

Australian Open

Thursday, 18 January 2024

Melbourne, Victoria, Australia

Sloane Stephens

Press Conference



S. STEPHENS/D. Kasatkina

4-6, 6-3, 6-3

THE MODERATOR: Congratulations on progressing through to the third round of the Australian Open. Talk us through the match from your perspective today.

SLOANE STEPHENS: It was good. Obviously it was a hard-fought match. Obviously playing a player who has been playing well. Obviously she made the finals in Adelaide last week. She's been super consistent on tour.

So it was always going to be a tough battle, but really pleased to be through.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. A big celebration from you at the end. More than usual I see from you I feel like. What made this one feel especially good when it was finished?

SLOANE STEPHENS: I think just having a long off-season, having to fight through a lot, and just happy to be out here, happy to be playing, happy to be competing and playing the tennis that feels good to me. I think that is the most important, so I think there's a lot of emotion behind that. I think now it's just coming out a little bit more.

Q. How is the emotion different than usual?

SLOANE STEPHENS: Well, normally you guys just talk shit about me and say how flat I am and unhappy I look on the court. This is the opposite of that. So whatever emotion you want to get from that...

Yeah, just happy to be out there fighting for every point. Whatever comes out, comes out.

Q. Intentional effort to be less flat?

SLOANE STEPHENS: No. Just enjoying myself more.

Q. Danielle Collins announced after her match today that she was going to retire this season. This would be her last season, she said. Obviously you're surprised by that. Did that come out of the blue?

SLOANE STEPHENS: Yeah, this is the first I'm hearing of it. Well, my first question to that is, was that an emotional response to her loss today, or is that genuine she actually doesn't want to play tennis anymore? She was already planning on retiring type of thing?

But, obviously if that's what she has planned and for her future, I totally support that. Obviously I grew up playing tennis with her. It's always sad to see players go, obviously especially someone my age who is still playing well and playing great tennis.

No, I haven't heard that, and I didn't see the press conference. I would rather talk to her first and get the lowdown.

Q. She did come in quickly after the match.

SLOANE STEPHENS: Yeah, it's emotional. I think she was up in the match and it's always very... Tennis is so up and down, and it's so emotional. I think sometimes there's probably ten times last year when I wanted to retire. It's a normal feeling. You're just, like, Why am I out here? What am I doing this for? Why am I playing? I don't know if it was that, or if this is truly what she has been planning.

Either way, yeah, if it was an emotional one, obviously anyone on tour would talk her out of that. So that's fine. But if it's something she truly has planned for herself and for her life, then that's also another beautiful and great thing.

Q. Can I ask you a player council question. How looped in have you stayed?

SLOANE STEPHENS: I am no longer on the player council. Sorry.

Q. You have a big smile on your face when you say you are no longer on the player council.

SLOANE STEPHENS: I'm no longer a player representative. Yeah, so can't help you.

Q. Officially, I have never called you flat or talked shit about you, so I'm absolving myself of that.

SLOANE STEPHENS: Thank you.

Q. Separate from that, how looped in as someone who is certainly interested in the future of the tour have you stayed with all the machinations about the future setup of the game?

SLOANE STEPHENS: Yeah, I mean, obviously I know a lot. My term didn't even end until pretty much January 1, so I still know.

Q. Do you have feelings and thoughts about what you would like to see in the future? You have spoken about trying to leave the game in a good place for the people who are coming up behind you? What does that look like?

SLOANE STEPHENS: I think there's a lot of work to be done in terms of CBC coming on and the marketing and all the things that they're going to be doing to try to grow the game and enhance the game and all these amazing things, which I think for women's tennis we are below par when it comes to marketing our athletes and really showcasing the talent that we have. I think that's a big piece of what CBC coming in and their marketing side is going to do for our players.

I also think players have lives outside of sports. Whether they play tennis or another sport, I think for us to be the leading global women's sport, a lot of our girls, like, we don't have a paid maternity leave. We don't have a lot of things that regular jobs have because we're independent contractors, which is totally fine.

I think some of the things that we could do better as a tour and just as supportive companies and brands, and we have Hologic, which is our great sponsor, our first title sponsor in I think 15 years or something doing wellness checks, health checks. All of that stuff really matters.

There's a lot of different things. Slowly but surely we will get there. I can write it all out for you if you want.

Q. Write it all out?

SLOANE STEPHENS: Every single detail.

Q. Please do.

SLOANE STEPHENS: It's long, but I think there's a lot of good movement being made. It just takes time. Obviously with a big organization, things don't happen overnight. I think that's why a lot of the players are frustrated.

At the end of last year just with a lot of complaints and a lot of outwardly aggressive comments towards the tour, I think a lot were unnecessary just because they don't really see the behind-the-scenes work that's happening.

It's just a lot of, We want it now. That's just not how business works, and it's not how you run companies and you run brands.

I think for the tour post-COVID I think Steve and the player reps worked really hard to make sure that the girls had a stable working environment for the most part.

Yeah, there's just a lot of work to be done, and I think it's just unfair to think that it's going to happen tomorrow.

Q. As a former players council member, can I ask what you think about the men's tour recently electing to their players council someone who is facing a criminal trial and some pretty serious allegations?

SLOANE STEPHENS: I think that the ATP kind of beats their own drum. Yeah, they do what they do on that side. Would that happen on the WTA Tour? Probably not.

Again, he's going to trial, and he will be judged by his peers, and we will see what happens after that.

Q. Just to follow up with that, as a person of leadership and a woman, conscientious person, what do you think how tennis as a whole has treated this saga after three-plus years that it's been going on and the continued sort of promotion of him, which has been alienating and off-putting for a lot of fans who I've heard from?

SLOANE STEPHENS: I mean, it's obviously a difficult situation, someone that is very prominent in our sport. I think now that he will be going to trial and be facing whatever he is facing can kind of put it to rest, whatever it is that happens.

I think there's a lot of speculation and allegations. I think at this point for the tour and for the fans it needs to be done with. I think that's what will happen. People will get what they want whenever his trial is. We'll just go from there.

I guess the ATP will then decide what they will do with their player after that.

Q. Until then... It's still five months away.

SLOANE STEPHENS: For three years no one has done anything, so I don't think another five months of waiting for a criminal trial I guess to happen is going to change much on either side.

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