana Maria

Laura Siegemund

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Welcome to the press conference of Team Germany. We'd like to hear from the captain first, then Angie, how excited she is to be back on tour, and Sascha as well. Your chances for this tournament? Let's start with the captain.

CAPTAIN TORBEN BELTZ: Yes, hello first of all. Team Germany here. This team ace very great team. I'm very happy to be captain of this great team, of everybody.

The preparation is going very well. We arrived like four, five days ago. We had good practice sessions. I think everybody is really ready.

Me and Angie had a long preparation because we had a long off-season because from August or September we started, so that was very long.

I think everybody's ready, and Team Germany is ready to compete and to have a good week here.

THE MODERATOR: Angie, how excited you are to be back?

ANGELIQUE KERBER: I'm really excited, to sitting here again actually long time. I'm really excited to be back in Sydney, to compete again. I mean, like Torben said, we had a long pre-season.

Yeah, it's a little bit changed in my team and in my life, as well. Yeah, I'm ready. I think we had a good few months. I can't wait to be on court and to play matches again.

This is for what I was, yeah, practicing the whole few weeks and months. I think I'm excited and ready to go.



THE MODERATOR: Sascha, how do you see the chances for the team in the group and the rest of the tournament?

ALEXANDER ZVEREV: Yeah, hopefully better than last year (smiling).

No, I'm excited to be back. I'm excited to hopefully play a lot better than I did last year. Yeah, it's a team event.

I mean, me and Angie, we played together a few times at the Hopman Cup. We made it to the finals there twice. We are just really excited to be again teammates and team members of Germany, of the United Cup. Hopefully gives us a chance to go very far here in this tournament.

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

Q. Angie, you've drawn Caroline for your first match. What do you make of the way she's progressed in your time out of the game? What kind of challenge does she represent?

ANGELIQUE KERBER: You mean Caroline?

Q. Yes.

ANGELIQUE KERBER: We had so many tough battles in the past. I know she is a tough opponent. I think, yeah, I have to play good tennis. She played well the last one and a half year when I was out. I think it will be a challenge for me, as well.

But I'm ready for it. I'm looking forward to have matches like this, as well, before the Australian Open.

Q. How are you feeling physically?

ANGELIQUE KERBER: I'm feeling good so far. I think for me the biggest challenge will be the weather because I was, yeah, practicing indoors actually in Poland the last few months. I think I'm a player which can get ready soon also in the heat. I like the heat. I like Australia.

I'm really excited for my first match because it's always different if you play matches or you practice. Everything is different.

To being here with the team, also in the background, this is why I choose as well to play here. We had the great



atmosphere so far. It's great to be also part of the team.

Q. Are you expecting to be maybe a bit emotional when you get to Melbourne, returning to the Australian Open?

ANGELIQUE KERBER: We will see. Of course, it is really a special tournament for me. I'm looking forward to get there. Now I try to focus to be here, to having good matches, to enjoying the time with my team, playing as well good tennis. Next is Melbourne.

Q. Alex, obviously you were disappointed with your performance last year. It sounds like you put a lot of pressure on yourself in terms of leading this team. How do you manage that?

ALEXANDER ZVEREV: I think generally the situation is different this year. Last year I'm coming back after a very serious injury. I was telling myself that I'm healthy, but I wasn't. I think it was very clear once I stepped on the court, I was very far away from actually being 100% and being healthy.

That's why I think also Angie is a bit different to me because, yes, I was out for a very long time, but I was out for very different, very bad reasons, with basically a broken ankle.

I think this is where she can help the team a lot as well. I think she's healthy. When you're healthy, I think you find your level quicker than when you are recovering from something. I think just generally speaking, I definitely wanted to come back here to play a very unique event in a way, as well.

But, yeah, give Germany a better chance of competing and better chance of winning, as well.

Q. Given the changes to the format this year, are you happy with the changes? How do you think that will suit Team Germany?

ALEXANDER ZVEREV: I mean, if I can answer, I understand the changes. I understand why they made the changes. I think for us, for Team Germany, I think Germany is a very deep team when it comes to team competitions where we have a lot of great male and a lot of great female tennis players.

I mean, if we wanted to, we would have had two top-30 male tennis players. Angie is No. 1. Tatjana is No. 2 on the female side, which is a very deep team, with the four singles matches. Laura in the mixed doubles is a great add to that, as well.

The changes are made because there are nations and countries where the teams are not so deep. I think there were a lot of matches last year where it's such a big

event if the world No. 300 was playing against the world No. 400 or 450, it was not suitable towards such a big event. That's why the changes were made. I completely understand, and I completely get it.

We'll see how it goes. I think last year was a very interesting event. I hope this year it's going to be the same.

Q. The next time you'll be together in this sense would be the Olympics. What is it like heading into an Olympic year?

ALEXANDER ZVEREV: Yeah, I mean, it's great. It's definitely something that I really much look forward to. As defending champion, not defending champion, I think the Olympics are always very, very special. It is probably the biggest event of the year, in my opinion, in my eyes, because the Olympics is once every four years. It is special in that regards.

But, yeah, I'm definitely looking forward to being in the Olympic Village again. I'm definitely looking forward to being in these small-ish apartments where you're all together, just enjoying the time. That's what I did in Tokyo. Kind of worked out very well.

Q. Laura, let me ask you about mixed doubles. They can be very important rubbers when there are only three matches per tie. Your thoughts on the importance of the mixed?

LAURA SIEGEMUND: Yeah, I think with the new format, also before every match was important, but with this format even more so. Yeah, it's exciting to play this format. We'll see how it goes.

Q. Alex, you had the great comeback season last year. I'm guessing the focus for this year is a little bit different. You're not trying to work your way back up in the rankings. How do you approach this season?

ALEXANDER ZVEREV: Yeah, I mean, we're back to hopefully somewhat a normal mindset. I'm saying normal mindset because last year I came to Australian Open, and I openly said in all the press conferences, I'm not here to win the tournament, which is not the mindset I was going into tournaments usually.

I'm past that now. I'm No. 7 in the world. I won a few titles last year where I've beaten some great players, as well. I think I'm past that now hopefully. I can look forward to being a contender again. That's what I want to be. That's the position I want to put myself in.

Yeah, that's the way it is. I'm looking forward to the big events this year.

Q. Maximilian, if Sascha plays singles and mixed, you might not have a lot of playing opportunities. Why come to an event like this? Is it to learn from Alex, just be part of the team spirit?

MAXIMILIAN MARTERER: Well, a bit of both actually. It's nice to watch Sascha playing. Also he's a great player. There's definitely a lot I can still learn from him. But, also, I love to play team competitions. I experienced the Davis Cup, for example, this year again after some time. I felt how nice it is to play in a team.

That's why I'm here actually.

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