

United Cup

Friday, 27 December 2024

Perth, Western Australia, Australia

Team Greece

Captain Theodoros

Angelinos

Petros Tsitsipas

Stefanos Tsitsipas

Maria Sakkari

Despina Papamichail

Valentini Grammatikopoulou

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Welcome to Perth. Your first tie here is against Spain, who is playing right now. Is it an advantage to watch them play first while you continue to prepare as a team?

CAPTAIN THEODOROS ANGELINOS: Yeah, I guess it's always good to have an extra day of practice and get acclimatized to the conditions, do a bit of scouting to be ready for the game tomorrow.

Maybe it is a small advantage.

THE MODERATOR: What are your first impressions of Perth and the event overall?

MARIA SAKKARI: Well, it's actually my third time personally here in Perth. I love the city. I think the arena is super nice. The court plays very nice, I guess.

It's a great event. It's great to start with the United Cup. I'm super happy to reunite with the team, just create some new memories with them.

Super excited for tomorrow.

THE MODERATOR: What are all your goals this week and for the Australian swing overall?

STEFANOS TSITSIPAS: My goal this week is to qualify for Sydney. I think this is something that our team deserves as the lineup of players that we have.

Another goal that I have for the Aussie swing is try to replicate what I've done a few years back of maybe getting to the finals of the Australian Open again, which served as an incredible memory, the first one in my



career in terms of having the opportunity to play at a Grand Slam final with the best that our sport has to offer, Novak Djokovic.

I hope I get some good matches here because these matches actually are super important for me when I try and build momentum. If things go well here, I don't see any reason for me not to believe that I'm capable of doing the same or continuing that same momentum, carrying it onto Melbourne.

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

Q. Judging from last year going into this year, maybe you're looking for a bit of a reset mentally maybe with the game. What are you looking ahead for in 2025?

STEFANOS TSITSIPAS: I'm looking kind of reinventing myself. I felt like I've been stuck in a pattern over the last few months. I haven't been able to kind of unlock the pattern or get out of it.

I'm looking for a fresh, new 2025. That doesn't mean to suddenly just start winning everything. That's not the point of this (smiling). It's just to see a trajectory of constant improvement and improving in all fields in my career, but also in my outside life.

I want to have stability in my life. Last year was a little bit up and down in terms of results, in terms of feelings outside of the court and on court. So I'm just hoping 2025 brings stability, a lot of health. I also struggled with those kind of issues in the past.

I'm hoping just for a healthy 2025 and one that brings me lots of good memories. It doesn't have to be happiness, just lots of good memories.

Q. When you mentioned you were stuck in that pattern, how frustrating was it for you? What things did you try to get out of it?

STEFANOS TSITSIPAS: You have to reflect, sit down, and see what doesn't serve you anymore, let the things that don't serve you kind of remove them or try to get them out of your life and refresh, restart, regroup, and go for those that you think that actually have purpose and can benefit you in what you're doing.

Q. Starting the year outside of the top 10 now, does that maybe ease the pressure, or do you prefer that



pressure on you?

STEFANOS TSITSIPAS: Honestly, I don't think there's that much pressure when you're outside of the top 10. Well, probably there is some pressure in terms of like now it's my opportunity to add on points and get some good weeks going. Looking forward to it.

Otherwise, I wouldn't say there's pressure because I don't have a lot of points. At least the points I've been accustomed or used to in the last couple years, having consecutively been inside the top 10.

When you're on the tour for so many years, you know what it takes to get back to where you remember being. There is a pattern there of what it requires you to get back there. You just need to be consistent throughout the year. You can't show up one day and not the other. You have to work it out from January all the way to November.

Q. You touched on the memory of reaching the final against Djokovic. How often do you think back to that? How special was that?

STEFANOS TSITSIPAS: It's funny enough, I was talking about it yesterday with Theo. Was it with you yesterday in practice?

CAPTAIN THEODOROS ANGELINOS: No.

STEFANOS TSITSIPAS: It was with someone else. It certainly is my best memory, let's say, on court ever. Even though I lost that final, it was such a big, important moment in my career because I was suddenly faced with perhaps a potential Grand Slam win and my all-time childhood dream, which was to finish No. 1 in the world. Both were right in front of me.

It's probably the only time in my life that I felt like everything is really under my control and I just need to focus 100%. Unfortunately didn't happen.

But the importance of it mesmerized me and made me kind of emotional that I'm getting so close to what I was dreaming for my entire life.

Q. Stefanos, this is your second time in Perth, your third United Cup in a row. How do you feel the tournament has changed over that time?

STEFANOS TSITSIPAS: The tournament itself?

Q. Yes. Have you noticed any growth, positive changes?

STEFANOS TSITSIPAS: It has actually developed much better over the years I feel like. There is a better structure and organization than what I saw in the first

edition of it.

