

United Cup

Friday, 27 December 2024

Sydney, New South Wales, Australia

Team Switzerland

Captain Sandra Naef

Dominic Stricker

Remy Bertola

Jakub Paul

Belinda Bencic

Celine Naef

Conny Perrin

Press Conference



DOMINIC STRICKER: Yeah, it's a perfect chance for me to play here, to have some matches. I think it's great to have Belinda and team. Because of her we're all here. No, it's great to have all the guys here. I'm very happy to be here before Melbourne.

THE MODERATOR: We'll open up to questions.

Q. So this is a question especially to Conny and Jakub, how do you decide when you're coming to play mixed doubles if you're going to come for this tournament? Can you just talk me through the thought process of the reasons why you come to play.

JAKUB PAUL: I think, well, my role is to support the team as best as possible. The decision on who's going to play I think is going to be in the team, and also with the coaches we have here. Yeah, some of the best-ranked in doubles, but I think the decision, like, is also with Dominic, and in the end we have couple good options for the doubles.

Yeah, doesn't matter which way the decision is going to go. I'm just going to be there to support the team the best I can.

CONNYPERRIN: For me, it was no options. Like, I love team events. I've had a long career. I played a long time singles, and now I had the chance to help the ranking in doubles to be part of the event.

Yeah, no, it was really exciting for me to be around all of them. I obviously don't know how much longer I'm going to play, so I'm trying to use the best out of it. And as I said, it's such a special event.

Also the chance that Belinda is here and also very special that what she's done. She's been inspiring all of us in Switzerland for many years.

No, I'm just very grateful to be here and supporting the team. And, yeah, let's go (smiling).

Q. Just for the captain, you've got two very strong mixed doubles teams who you're playing in this group. How do you go preparing for those undoubtedly very tough matches?

CAPTAIN SANDRA NAEF: Big question.

THE MODERATOR: Welcome to Team Switzerland's press conference. We'll start with Sandra, the team captain. Welcome to Sydney and the United Cup. Talk us through how excited you guys are to be here and representing your country.

CAPTAIN SANDRA NAEF: We are very excited, and we enjoy the time together. It's a cool possibility to spend time together. It's not often in tennis. Yeah, we enjoy and are grateful to be here.

THE MODERATOR: Belinda, welcome back on tour. You're coming back after a break after you had your daughter Bella. Talk us through how you're feeling, how your form is and your fitness ahead of your return to the WTA Tour, at least.

BELINDA BENCIC: Yeah, I'm very excited to be back. It feels like yesterday. It's been really the best time of our life so far, so we're super happy with the new life. It's a big change, but I think for the better.

Yeah, I mean, I'm excited to play. I didn't expect, you know, for my return to go this fast. I played some tournaments last season, as well, just, like, lower-category tournaments to get into the rhythm.

I wouldn't say I'm, like, at my best shape so far yet, but I'm definitely on the way there. And yeah, I'm very, very confident with a lot of match play I can hopefully get into good form.

THE MODERATOR: Dominic, you're leading this team on the men's side. How much are you looking forward to getting some good matches ahead of the Australian Open?



BELINDA BENCIC: Be careful, maybe he's from France or something.

CAPTAIN SANDRA NAEF: That could be.

Yeah, we take -- I don't know how to explain or to answer, so I have to check with my team.

BELINDA BENCIC: No, I think we're just going to look match by match. You know, it depends also on the score after singles who's gonna play. So we don't even have that decision yet.

We're practicing the mixed doubles for sure, but it depends on so many aspects. Me coming back after a long time, you know, seeing how the body is going to hold up. You never know how the singles are going to go, so that's why we're really happy everyone is in the team and everyone is ready to play.

I think everyone can, yeah, step in and be ready.

Q. Belinda, to you, where do you feel you are at the moment as far as your level is concerned? I know you're saying you played some lower-level tournaments this year. But if you had to gauge on your level at the moment, what would you say?

