

Australian Open

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Legends All Access Hour

Li Na

Thomas Johansson

Iva Majoli

Tommy Haas

Alicia Molik

Casey Dellacqua

Marcos Baghdatis

Daniela Hantuchova

Radek Stepanek

Press Conference



LI NA: I got pressure.

NICK McCARVEL: First off, Na, welcome back. Happy to have you. Tell us how it feels to be back. And Na, we saw just a couple days ago you had that nice interaction with Zheng Qinwen and being able to say hello to her with a little tap on the behind. What does it mean to have her leading the charge in Chinese tennis? She's got a big opportunity here at the Australian Open.

LI NA: I mean, for me, always looking for back to Australia. This is my favorite tournament.

Also, ten years, before ten years, I got a very good memory. Yeah, still proud of myself (smiling).

Is good for her, for China tennis. I'm happy to see a lot of young player grow up, yeah.

I think it's big chance for her for this year. Yeah.

NICK McCARVEL: How does it feel for you to be back here? I think the last time you were here was five years ago you handed Naomi Osaka the trophy.

LI NA: Yeah, time running so fast. Getting older and older.

NICK McCARVEL: Thomas, I want to welcome you back also as a former singles champion. I'm going to throw you maybe the easiest of questions in the sense of, can anyone take on the hardest of tasks in tennis right now and topple Novak Djokovic? You know how hard it is to win this title once. He's done it 10 times. Does it feel like anyone has it within them to beat him at the Australian Open?

THOMAS JOHANSSON: I think it's going to be difficult, because I think Novak is the guy to beat. I am very impressed with the way Alcaraz is playing at the moment. I think they can also have a battle here.

Sinner also looks good, but Novak is the guy to beat. You know, the interesting thing with Novak is that even if he's not playing well, he's winning matches. This is his biggest strength for me.

Yeah, I would be surprised if Novak would not win another time here.

NICK McCARVEL: Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome to our Legends press conference. Welcome back to all our Legends. I think some of you were on court earlier today.

We're happy to have you here. I want to go down the line and welcome Casey Dellacqua, as well as Alicia Molik. Iva Majoli is here. Daniela Hantuchova. Li Na, welcome back, the 10-year anniversary of your championship here 10 years ago.

Thomas Johansson, shall we say how many years since your title?

THOMAS JOHANSSON: No. Recently. Very recently.

NICK McCARVEL: Very recently.

THOMAS JOHANSSON: Yeah.

NICK McCARVEL: Marcos Baghdatis, good to see you. Radek Stepanek and Tommy Haas. Thanks for being here.

We're going to be quick in this portion and then we'll open it up for questions. No pressure, Li Na, I want to start with you if I can. We do have a handheld mic if it is floating around on the table.



NICK McCARVEL: Is there one X factor for Taylor Fritz in that 0 and 8 head-to-head against Novak?

THOMAS JOHANSSON: Might be 0 and 9, unfortunately (smiling). But, I mean, Taylor, he's a great player. You know, he has big weapons in his serve and on his forehand side. Very solid returns, as well.

Of course it will be a battle, but I also thought it would be a battle between Novak and Mannarino. It went quite quick.

Taylor has to come up with the big stuff, but I think Novak is the favorite.

NICK McCARVEL: Awesome, thanks.

Daniela Hantuchova, welcome back. Former semifinalist here, also a mixed doubles champion. You've spent a lot of time in the commentary booth the last few years. This women's draw, it's wide open on the top half whereas on the bottom half you've got Coco Gauff and Aryna Sabalenka maybe heading for a semifinal clash. How has the women's draw played out for you?

DANIELA HANTUCHOVA: First of all, I just want to say, I don't know about you guys, but this feels like so much pressure when we say something next to each other, right? Like, it's one thing to talk to you guys, but then it's like, Oh, my gosh, I better watch out what I say here because I might get a hard time in the locker room.

