

United Cup

Thursday, 1 January 2026

Perth, Western Australia, Australia

Team Greece

Captain Petros Tsitsipas

Despina Papamichail

Stefanos Tsitsipas

Maria Sakkari

Stefanos Sakellaridis

Sapfo Sakellaridi

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Can you give us your thoughts on playing here at the United Cup?

MARIA SAKKARI: Yeah, we've been playing for the last four years since the event started. It seems like we kind of like it. It's our third time in Perth, which we really enjoy playing here of course. We like the team spirit because we rarely have it during the year.

I feel like we're all very excited to be back and ready to get the season started.

STEFANOS TSITSIPAS: I feel like this court hasn't changed much in the last five years of the United Cup (smiling). It's great to be back again.

We've had a good team spirit the last couple of years playing the United Cup. It's been an incredible journey to get started with. Here we are again in Perth. I feel like we can soon be baptized here.

We've played here plenty of times. Perth seems like it's becoming part of one of the biggest cities of Greece little by little. I'm glad that we're back. It's a great way to start the season. Couldn't ask for anything better right now, honestly.

I'm really hoping each and every one of our teammates is ready and prepared for war. We are going big. We are fighters. We're Greek, so we're going to try to make the most out of it (smiling).

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. Stefanos, it was a tough autumn. Could you go into how you feel now and how you went on your fitness journey in the autumn? Probably a lot of



different experiments, whatnot, to get your back sorted.

STEFANOS TSITSIPAS: What kind of experiments?

Q. Doctor here, doctor there.

STEFANOS TSITSIPAS: Yeah, right. I did spend some time recovering. I mean, as you know, I was absent from the courts for a long time. The last three or four tournaments of the season I could barely hold up. So it was important to try and find something that will bring me back again healthy.

I did all the necessary actions and took all the necessary steps to rehabilitate and get back to what I remember myself being back at.

So now so far, you know, I think it makes for a great feedback knowing that I've done my whole pre-season without any pain, without any discomfort. I'm just hoping that stays this way and I can deliver that starting with United Cup and hopefully for the 2026 season.

Q. Maria, going into this United Cup last year, you were recovering from the shoulder injury. How was your off-season this year? What are you excited about playing in Perth?

MARIA SAKKARI: Yeah, I mean, it was a very, very tough season last year. I'm not going to lie. It wasn't easy to handle, but at the same time, I feel like I learned a lot. I just had some time to recover and just think about the things I want to improve for this season.

I had five weeks of very good practice and had time to put in a lot of work and just think of the things that I want to work on. It went really well, but the results will show how good of a work we did put. Obviously not just in this tournament, but during the whole season of 2026.

The most important thing is that I have full belief that I can come back to where I was. I'm going to try everything I can in order to put myself back to that spot.

Q. Talking about your singles matches, you face Naomi and Emma. What do you think of them as opponents?

MARIA SAKKARI: I mean, they're very, very tough matches. Two very different players. Naomi's an ultra-aggressive player. She has been playing very



good, if I'm not mistaken, the second half of the season, of last year.

Emma, I have a negative record against her obviously. I'm aware of that, but she's a solid player. She's very tough to play. Both of them are very tough to play.

As I said, I've worked on things. I'm going to try and deliver them on the court and see how it goes.

Q. What are you hope to get out of your time here in Perth?

DESPINA PAPAMICHAIL: Yeah, I mean, it's a very good opportunity for us to be here in such a tournament, to be able to practice and compete against best players of the world.

Of course, when you are on tournament, you want to do the best and to win. But the focus of course is as well in the next tournament, for me for Australian Open quallies, to be able to be back again after a tough last year.

But I've worked really hard, so I'm pretty confident for this competition and for the next one.

SAPFO SAKELLARIDI: Well, honestly, first of all, I want to say thank you for the opportunity to be here. It's really nice. The experience is so good to see all these players playing. The practice, of course, for the next tournaments will be really good to prepare here.

I really enjoy it, so yeah.

Q. Stef, mixed doubles is a big part of this event. Can you talk about how much fun you enjoy playing with Maria?

STEFANOS TSITSIPAS: Look, I couldn't ask for a better partner to play mixed doubles with. I've known Maria for a very long time. I feel like our mixed doubles matches have built a lot of trust and confidence in what we're good at and what we're not so good at.

Obviously there's a tradeoff. We know our strengths. We know our weaknesses. We try and use that type of information to try and come up with the best doubles strategy and plan whenever we have the chance to play.

We actually reflecting on it, we've had so many amazing comebacks, but also appearances, including the Olympics. Thinking about it, 15 years ago I would never have pictured myself in a situation like this where I get to be on top of the game that I love the most with the female equivalent from my country.

I don't know from Maria's side, but I'm kind of living my dream on it. To be here right now, it's a privilege. Team Greece, Greece is generally a small country. We don't

have a big history when it comes to the sport of tennis. So to be part of the United Cup and to be trying to fight for a title at the United Cup, I would I guess call it the biggest privilege our sporting history is having right now.

We obviously have a lot of other superstars in other sports, too. This is a great opportunity to try and fight for something that I feel like we are worthy of in the next couple of days.

Q. Given that you only played Davis Cup after the US Open, haven't had a lot of matches or tournaments, are you more excited than normal to start a new season?