BELINDA BENCIC: Well, I'm definitely improving every day. So that's very motivating for me to see improvement. I think my tennis is there. I think that's like riding a bike. I don't think that you lose that.

But it's definitely the physical side that I can still improve. I already did a lot of improvement. I think the most that I needed to improve was my movement, was the reaction, and just, like, yeah, the physical condition.

Yeah, I feel like now it's going to be much hotter, I'm maybe going to play three sets, maybe I'm going to play two matches a day. So that's for sure a test.

I mean, I cannot really tell you percentage-wise how I feel, because obviously the tennis is different than the physical side. I feel definitely over maybe 75, 80%. I feel that, you know, my level is there. I definitely feel like I can compete and beat a lot of players.

Now it's just about getting that match practice again and just having all these match situations, that gives me the experience and confidence again.

Q. Obviously a major change for you personally, mentally, physically. A lot of mothers on the tour now. Did you seek any sort of thoughts, suggestions, advice from some of the other mothers, even ones that are just retired like Angie Kerber? How have you adapted to the new phase of your life?

BELINDA BENCIC: Yeah, I think we've adapted really good. That's definitely one thing that Bella taught us in the last eight months, to be very spontaneous and not to be, like, not to plan everything, because she's gonna do it her way anyway, and she doesn't really have a routine yet. It's always about adapting, and problem-solving once the problem is there and not, like, overthinking everything.

So yeah, I've also talked to a lot of moms on the tour, but I've talked to them more like friends and moms instead of athletes. I mean, they were able to give me a lot of tips, for sure. It's been really inspiring to see, you know, many other moms, you know, being able to come back, also physically, also tennis-wise, you know, they came back to the same level.

That supported our decision to having a baby in the middle of my career, because I knew that, you know, it's possible to come back, it's possible to be in the same level, and even to be even better.

So for me it was more important to have a family, so I choose this decision, but also, yeah, based on the inspiration I took from the other moms, as well.

Q. For Remy and Jakub, just how nice is it to start the season with the team with the best players from your country just to experience this and represent Switzerland?

REMY BERTOLA: Well, when Domi called me and asked me do you want to join us for United Cup, I said, why not? No, no. Yeah, no. It's a great opportunity. Now they are laughing, but on my side was a great opportunity because I'm, like, not that high in the ranking yet. So just to be here and enjoying time with all these, having the team next to me and supporting the team and just to be here for me was a great experience.

So I take a lot of good things in this ten days with them, and I will bring it to the 2025.

JAKUB PAUL: Yeah, I can almost repeat what Remy said, but it's just an honor representing Switzerland. It's always nice to play in a team because we don't get the chance to play a lot in a team.

It's super nice to experience it here in Australia. Also for me it's the first time here, so it's a very nice experience. Yeah, thanks to Dominic and Belinda, we are here.

Yeah, it's just super nice to be here. Also, for me, for my doubles ranking, it's nice to see all the other doubles players here, what they do, how they play, so it's a great opportunity for me to also learn something.

Q. Belinda, a bit off-topic, when you were coming up, you had Roger and Stan and all that, and now

people like Domi have someone like you to look up to and learn from. How interesting is that for you to sort of have that different role, I suppose?

BELINDA BENCIC: It's just a thought I had earlier when Conny was so nice and she said that I inspire some other players in Switzerland, and it's almost like a pinch-me moment, because you're not really aware of that, because you're just kind of doing you and just practicing and looking up to other players like Martina and Stan and Roger.

So it's crazy to be in that, not in the same position obviously, they are, like, in a different position, but to be in a similar position where maybe younger players look up to you. It's really, yeah, a pinch-me moment. It's a nice moment, and for sure it's something to be aware of, to try to be a role model and to inspire the next generation.

Hopefully we can all do that here and people in Switzerland are very interested to see the United Cup. They love team events, and I think we all love team events. It brings out the best in us, so hopefully we can, you know, yeah, do Switzerland proud and, yeah, inspire.

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