

Australian Open

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Darren Cahill

Simone Vagnozzi

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Just wanted to congratulate you both on your work with Jannik. Of course today must be a big celebration of sorts, but could you just explain how impressed you were with Jannik getting through that tiebreaker, and then regrouping to finish off the match.

DARREN CAHILL: Yeah, look, well, firstly, my role with Jannik is a little bit different to the other coaching roles that I've had, and 99% of the credit for the coaching goes to Simone. He's done an incredible job with Jannik.

I'm more overseeing everything. Certainly we discuss tactics and the technical and everything, but Simone is the voice. He's the guy driving a lot of what you see in the improvements of Jannik. He's doing an incredible job.

Jannik also is absorbing a lot of that information. Part of our role as coaches is to help him learn from experiences, and build that resilience.

I think the match he played against Novak at Wimbledon went a long way to teaching Jannik where he needed to get better. When he was up two sets to love and lost that five-set match against Novak, you're able to sit down with him and talk about where the improvements needed to be made, and credit to him, he absorbed it. He gets on the practice court, he takes the information, and he loves to work on things that are going to make him a better tennis player.

For us, as coaches, it was really rewarding today to sit there and see him do some of those things. We knew that Novak was struggling in the first couple of sets. Everybody could see that. But we also knew that Novak was going to make a huge push in the third and fourth sets. He did an amazing job.

(Jannik Sinner enters room.)

Q. (By Jannik Sinner) How is it to coach Jannik?

DARREN CAHILL: It's crappy job. We are not paid enough. The guy gives us a hard time all the time, and he's forever actually taking our money in cards games, and he gets a lot of enjoyment about that stuff.

(Laughter.)

(Jannik Sinner exits room.)

DARREN CAHILL: So no, it was great to learn from that match and see him go with Novak early in the third and certainly early in the fourth. He did a great job to absorb a lot of that pressure that Novak threw at him. In the end I thought the last couple of sets was amazing tennis from both players, and Jannik was able to find a way to win.

THE MODERATOR: Questions in English.

Q. Were you surprised by Sinner of the first two sets that went so quick?

SIMONE VAGNOZZI: First two sets? I think Jannik start really good, the two sets. Novak was making a lot of unforced errors, so was quite strange because he looks a little bit wary, Novak, he wants to play really aggressive and make few mistakes, so for Jannik was a good start.

Is normal that you expect that Novak increases level. Jannik was really good to be able to stay always really close to Novak when Novak played better.

The third set he had some chance. Didn't got it, but in the end it was beginning of the fourth set was really, really important. The first two games of Jannik serve was really important that Jannik serve good in this moment. So we are really happy about his attitude especially.

Q. Darren, when you joined the group, did you already have this dynamic in mind where you're overseeing I think was the word I think you used before? What did you look to add, bring in, change, et cetera?

DARREN CAHILL: It's not just us. The whole team changed. The fitness trainer Umberto Ferrara and Giacomo Naldi is the physio. We addressed everything. There was certainly from a tennis perspective areas of Jannik's game -- he was already a great player, already a potential top 10. I think he'd already been top 10 before we started. You can't be top 10 without having the platform of some incredible weapons, and he had those.

I think the natural progression that Jannik needed to



make everybody could see, but I think the coaching comes down to be able to give those messages in the right way, that he would believe in it, absorb it, and then do it on the practice court, then eventually do it in matches. Which is kind of what we're seeing a little bit of now.

The physical part was just as important as the tennis. The physical part with Umberto has been crucial for him over the last couple of years. I think you can see that now that he's able to move more efficiently, and he can hold that higher level for longer, and to be able to do that in five-set matches.

So it wasn't just tennis. It was about looking after his body from a physical standpoint but also getting the right treatment and care of his body when he'd step off the court to make sure he's doing the right things. That's everything. That's the physio, that's the treatment, that's the diet, that's the technology of going to places to make sure we're on the right path and doing the right things, and he's got the right muscle mass. Umberto could speak about this forever.