No, this is so cool. Talking about the girls, what do we think?

Well, I think Sabalenka obviously is the one to beat here. She knows what it takes to go all the way. She, to me, looks even fitter than 12 months ago. Striking the ball extremely well. So I feel like she also seems to be so relaxed, given that she's defending champion. You guys know what it felt coming back and having all that pressure. She's doing all the right things to, I feel like, get the trophy once again.

NICK McCARVEL: You would know very well these up-and-coming players. Yastremska has been around for a few years but she just has that big win over Vika a few minutes ago. And Linda Noskova is someone that we've been watching come up. She's now into her first Grand Slam quarter.

DANIELA HANTUCHOVA: Yeah, I was going to say, Noskova, to me there is something about the Czech players, they just don't get tight under pressure. We saw it against Swiatek. Big occasions. I feel like they are so used to, ever since Martina Navratilova, winning on a big stage. We saw that with Petra Kvitova at Wimbledon, with Vondrousova last year.

It seems like when there is a big occasion, they just don't get tired like the rest of us. I don't know how they do it. I would love to know.

The same with Noskova against Swiatek. I wasn't really surprised, given also the two Czech coaches that were sitting in her box, they are super smart tacticians. So yeah, I think we can expect a lot from her, not only here but in the future obviously.

NICK McCARVEL: Thanks, Dani.

Marcos, welcome back. 2006 you made that dream run to the final. I think you played a fistful of five-setters, three or four to get to the final against Roger. We've had 32 five-setters this Australian Open. I think we're knocking on the door of the record. The Grand Slam record is 35 from the 1983 US Open.

But I'm curious what you've made of all the upsets. Is it a change in tennis? Are we going to see more upsets at the Slams perhaps maybe on the men's side moving forward?

MARCOS BAGHDATIS: Definitely. I think tennis is changing the last few years. You know, you see tougher and tougher matches. Yeah, I think it's no surprise that there is more, you know, close battles and more five-setters.

One of the five-setters I won in 2006 was against this guy in the second round. It's nice to sit here and talk about it.

RADEK STEPANEK: For you, not for me.

MARCOS BAGHDATIS: Yeah, it's not a surprise with the change that's going on the last few years. You know, the top three guys -- I mean, two guys, Novak and -- sorry -- Roger and Rafa gone, you know, you have more players at a certain level where they can compete more. I think it's no surprise.

NICK McCARVEL: Thanks.

So we've got two handhelds. Tommy, there's one by you. I'm going to go next to Iva. So let's pass that one down if we can.

We've watched these young players. Mirra Andreieva has been a big story I think for everyone this Australian Open. We've watched now Linda Noskova at 19. Yastremska has been around a little bit longer. But for you as a 1997 Grand Slam champion at the French Open, what does it take for a young person still in their teens to have the ability to go deep at a major? How is it easier but also harder for the teens?

IVA MAJOLI: Yeah, I think it became much harder I think

these years, but it's great to see girls like Andreeva and Noskova. They're so talented but also you can see they're maturing. They're playing amazing tennis. I was really surprised how Noskova, like Daniela said, handled all the pressure in the final moments against Iga. You're playing No. 1 player, and she just showed very, very big experience in her tennis.

I was hoping Mirra could maybe go further to see how these teenage girls will compete against each other, but she's only 16. She has plenty more years to come.

I think in our generation, we were so used to playing 16, 17 years old. Now when they come in, it's like, wow, she's 16, she's 17. When I played Hingis, she was 16, I was 19 in the finals of Roland Garros, and it was kind of normal. She was 37-0 coming into Roland Garros, so she hasn't lost a match that year.

In a way I like that everything starts a little bit later. I think that's why their careers are longer. But in a way it's nice to see a young girl coming up. It's always fun.

I'm really excited to see this new generation. There are a few young girls, really good ones. I think they are important for women tennis.

NICK McCARVEL: Thank you.

