

# Australian Open

Monday, 15 January 2024

Melbourne, Victoria, Australia

## Storm Hunter

Press Conference



S. HUNTER/S. Errani

6-4, 6-3

THE MODERATOR: Storm, congratulations. From quallies through to the second round, you must be happy with your singles game right now.

STORM HUNTER: Yeah, honestly it feels amazing to get through qualifying. I played three tough matches there. I played Kaia Kanepi first round. To be honest, I was 3-love down first round quallies, and I was thinking, What am I doing out here on the singles court? I didn't feel great.

Then, yeah, since that moment, I kind of just really enjoyed it, and then to qualify and win my first round of main draw here at Aussie Open, it's insane. It's an amazing feeling.

Walking out on Kia this morning, the crowd was incredible. The Aussie fans really got behind me. I've never had that feeling on the doubles court because usually I'm with a teammate. So to walk out there on my own and to have that support just for me, yeah, was amazing. I just tried to enjoy every moment. Yeah, it feels pretty good sitting here right now.

THE MODERATOR: Questions in the room, please.

**Q. Is it extra special, Storm, making it on your own, as well as second round? You've had so many wild cards, and you win your first main draw match here.**

STORM HUNTER: Yeah, 100%. To come through quallies, I think it just really made me feel that I belong and believed. I think obviously I've been really lucky to have a lot of wild cards into the main draw here, but I always felt like I had to prove something to other people.

This time around I'm, like, I'm just going to do me. I've got my team. I've got great people around me.

Honestly, the only pressure I put, it was on myself. I didn't feel like I had to prove anything to anyone. It was just prove it to myself and kind of keep trying to do what me and my team have been working on in preseason.

I've done a lot of singles practice over preseason. My focus was to qualify on the Australian Open. I obviously entered the United Cup when those entries were done in November, so I knew I wasn't getting a singles lead-in tournament.

Yeah, the priority was qualifying and playing there. It definitely feels amazing to do it on my own.

**Q. Storm, you were saying you've had a huge program since pretty much New Year with the United Cup and then into quallies. You said when you finished your match, that you've got singles, doubles, mixed. How are the energy levels holding up?**

STORM HUNTER: Pretty good. I think last year I was lucky enough to play singles at all slams, main draw, qualifying for French and Wimbledon and getting wild cards into Aussie and US. I've kind of had a little bit of that experience, but I'm definitely trying to turn down the noise around me and just focus on what I can control.

I'm staying at home, so it's nice just to be in my own house. We drive in. We just do everything that's kind of normal to us. Keeping it pretty low-key. I think that's the best way to keep the energy levels I guess there.

Yeah, I'm feeling pretty good. I'm not really tired. I was lucky to have two days off from qualifying, so I had days just to reset, refocus, and kind of start this week as a fresh week.

Obviously, I have doubles tomorrow and singles on Wednesday. Yeah, just trying to focus on my recovery and not be on my phone too much, not look at the noise. Just try and focus on what I need to do and just lock in for the next two weeks.

**Q. You mentioned the noise. There's also the good noise of the crowd. You mentioned that support that you are feeling out there. Does that give you an extra gear? Can you use that?**

STORM HUNTER: Oh, yeah, 100%. I was saying to my coach today that usually I'm pretty fiery on court and pretty pumped up, but I felt like I didn't need to do that today because the crowd was doing it for me.

Every single point that I would win, they were cheering and yelling. Even if I lost the point, they're like, Come on, Storm, next one.

I've never had that experience. It was amazing. They definitely gave me a lot of energy. I was up 5-1 pretty quickly, and then it got back to 5-4.

Errani is a great competitor. Kind of just changed a few things, played a bit more aggressive. I got a little passive. The crowd was right there with me, and they helped me get through those moments.

Yeah, they definitely brought the energy for me today. I think, yeah, in those moments where it is tough and it's tight or you're feeling it, they definitely help. To have that experience is incredible.

**Q. I'm guessing you want a bit more.**

STORM HUNTER: Yeah, definitely I want more. I think winning first round, hopefully they come out again on Wednesday. I don't know what court I'll be on. Hopefully on Kia again. I loved it out there. It was a great atmosphere. Sun shining, Melbourne weather, it was great.

Yeah, it was a lot of fun having the Aussie fans there, and hopefully they come out for doubles tomorrow and then singles on Wednesday.

**Q. Did you ever think as a little 6-year-old growing up in Rocky watching the AO on TV that you would be here talking about this?**

STORM HUNTER: No, not at all, to be honest. I think, yeah, it's crazy coming from Rocky. Then my parents joined the military when I was 6 years old to I guess help support my career.