The technology now in sports is much different than what it was 20 or 30 years ago. So we can have ideas about what we wish to do with an athlete but now you can double- and triple-check it to make sure you're doing the right things for that particular athlete. Umberto has been responsible for that.

Q. How do you think he's different from when you first came on the team and then what do you think are the sort of maybe finishing touches or how you would describe them? What is the 1% that Darren...

SIMONE VAGNOZZI: So Darren is really bad coach. (Laughter.)

No, I think how you can see, Darren with the words, is fantastic. It's another level.

DARREN CAHILL: I'm older. I've got a little more experience.

SIMONE VAGNOZZI: And it's a real pleasure to have him in the team. He bring the experience to be in the final of this stage of this great tournament. He's always of a good word before the match, and also after the match, no, to see something that maybe I cannot see so with my age.

This is I think what Darren brings to the team.

Q. Technically what did you bring?

SIMONE VAGNOZZI: Me? So when we start, Jannik was, like Darren said, he was already unbelievable player. But I think was -- how do you say in English? --

monotony? Like when you play always the same.

DARREN CAHILL: One style.

SIMONE VAGNOZZI: One style. Was just pushing hard and without not so many tactics. So now he can play with his speed but knowing where to put the ball, when play dropshot, when play slice.

And also the serve I think improve a lot in the last two years. Today I think the second set was amazing. Not giving any breakpoint to Novak, I think in the last ten years maybe happen one time. So I think was probably one of the best match for his serve today, because second set was amazing. In the important moment, he find always a good first serve.

I think the serve is something that help him a lot to reach this.

Q. You have coached major winners, Hewitt, Agassi, Halep. Obviously there's still one match to go for Jannik, but what qualities did they have that you see in Jannik?

DARREN CAHILL: Work ethic, purpose, desire, willingness to learn, tennis IQ of all those champions is fantastic.

Jannik has all that. He's got a sense of humor. I think you can get a bit of a sense for it on the court in after-match interviews. We see it every single day. He's a good guy, and he's a fun-loving guy. He likes to be around people he enjoys, whether that be before we started working with him or with us in our team at the moment. We have a really good feeling within the team.

Whether he wins or loses, you know, we've taken our shares of losses, tough losses, as well, but nothing changes within the team. Everybody enjoys each other's company. It's been really important for him to enjoy the journey as well.

He's got the qualities I believe that a lot of the great champions in the game have, but you've got to start winning to let that come to fruition. So he's making little steps. He had a good finish to the year last year. He gained a lot of belief from what he was able to do.

He had some pretty poor records, head-to-head records against some of the players up until last year, and he was able to knock down a couple of hurdles and get a win over Tsitsipas, get a win over Medvedev, get a win over Djokovic. And they're important wins, because when you play a certain style of tennis and you keep taking losses, you can't keep doing the same thing. You have to change and your game has to evolve.

That's what Jannik has been attempting to do for the last

couple of years. That's a great quality and that's what he needs to continue to do. Never stop evolving and never stop getting better.

He still has one match to go here. Whoever he plays in the final is going to be an incredibly tough match. I actually think he has a losing head-to-head record against both of those players. We took a tough loss against Zverev at the US Open last year, and we have incredible respect for both of those guys.

So it's step by step and just trying to keep knocking over those hurdles. The important thing for him is he's going to treat today like tomorrow and like the next day and just have fun and enjoy himself.

Q. Darren, you have had to integrate into an all-Italian team, which could be challenging. Wondering what was the most difficult part to actually get into the team? What did the sort of the Italian environment actually bring to you as a person?

DARREN CAHILL: Learning to say the swearwords with the right accent and pronounce them correctly was -- I can't say. (Laughter.) I can't say it.

SIMONE VAGNOZZI: It's not so bad.

DARREN CAHILL: No, no, no, no, I've heard that before (smiling).