Radek Stepanek, welcome back. A doubles champion here. Welcome back. Good to have you.

We've been talking about Linda Noskova but also Barbora Krejckova from Czech Republic into the quarterfinals. And for the Czech men, we saw Tomas Machac as well as Jiri Lehecka, they're having more success. How do you describe that? As Dani was saying, is it something in the water, in the Czech water to see the success? Radek, are the men going to be able to have the sort of glory that Tomas Berdych was able to bring in the last decade or so?

RADEK STEPANEK: I believe that tennis had a big history in our country, even though we are a small country. But the past generations of players left for us a huge message and motivation for everyone who wants to become a professional tennis player.

Obviously right now we have so many great girls playing. We have two young ones, even younger ones coming, the Fruhvirtova sisters. Obviously Linda Noskova is a great story even for myself because when she was small she spent some time with my father on the court. Plus Tomas Krupa is coaching her now. He was with me seven years.

We're a small country so we're trying to use the knowledge of those people who have done it. I mean, it's working pretty well. More of a woman's side, but I hope

that we'll have for the guys coming after us a message as well.

I believe you didn't mention Jakub Mensik, which I believe has a very bright future in front of him. I like the way he thinks about tennis, I like the way he plays. For his height he's moving pretty well.

I think those three guys can be our future of Czech men's tennis.

NICK McCARVEL: Great. Thanks so much.

Alicia, welcome back. Good to have you.

ALICIA MOLIK: Thanks, Nick.

NICK McCARVEL: You've been spending a lot of time in the commentary booth. For you, can you talk about the eight moms that we had in the main draw. We obviously just lost our last couple with Svitolina and Azarenka going out, but what is that challenge for those moms coming back in motherhood? How impressed were you, even though we did lose the likes of Naomi Osaka and Angelique Kerber early?

ALICIA MOLIK: Yeah, I've loved watching the mums club and many of the mums come back to the tour. I think it just adds a huge amount of interest but also I think inspiration for the next generation to know that, yes, women can still have a wonderful career, can still take time out of the sport and come back and achieve.

I think the precedent has been set largely from mums like Lindsay and Kim Clijsters. So if they can do it, the next generation can do it.

Naomi Osaka, as we know, came back extremely soon after having her child. Despite losing to Garcia, I was incredibly impressed with her level. I think she has a Grand Slam on the horizon within the next 18 months. I'm not sure if anyone else agrees with me here. She's way ahead of where I thought she would be at this point in time. Angelique Kerber too, I've been enjoying watching her comeback.

I think the other interesting to note is that the mums who have returned, they left the sport still in a really healthy state. They didn't have injuries, they weren't leaving because of a physical reason other than, you know, deciding to start a family. So they're returning I think with a new invigoration and new zest.

Naomi Osaka, for instance, I've never seen smile as much as she has at this Australian Open throughout her whole entire career.

We know how much of a bubble it is. So having perspective, everyone who is a mum comes back with a

newfound appreciation and perspective for the sport that they mostly love, but I think when you're in the thick of it, you can learn to hate it very quickly, as well. You know, everything that comes with professional sport.

So motherhood, I think, brings a really healthy perspective. Look what Vika's achieving. 34 years of age, too. She's still moving as well as she was when she was 21. You know, Elina sadly just retired, she had a back issue. I watched her match and I thought she was a real contender here.

Maybe it's a secret. Maybe we need more mums on tour, and dads. Shout-out to the dads, too.

NICK McCARVEL: Tommy, welcome back. Three-time semifinalist here at the Australian Open. You've taken on this role in the last few years at Indian Wells at the BNP Paribas Open. Curious for you, this tournament here in Australia, it's grown so much, Melbourne Park. Can you give us a little bit of insight as to what the challenges to run a massive event of this caliber, and the changes that you've witnessed behind the scenes at Melbourne Park.