I grew up in a pub in Rock Hampton. My parents had no money. They were hard workers. They knew I had this dream, and they joined the military to try and give us a better life and a better opportunity. We relocated to WA. I spent a lot of times in my childhood not seeing my parents because they were sacrificing their I guess time with me and my brother to give us that support.

Yeah, I kind of feel like I owe it to them as well because they sacrificed a lot for me and my brother. They've always been so supportive of my career and I think believed in me more than I ever believed in myself, especially my dad. He was always saying, You can do it, you can do it. I'm, like, I don't know if I can do it, to be honest.

Then I'm lucky to have Nicole Pratt. She's been in my tennis career since I was 17. She was the one who actually got me a scholarship to move from WA to

Victoria with kind of the AIS program at the time. She saw me practicing in Perth and was, like, This girl is good. I like how she works. She's working hard.

She really backed me in. I'm so lucky to have her still in my tennis career. She's basically like family to me. So I feel really lucky that have I people around me that I think believe more in me than I believe in myself. I guess now with my doubles, I'm trying to use that to believe in myself more on the singles court as well.

**Q. What was the name of the Rocky pub?**

STORM HUNTER: It was the Grand Hotel. It's not there anymore. Yeah, my grandparents used to own that and then we lived upstairs for a while there when I was young. Yeah, then moved to WA.

**Q. With the United Cup and now this and obviously this tournament playing here, it's a great sort of start to the year for you. What about the rest of the year? How does that look? How does the Olympic Games fit into your schedule for this year?**

STORM HUNTER: For me the Olympics is a priority. Obviously I'm not sure doubles-wise who is the partnerships are going to be yet. Depending on I guess the ranking cutoffs at the time after Roland Garros.

And also with mixed, obviously playing with Matt Ebden at United Cup, we did great there, and we're going to play here and play at Roland Garros. Same thing, we won't know the partnerships until closer to the time, but that's definitely a huge goal for me.

I would love to medal at the Olympics. Obviously winning gold would be incredible, but to medal would be amazing. I think as a kid with Sydney 2000, everyone was inspired by that and wanted to be an Olympian. That's been something that I've wanted to do my whole life.

Obviously I was lucky in Tokyo, but to win a medal would be a huge honor. It would be amazing. Yeah, that's definitely a priority, and now I've got to work out kind of doubles and singles priorities as well. It's definitely not easy.

Hopefully I can get my singles inside 130. Then I'm playing qualifying of Masters events of 1000s. Then obviously slams as well. At the moment I'm not sure where my ranking will be after here. Hopefully I can get it a little bit further down. I've got to kind of work out the balance. It's not easy, but I want to do both, so just trying to figure that out.

**Q. How does an Olympic medal rank for you compared to, say, a Grand Slam title?**

STORM HUNTER: For me an Olympic medal is higher. For me I think being an Australian athlete and an Australian growing up, that to me is everything.

belief in the doubles game on clay as well.

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Before I played tennis, I kind of wanted to be an Olympian. I played every single sport as a kid and kind of just fell into tennis and loved it when I picked up the racquet when I was 6 in Rocky.

That would mean the world. That would be a dream come true. I think it's because it's not just for you. It's for your country. Your name is on there, but it's like you've done that for Australia, and I'm a very proud Australian.

I think I play my best tennis when I'm representing the green and gold. Yeah, that would mean everything to me.

**Q. Just on that, Storm, if you were given the choice, Wimbledon singles title or the Olympic 100-meter sprint?**

STORM HUNTER: (Laughing) I think the Olympic 100-meter sprint, that's the benchmark. That would be the -- yeah, that is I think the most amazing thing you could ever do. Definitely not happening. I'm not a sprinter, that's for sure.

Honestly an Olympic gold medal in anything.

**Q. Even over the Wimbledon singles title?**

STORM HUNTER: I would take it, yes.

**Q. How comfortable do you feel on the Roland Garros clay? I know you've won a singles game there, and, of course, Paris Olympics is going to be at Roland Garros. How comfortable do you feel at Roland Garros, and how comfortable do you feel on the clay?**

STORM HUNTER: I definitely feel more comfortable in singles on the clay than doubles. I think doubles I've still got a little bit of work to do, to be honest. I just find trying to work out the speed of the ball, and obviously it's a little bit slower, a bit more shape, so just finding my positioning at the net and stuff. I definitely think I have a bit to improve on there.

But singles I feel comfortable, but doubles is my priority for the Olympics, doubles and mixed. I'm glad me and Matt will have an opportunity to play there and then obviously play Roland Garros doubles as well. But, yeah, hopefully we also have Madrid, Rome, and whatever other tournaments we play on clay just to get more experience playing on clay.

Obviously we won Rome doubles last year, so yeah, can play well on it. It's just feeling a bit more confident and