I can't, I cannot thank them enough for inviting me into this team and making me feel welcome. It would be easy for these guys to talk Italian amongst themselves. I'm there, but I'm part of the family.

And it's not just the family that we have. We have an extended family with other people around us that you don't see. And then the fans that Jannik has in Italy and around the world. It's been fun and feels like a lot of love, to be honest.

It's different. I think that part of the job of coaching also is to build that culture within a group and to make sure that everybody's treating everybody as equals. No one is more important than anybody else.

I feel like we have that within this team.

Q. You guys just talked about his personality. I heard that Jannik, he is from a city which is of course Italy, but very close to Austria, so he speaks both like German and Italian, and he had kind of like a multi-cultural background. Do you think that kind of his background reflects his personality and do you think it makes him easy to communicate or, you know, I don't know if it's helped him to be a good tennis player.

DARREN CAHILL: Well, you know Italy much better than I do.

SIMONE VAGNOZZI: No, for sure it's a different part of Italy where he borns. I think this part of Italy normally are really serious. They don't speak so much. And from outside maybe you see this one of Jannik, but in the reality is a guy who want to make a joke, want to have a smile always.

So when we are in the hotel, when we are in the restaurant, is really funny guys. So it's really serious on the court when he practice, and this one is maybe the part of German part of him, but is also really funny, and this one is more Italian part (smiling).

Q. Obviously, Darren, Jannik is a huge ball striker, one of the best ever. What kind of player does he remind you? What makes this ball striking so special, so impressive?

DARREN CAHILL: The sound of the ball when he hits it, it's pretty amazing, isn't it? Yeah. That was the one thing that I noticed, because I have seen him play from a distance a long time, for years now.

I think on ESPN maybe three years ago I may have said courtside that this kid could be a future No. 1. He was that good that early. And Riccardo Piatti did an incredible job with him.

The sound of the ball when he hits it is unique and special. He gets that from his timing and his hand speed. He's worked damn hard to be able to do that. One of the toughest things we have as coaches is to stop him from practicing. He will play nonstop on the court.

We have to try to balance what we're trying to do, are we doing it for long enough, and then getting him off the court. Because if we don't get him off the court, he will stay out there four or five hours and keep doing the same thing over and over. That's one of the juggling acts we have as his coaches.

Agassi hits the ball like that. When he hits the ball, it just sounds like it's hit harder than everybody else. A lot of the great champions. Rafa was the exactly the same. Roger, when he hit a forehand, you could just hear the sound of it. And Novak, when he hits a forehand and backhand, it's like a thud. It's not just a normal person striking the ball. All those players have a different sound when they hit the ball and Jannik certainly has that, as well.

Q. You spoke about culture, spoke about team, a sense of fun. What do you contribute to the team in that respect? How much did that come from your upbringing, your father? What did you learn from the

coaching environment that you're exposed to as you were growing up? How much does that contribute to your coaching and your part in Jannik's rise to the final?

DARREN CAHILL: 95% of my coaching throughout my entire career was learnt through the Port Olé Football Club. It's just what I was brought up with with my dad coaching there for so many years and being successful there and being around a club and people that experience success. Yeah, I guess there are some habits and some cultures and some ways of coaching that never leave you.

I think also it's important that you continue to try to get better. I was really lucky that I have had some great players, and I started my coaching career with one of the all-time Australian greats with Lleyton Hewitt and I had him at 12 years of age. Incredibly lucky to be able to do that.

One thing has led to another and I have been fortunate to work with some great players as well. With those experiences you learn different ways of coaching and different ways of communicating and different ways of hopefully trying to inspire the people around you and not just the players as well.

That's part of my job with this team is to keep everybody's feet on the ground and thankfully I have an incredible coach next to me that's doing an amazing job with Jannik and the technical and tactical, and I just try to make sure we are on the right path.

If we are doing our job right, eventually he's going to get there, I think Jannik, regardless whether we are coaching him or not, but hopefully we can fast-track him to get him there as quickly as possible. That would be a good coaching job.

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