STEFANOS TSITSIPAS: The thing that I'm most excited about is trying to see my actual training that I've been putting in the last couple of weeks, how it responds in regards also to my back, because my biggest concern has been, can I actually finish a match? That was what was going through my mind the last six to eight months. I was constantly thinking, if I win a match, will I be able to come back the next day and play another match without pain?

I got really scared after my US Open loss with my back, because I just couldn't walk for two days. When things like that happen, you start reconsidering the future of your career.

I'm just hoping 2026 doesn't bring any of that. I went to actually visit one of the best sports doctors in the world, and he so far is promising to heal me. I'm hoping this stays for 2026. That's my biggest wish for 2026, is to finish matches and not have to think about any issues regarding my back.

Q. Younger Stefanos, you had a great year in the Challengers. Are you heading into 2026 hoping this will be your best season ever?

STEFANOS SAKELLARIDIS: Yes, last year was a challenging year for me. I had to play throughout the whole year with a lot of injuries. I was never fit to play, but I was able to have a good year on the Challenger Tour.

So yeah, hopefully this year I will be able to stay healthy and keep up my improvement and performance and do better than last year, yes.

Q. Petros, can you speak to the team's chances, how you think they'll shape up this week?

PETROS TSITSIPAS: Well, first of all, Happy New Year.

I think it's always the same every year. I think we have great chances of advancing to the quarterfinals, making it to the semifinals, and probably winning the whole thing. I

believe a lot in everyone, especially in Maria and Stefanos. They've shown in the past they're capable of going all the way through and winning most of the matches.

Yeah, our main goal is to enjoy what we do, and the result will speak for itself.

Q. Stefanos, you've had a lot of success in Australia, very good results at the Australian Open and here in Perth. Is there anything about Australia which you feel helps you?

STEFANOS TSITSIPAS: I just love summer and Vegemite. That's what excites me being here (smiling).

Q. Stefanos, you have your dad as coach and your brother as well that you play alongside. How important is it to have family around you when you play tennis? How does that affect your game? I'm assuming positively.

STEFANOS TSITSIPAS: I don't know if it's important, but it definitely looks like it's a problem that everyone is involved with tennis. I can't seem to resolve that. Everyone wants to be around tennis.

My dad, now my brother, Petros, who I guess in a couple of years it will be nice to have him as a coach, if he accepts of course (smiling). I know he has his own career. I guess he just realized that now.

We're a tennis family. We love tennis. Tennis is our life.

Sorry, back to the question?

Q. What is it like having your dad back in your camp and how has he improved your game in the off-season?

STEFANOS TSITSIPAS: So far great. I don't have any complaints. He's a much better communicator. That was the most important thing working with him.

Working with family is never easy, and it's one of those challenging things that you have to tackle daily to separate the father role from the coaching role. I think it is important to sit down also and have a person in the team that can help filter the conversations and the way you communicate between one another. That is something that I've included in my team, as well.

It's really important to stay honest and to stay true to yourself of what you think and what you think needs improvement. The biggest issue in the past with me and my father is obviously we're two strong personalities, and we want to express our opinions. Sometimes they don't really co-align.

It's important to know where you put an end and a stop to it and accept and talk through certain things that might cause friction. So I believe so far we've been managing it better. It did get a little bit misunderstood in the past. I did some silly things that I shouldn't have done actually.

But yeah, it's a Greek tragedy, one of those type of situations (smiling).

Q. You mentioned your back issues. How close were you to retiring?

STEFANOS TSITSIPAS: I'm not entirely sure how to answer that, but when you see yourself unhealthy and in such a dark, bad state constantly, and not just a week or two, a lot of things cross your mind. A lot of your future flashes in front of you of how you see yourself in a couple of months from now. These things did occur.

There were phases during the year where I was asking myself, why am I doing this, and why am I putting myself through so much pain? Pain is not an enjoyable thing when you're an athlete and especially when it keeps coming back and reverting constantly.

It's one of those things that at the end to me is much more important to be happy and pain-free than struggling through the sport I love with pain. I'd just rather put an end to it if it ends up going towards this route than just like constantly suffer.

To answer your question, I just want to be happy in the way I live my life. If I'm not able to compete, one day I guess I'll have to put a stop at it. I don't want this to happen. I want to continue hopefully for 10 more years. That would be amazing. That would be a dream of mine.

Yeah, tennis has given me so much. It's tough to also put a stop to it. It messes up with your mind a lot.

Q. In 2023 you had that samurai theme. Do you have a theme to 2026?

PETROS TSITSIPAS: 2026, a year of enlightenment, a year of truth, and a year of redemption.

Q. You and Maria are top 3. How confident are you of breaking back into the top 10 through the year?

MARIA SAKKARI: I'm very, very confident for both of us. If I'm being deadly honest, I feel like Stefanos is one of the best players I've ever seen in my life. He deserves to be up there with Jannik and Carlos. I feel like now that he's healthy, he has a great chance to come back. I have full belief in him.

At the same time, as I mentioned before, I have full belief in myself, too. It's not going to be easy. It's going to be very tough, 'cause the level is very high. But as I said in

the beginning, I believe in both of us a lot.

Q. You have a connection with the Greek prime minister, as well. Do they ever come watch your matches? Are you expecting them in Perth?

MARIA SAKKARI: I don't think so. No, I think it's a little bit too far for them (smiling). Yeah, he's quite busy with other things. I would love to have him come to one of the matches during the season.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports