

Laver Cup

Thursday, 22 September 2022

London, England, UK

Captain John McEnroe
Vice Captain Patrick McEnroe
Jack Sock
Alex de Minaur
Frances Tiafoe
Taylor Fritz
Felix Auger-Aliassime
Diego Schwartzman
Tommy Paul
Press Conference

TEAM WORLD

TODD WOODBRIDGE: Welcome to Team World for joining us in the team press conference for the Laver Cup London 2022.

John, first question comes to you. Are you ready?

JOHN McENROE: You know, I'm always ready. I think the boys are ready. No one likes losing, least of all very competitive people that are on my left and right.

I believe we are due. It's been tough obviously. Last year was a nightmare. We have been watching highlights from the other years. We were this close a couple of times.

We know that we are up against it, but we are confident.

TODD WOODBRIDGE: Taylor, let me start with you. You are the one that brings fire out on court, absolute passion. Are you ready to take that type of leadership role within the team?

TAYLOR FRITZ: No, I don't think anyone really is a leader except for obviously John, you know, our captain. You know, I'm ready to play. Whoever we put me up against, I'm ready to take on the challenge. If it happens to be, I mean, whoever it is, you know, I'm ready to go.

TODD WOODBRIDGE: Alex, you're coming into the Laver Cup for the first time. You play terrific tennis when you play for your country in a team event. What's the experience going to be like when you've got the rest of



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these guys to have to do your job for?

ALEX de MINAUR: Look, it's extremely exciting. I feel our team competitions brings out the best in me, so I'm extremely fired up, extremely excited.

You know, I know every single one of these boys has my back. I have everyone's back. You know, we are just going to go out there and compete.

TODD WOODBRIDGE: What about competing tomorrow against Andy?

ALEX de MINAUR: Yeah, you know, it's going to be a great match. I'm looking forward to it. Hopefully I can bring some of my best tennis for Team World and hopefully I can give them a valuable win.

TODD WOODBRIDGE: Frances, you're coming off some amazing form, your run at the US Open. You have been here before. You're a better player this time around. How are you looking forward to the challenge that lays ahead?

FRANCES TIAFOE: I'm just excited. I think it's going to be really good. I think we have a great group of guys, guys that are hungry, ready to do something special.

As John said, I think we're definitely due. I genuinely really like our chances. Yeah, I think we are all just here to go for it, honestly.

TODD WOODBRIDGE: Jack, you have been here, you've won, what, 16 points, singles, doubles. Tomorrow double duty. How are you feeling about taking that on?

Also, I might even go back to Frances as well with this question, about coming out and playing that match in the doubles against Roger and Rafa?

JACK SOCK: Yeah, I mean, I think obviously -- I mean, I think experience plays a little bit, has to play a little bit of a role. I have been a part of a few of the teams. Like we have said, we have had a lot of chances in the past. I think we'll use some of that confidence, even some of those losses and use it for, you know, for motivation.

I agree. I think we have a great chance. I hopefully can do my part and contribute in the doubles, as well, obviously one of the bigger reasons why I'm here. But I also feel like I have played some great tennis in singles this year. Not going to count myself out by any means in that.

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Tomorrow one of our big goals is to get off to a much better start. I feel like in years past, instead of playing from behind, I feel through the first two days we have always been trying to play catchup. Obviously tomorrow night is going to be a beyond-iconic evening, doubles match. I'm just stoked to be a part of it with my guy Foe, you know, next to me.

We will go out and enjoy the moment, but not going to hold anything back. Sorry, Roger. Don't want to spoil the night (smiling).

TODD WOODBRIDGE: What do you think, Frances, about that doubles?

FRANCES TIAFOE: I'm just excited to play two up-and-comers tomorrow (laughter). Should be good.

No, it's going to be iconic to be part of that. Both guys are absolute legends, and obviously Roger's last dance. Again, as Jack said, we are definitely just out there trying to get a win.

TODD WOODBRIDGE: Felix, you have come in with a win over the World No. 1 and some good form last week. How are you looking at taking that form in, and how important is it to really be able to lead this team into these matches?

FELIX AUGER-ALIASSIME: Yeah, for myself, yeah, I played some tennis in another type of team event last week, so I'm going to try to bring that level and that type of energy again coming into this event. I had a great time last year.

Yeah, it was unfortunate we couldn't win, but I feel like we have a great group. Everybody has been playing some really great tennis this year. I really feel like this could be it.

I will happily take my part and try to bring my best game to try to get points for the team.

TODD WOODBRIDGE: Tommy, you are the alternate. They all look pretty serious up here. Have you been trying to lighten things up a bit? If you get a chance to play, how will that be?

TOMMY PAUL: I'm just going to bring some good energy for the team, support all the guys. I believe in every single one of them to perform.

I will be ready if they need me, you know.

TODD WOODBRIDGE: One to go. You said that playing the Team Europe is like playing a team of super heroes. My question is: Are you going to be their Kryptonite?

DIEGO SCHWARTZMAN: Yeah, I was meaning because of Rafa, you know, all together for us, being tennis players, means that. But we are another side of the net, and we want to beat them.

So we have the chance to beat and be the bad guys this time here in London. Let's see if we can do. I really trust in these guys, and I think we have the chance. We have to improve from last year and try to do much better and have the chance.

TODD WOODBRIDGE: The bad guys beating the super heroes.

I will pass it over to the rest of the floor to answer some questions.

THE MODERATOR: Just keep it to one question each, please, so we get to as many as possible.

Q. A question for Felix. You mentioned being here, participating last year. I think it would be fair to call it maybe a horror? I'm wondering, do you think that Team World is like the perennial underdog in this event?