TOMMY HAAS: First of all, big shout-out to our Tournament Director here at the Legends, Andre Sa, who is in our presence here, in the press room (laughter).

(Applause.)

TOMMY HAAS: To be honest, some of us probably wouldn't be here if that wasn't the case.

Look, I think the Australian Open has sort of been the leader on the tennis tour in sort of making sure that tournaments progress in a way that it should.

I think we can all agree to the fact that they are always raising the bar, which is great for me to be here again, to see all the little details that are going into running an event like this. Not only just for the players, but I think that the players have had the biggest support from the Australian Open for many years now. Even just with travel, when it comes to coming to Australia, you get a little travel help. You don't have to worry about paying for your strings when you're stringing your racquets.

Those are little things when you're going, you're basically on tour all year long. Paying for hotels, travel, et cetera. The teams are getting bigger and bigger. And they were always sort of the steppingstone of trying something new and being there for all the little details.

You have three courts now with the roof in case the weather is bad. You never know what to expect in Melbourne. Yesterday or this morning was pretty chilly. It could be hot tomorrow, then it could be raining. But you have also the fact that matches start at a certain time if it does rain. They were sort of the leader in that. I

could go on and on and on.

For us, it's obviously when you're behind the scenes, you want to make sure the three things are taken care of. That's No. 1 is the players, because everybody comes, the fans, the sponsors are coming because the players are providing the act. They are basically gladiators going out there competing for the biggest of titles.

You want to make sure the fans are happy not just watching the matches but what do the grounds offer, how easy to move around, how easy to get merchandise, is there a big line, how is the food. All those little things that make it -- you can go to the nicest place in the Maldives but if the food is not good at the resort you're probably not going to go back.

And of course, the sponsors, all the corporate people that are coming, to make sure that they are taken care of. So it goes on and on and on.

You see all the former Legends here. This is such a great event in so many ways. All eyes right now are at the Australian Open around the world, and we get to witness it and be here ourselves, and, you know, see some of the best athletes I think in the world compete and go out there and give it their best.

I think it's great. Yeah, always great to be back Down Under.

Did I answer the question okay?

NICK McCARVEL: You did, absolutely.

TOMMY HAAS: We can go on and on. I don't want people to start falling asleep a little bit. I'm sure people can't wait to ask us questions, right?

NICK McCARVEL: We've got one more. Last but not least, Casey Dellacqua. You're just off court, actually, postmatch interview. I'm curious for you, this has been such a big Australian Open for Storm Hunter and the balance that she now has to have as World No. 1 in doubles and singles. Can you talk about her AO and the challenge that now sits in front of her as she tries to balance those two.

CASEY DELLACQUA: Yeah, absolutely. I was excited to see what question you were going to ask me, Nick. I was like anticipating. It's a great angle. Obviously Storm Hunter, all of us here have played not only singles but doubles and a lot of mixed doubles as well. We can attest to the fact that I think everything that you do on the doubles court translates into the singles game.

I think for Storm Hunter coming in as the World No. 1 in doubles has certainly been a huge positive, and a lot of that success and belief I think has been really important

in terms of her singles success.

I know she's going to now travel and she's started a new partnership with Siniakova, so that will be interesting. They will play together, but she is also putting some pretty big goals ahead of her for her singles games, which I think she should be, because she's such a wonderful singles player as well.

She's going to make sure that that's a priority for her as well as continue her doubles as well. It's going to be a big schedule for her, a big juggle.

Yeah, she deserves everything that's come her way. She's so resilient, she's worked so hard. It's tough for us Aussies out on tour often. We are on the road for nine months of the year, and to see her in her home slam really utilize the crowd and the vibe and the energy and come through qualifying has just been awesome.

So Go, Stormy.

NICK McCARVEL: And the No. 1 ranked name in tennis, I believe, Storm Hunter.

CASEY DELLACQUA: It's a ripper, isn't it?