I'm just extremely happy the United Cup keeps on living, keeps on going because there were a few doubts in the past few years is it going to be able to sustain itself, is it something that's going to last?

So far it's shown that it's still sticking around, still gives the opportunities to players like Stefanos, who hasn't had the opportunity to play an ATP event before. He scored some good wins here before. I was there supporting him as much as I could.

So I think it just brings something beautiful into kind of a symphony and allows players that haven't had the experience or the opportunity to experience something like that, to come out and play.

Q. Maria, this is your third time in Perth. What is it that keeps bringing you back?

MARIA SAKKARI: I think the team spirit. It's just a different event for us 'cause obviously our wins count individually, but at the same time we play as a team and we represent Greece, that we all really love.

It's just a very nice event to get the season started and get some good matches, play under different circumstances, just because of the team and the bench and everything.

It's just a very special event. I always love to be surrounded by all the people. I'm just so happy that I get to experience that once again.

Q. Maria, you've spoken about 2024 being a bit of a journey of resilience for you. How did you spend your off-season?

MARIA SAKKARI: I basically didn't have an off-season. I've been injured for the last five months. I tried to play the US Open, but it wasn't successful. I basically got injured in the Olympics. After that I didn't get any practice until New York.

I didn't have a regular off-season. It was probably a rehab season, I would say. But it was tough in a way, but at the same time it was nice to have downtime and just be home for longer than two weeks and just do different stuff other than tennis: see my friends for more than two hours a week, just spend time with my family, just be a normal person for a couple of months.

Seeing the positives out of that negative thing that's called an injury, it was a great lesson. I had a good time being out of the tour.

Q. Starting the season in Australia where there is so much Greek support, how much of a boost does that

give?

MARIA SAKKARI: For us, I mean, we've said it many times, but especially in Melbourne it's like playing at home. Just coming back to Australia, living the experience again and again, just seeing the support, all the Greek community, everyone supporting us every single match, it's just something very special.

It's probably the best trip of the season. It's obviously tough to leave during Christmas, leaving your family back. At the same time once you get here, it's just the best place to be. I love Australia. I love being here.

Q. Petros, you are not only representing Greece, but do you feel like it's cool to kind of represent the Tsitsipas name as well?

PETROS TSITSIPAS: Why do you ask me that?

Q. Because you're here with your brother. Your teammates from Greece, but also your brother, so I thought you might find that nice to also represent the family name. Is that something you've thought about? Doesn't sound like it.

PETROS TSITSIPAS: I've been representing my name my whole life. I've never thought about it this way.

Q. (No microphone.)

PETROS TSITSIPAS: Well, it's definitely great. I feel good having that family name under my belt. I feel like sometimes it's important not to think about it too much and just be a normal tennis player on the court and do what you got to do, yeah.

Q. What sort of goals have you set for 2025?

DESPINA PAPAMICHAIL: Yeah, personally for me, 2024 was a tricky season. I mean, it was historical 'cause we played the Olympics with Maria. Yeah, I managed to play the quallies for all the Grand Slams.

I as well dropped in the ranking. For us, we are a bit in the ranking of 150 to 250. We have to mix ITFs and WTAs. The points changed a bit in the ITFs, so it was difficult to keep up.

So, yeah, I dropped a bit. My main goal is to get back to my highest ranking and why not even improve it and break into the top hundred of singles for the first time.

VALENTINI GRAMMATIKOPOULOU: I experienced the same as Maria this year. I got injured very badly, my back. It was very tough emotionally and physically to experience it because I didn't know what's next.

In the same time, the other hand, like, I could see my

family. I could see another side of this life. I was also happy to experience it. Like, I was injured, but I saw my family, my loved ones. I could see my potential in another stuff than just tennis.

Of course, I have big goals for '25. Just to be healthy, first of all, to start with that. Put a lot of effort on health, fitness. Yeah, the rest just have big goals and try to play your best tennis and improve.

STEFANOS SAKELLARIDIS: For me, yeah, I had a good year in 2024. I managed to make so many changes in my career, in my life. Able to help me develop as a player. It was like a year that I was able to build so many important things for what's going to come up in my career as a player.

I'm ready for 2025 to try to win as much as I can, try to win many tournaments, up the rankings, try to play in the better tournaments.

Q. Stefanos, can I ask you for your thoughts on Joao Fonseca who has just won in the Next Gen Finals?

STEFANOS TSITSIPAS: I was talking to him in Halle this year. We had a few hours together. He was someone I already saw potential in before he wins the Next Gen Finals. I was sure he was going to be someone that is going to show big results in the upcoming months.

I personally believe it's just the beginning of him raising up in the rankings and showing his actual true potential.

I'm happy for him. He's a very humble kid. That's what I liked about him. I had a conversation. I really liked how down to earth he is, how determined and focused in regards of his goals he is. That is something that definitely stood out.

I think we're going to see big things from him in the next few years, as long as he stays the same way he is now. I see no reason he would under-deliver.

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