NICK McCARVEL: Thank you to each of our Legends. We'll open up to questions. I'm going to hand things over to Prue.

Q. There has been talk the last year or two about combining the ATP and WTA. Wondering where you guys sit on that.

ALICIA MOLIK: "Combining," you mean --

Q. The men's and women's competitions.

NICK McCARVEL: Tours.

ALICIA MOLIK: I think the more the women play with the men and vice versa, for the product to be enticing and for the fans to love it, they want both. They want men's tennis, women's tennis, they also want doubles and mixed doubles, that's a huge product which I don't think we discover enough in tennis. But I think we've got to be a little bit more agile in tennis, and, you know, for the new fans, for the new fans that want bang for their buck, yeah, more for combining events and more of them.

Q. A question for Tommy and the other ones that would like to jump on it. With you very active in the tour, you've been playing in the Legends, in the tournaments, do you feel you would like to move into coaching and be part of a player's -- you will always provide us a lot of insight on what's happening. It seems to be, no, it would be a natural progression for you to move into tennis coaching?

TOMMY HAAS: Yeah, I mean, I think it's always a time and place what kind of player would be interested, et cetera. Obviously yes, I'm still very involved in playing tennis, trying to stay active, love the opportunities that I still get to play a little bit in these champions Legends events, however you want to call them.

This is something unfortunate we have to stop at a young age in some ways, right? You try to prolong your career now as long as you can. When you're 38, 39, 40 and you're kind of stopping something that you truly love, it's something that you're quite good at, it's hard to sort of let it go. But it's just at some point it's just that's a realization and the understanding you have to have with yourself that that's part of it.

Actually just saw an interview on a podcast with Thierry Henry, the soccer player. He said basically once you stop, something dies in you. I thought it was pretty interesting because I never looked at it that way. But it is true in some certain way.

So any chance that we have, I think, to stay connected to the game, to the great game of tennis, you just have to figure out what that might look for you.

Again, opportunities are different for everyone, likes to put themselves out there and travel with whatever the case might be. I've tried it before with Lucas Pouille who was very, very interested in me helping him. So it was sort of a situation where I felt, okay, let me see what I can do. It was a good learning experience on top of that, but I have two daughters at home. I travel enough as it is. I want to make sure I spend as much as time as I can coaching them and getting them ready for life.

They are 13 and 8 now, so the next 5 to 10 years, who knows what opportunities might come by. If it's a right challenge and, I always say it's like if you have the right horse to send out into the race, to also potentially do great things and potentially also win slams, then I'm obviously very, very curious. I think I can be very helpful in that sense.

But, yeah. Such a great sport. I believe also the longevity of playing tennis or any racquet sports and I think tennis was No. 1. Also has proven scientifically as long as you play, good chance of you having good longevity, so go tennis. (Smiling).

Q. Li Na, watching you playing at the Legends matches, so much more relaxing and so nice to see you smile a lot and a lot of fun, love to the spectators as well. Do you miss those days when playing or competing professionally despite the busy traveling schedule and arduous training and high expectations for the massive population?

LI NA: I miss zero. (Laughter.)

I mean, when I was athlete, this is my dream, you know, take care about the family. For the Legends, we are just playing for fun. I was smiling a lot before, but now on the court, off the court. (Laughter.)

Yeah, of course, tennis is part of my life. I miss, like, competition. But I didn't miss traveling a lot. When I would think back, it was killing me (smiling). I think we fly a lot, you have jet lag. You have to prepare for the match. You have a lot of stress.

Yeah, it's tough for tennis athlete. Yeah.

Q. Can I get your thoughts on women's tennis potentially heading to Saudi Arabia? There's been a lot of talk about the WTA Finals going there sometime in the future.

ALICIA MOLIK: Look, I don't know about that, because I haven't been filled in on all the detail. I'm like you. I'd love to know more about it.

DANIELA HANTUCHOVA: Same.

TOMMY HAAS: Yeah, there's probably a lot of rumors going around, suggestions behind the scenes, but I don't know if anything has actually been confirmed yet so far.

Q. My question is for Li Na but also the broader group. How do you think the tennis community has responded to and dealt with the allegations against Zverev?

CASEY DELLACQUA: I'm happy to assist.

Obviously I think they are just ongoing, and it's probably not the place for us to make comment now in the ongoing stuff happening outside of the tour and tournaments. So probably not a place for us to speak on that right now.

Q. A question for Radek about Jannik Sinner. How much have you been impressed by his tournament so far and by his quality of tennis, his ball striking and all-around game? In case he faces Djokovic, how much important do you think the two victories he has last year at the end of the year are important?

RADEK STEPANEK: I think Jannik is looking great not only in this tournament but last, you know, year or year and a half that he's coming up. I believe that, you know, Darren Cahill taking over his coaching was a great step forward for him. He's doing, with Jannik, an incredible job. Same as his whole team.

His tennis, you can see that he's trying to improve in every department of his game. If it comes to a match, you know, with Novak, obviously it's going to be a great

battle, as always.

I believe that it plays to his advantage that his matches are so far, you know, three-setters. He's not spending much energy. So if it comes to a match with Novak, then his tank will still be full.

It will be very interesting. Still, it will be a different match because they are going to play best-of-five. As we know, this is Novak's living room. This is his home. This is his house. I know from my experience that he would like to keep that as his home.

It will be very, very interesting and I believe a great battle when they face, if they face each other.

Q. This is for you all. I wanted to ask about Sumit Nagal, if any of you have watched him play, what you think of his game. Just your opinions on that.

ALICIA MOLIK: Is he 19, 20?

Q. No, 26.

ALICIA MOLIK: Oh, 26. I thought he was 19.

I did watch him. I only watched a set. I haven't seen much of him play. He qualified?

Q. Yes.

ALICIA MOLIK: I need to watch more of him. Clearly all of us do.

But I think, you know, from India in particular you have had so much doubles success, so we want to see someone break through in the singles ranks really soon. I think he's that person to forge ahead.

But it's incredibly difficult to qualify for any slam. Whether it be male or female, I think that really is the exclamation point in any player's career. As soon as you do qualify for a slam, I think you have a new, yeah, renewed energy and also gives you, you know, the confidence to earn your spot as one of the top players in the world.

So I think we can look for his career to go from strength to strength. You have earned your place. You're now rights holder at a Grand Slam. So it will be really interesting to see what he can do in the next few slams. In particular, I think Wimbledon, where I think he can show his skill base. I didn't he watch his whole match. I saw snippets while I was commentating.

Q. Alicia, what does Alex de Minaur need to do to go beyond fourth round here? Is he capable ultimately of winning a slam?

ALICIA MOLIK: Yeah, look, he's capable. Gee, he got close last night, didn't he? Rublev I think got to the highest gear that he needed to go in order to beat Alex last night.

Rublev had to red-line. I loved watching that. I've never seen two guys take the ball on the rise on every single stroke. It was quite phenomenal. It was like Agassi playing Agassi.

Yeah, it was incredible. For Alex, he's identified he wants to play more aggressively. You know, maybe he can up the risk on his serve a little bit more.

I love watching him, because he can flip the switch pretty quickly to make players really uncomfortable, and I think watching last night, if it would have been in the US Open or Wimbledon, I think no question, Alex would have won that match, would have then put him in contention to win the slam.

So I think he's got to bide his time a little bit, but he's one of those guys that can take your time away, can surprise you, his variation, can play quick, can play show, he has incredible feel and touch. I think we're going to see the best of Alex on grass, to be honest. That's my opinion. But absolutely he can win a slam.

PRUE RYAN: Thanks very much. I think we'll thank all of our Legends today for coming. Look forward to watching them in action on court in the coming days.

Thank you very much.

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