FELIX AUGER-ALIASSIME: I mean, it was my first time playing last year. I played one match which was very close, like I felt like I had I think breakpoints or set points in the second set almost to win. So it was really a coin toss, that match. I feel like I could have won and brought one point to the team.

We eventually lost, but like John said, the previous years have been really close. When you look back, sometimes it's just really unfortunate that, you know, in four times that Team World couldn't get a win.

But still, last year I thought that, yeah, again, there were some really close matches, especially on the first day, like Diego and I. If this year these matches, just half of these matches can go on our side, it would be a different story. Then if we can win more, I think we will be very competitive.

So I think, you know, we have really good guys. Of course there is legends in front of us, of the game, but we are all young guys playing good tennis coming up, you know, getting better and better each year. I think, yeah, this could be it.

Q. John, what sort of hole do you think Roger's retirement leaves in the sport? Would you be able to offer him any advice on retirement? Are there any dos and don'ts of retirement that you could share with us?

JOHN McENROE: I don't know if he needs any advice, actually. He seems to be in a great position as far as

what he's got going. I hear he's involved in a lot of things off the court.

Obviously there is a void that will never be filled. Then the same way as you walk on and winning a Wimbledon or US Open, he's done that so often to so late an age, which is amazing.

I mean, he's got to look at, like, his career and think to himself that he -- I remember six years ago when he limped off the court at Wimbledon, and then he ended up winning, didn't play for six months, and winning three majors in the next 18 months. Then he had match point on Novak at Wimbledon, two of them.

So this is beyond belief what him and the other two guys have done. He doesn't need my advice. He's in a great position. He's a total class act. We all know that. He loves the sport. That's part of why he won so much, in my book. He loves it.

I'm hopeful that he, and I believe he will be around it in some way, shape, or form. I don't know exactly what that is and he probably doesn't know, because I'm sure up until recently he was planning on playing.

Q. Jack and Frances, your emotions being cast in the role you're being put in tomorrow night in the storyline as the villains, and if your coach, who maybe has some personal experience of facing a top player and a crowd against him has had any advice for you?

FRANCES TIAFOE: I mean, yeah, I mean, this is a special night. I just think me and Jack are just looking for a special night, come out there, have fun. I mean, the crowd is obviously going to be for them. You understand that kind of moment, and just go out there and do your part and just try to get a win.

Obviously, as Jack said, we have played these events before and know what to expect. Yeah, it's going to be a special night tomorrow. I'm just happy I get the opportunity to do it with Jack.

JACK SOCK: I mean, like I said earlier, I think drawing back on the past years of this event, obviously outside of this tournament you're never going to see these guys playing together in doubles.

I have been fortunate enough to play some combinations of these legends of our sport a few different times. I'll definitely draw off that. Obviously the emotions and everything will be a little different, obviously mainly on their side and to be a part of it on our side. I will probably just draw off of some of the matches we have had in the past against these guys.

Yeah, we'll definitely do our best. We want to put as

many points on the board as we can for our squad.

Q. Would like to ask John McEnroe, considering could become most famous double match in tennis?

JOHN McENROE: This one that's tomorrow?

Q. Yeah, because you won so many tournaments in doubles. You won the greatest.

JOHN McENROE: Well, first of all, I just want to say that these guys aren't villains. I earned that reputation. That's unfair to them. They are opponents to, you know, a very unique situation that we are all fortunate enough to be around. This is like an incredible moment for our sport.

I mean, the good news is that if they win, they are not going to be villains either. This is about the celebration of what Roger has accomplished and him ending it and hopefully not hurting himself, is what I'm thinking.

So whether he wins or loses I believe is beyond the point. So that opens the door beautifully for us to go do our thing.

As far as the doubles match, it would be hard to think it would be anything that I have ever encountered. You'd be, like, Wow, this particular doubles match is more important and this is obviously for totally different reasons, because this is -- otherwise it would be like "another match," but obviously this is not another match.

So it's going to be awesome just to be out there.

Q. I'd like to ask Taylor, Felix, and John your thoughts on this. Wondering what you think the effect will be of these back-to-back retirements of two of the greatest players ever, Serena Williams and Roger Federer? Do you think it will affect the popularity of tennis? Do you think some fans might be lost because they're leaving the game?

TAYLOR FRITZ: I mean, I think it is going to be tough on a lot of fans, because Serena and Roger probably have, you know, more fans than anybody in tennis. But, you know, there's so many more players.

I think tennis is becoming so much more entertaining because you're seeing so many new people win. You know, I think it's really exciting that going into these big events there is 10 different people that could potentially win.

You know, hopefully their fans stay in the sport, want to keep watching. I think it's tough to replace two people as iconic as them, but, you know, I still think there is a lot of exciting times ahead for tennis.

FELIX AUGER-ALIASSIME: Yeah, not much to add. Of course I think there is exciting players coming up. We saw now, for example in New York, that was a good example, Frances in the semis and the atmosphere was crazy. And then that final match, also with the youngest champion in a long time.

So there is exciting times ahead, like Taylor said, with a lot of new faces, a lot of new players playing very good, very intense and entertaining tennis.

But I also think that it's important that, like I saw Roger in an interview earlier, that he's going to stay around for his fans that just have followed him throughout his career, that he stays around tennis, gives back to tennis in some sort of way, and I hope the same for Serena, you know, because they have been icons, idols to all of us sitting here. Hopefully, you know, they have a chance to give back in some form and stay around tennis.

JOHN McENROE: As far as what was said, these two players are irreplaceable. I don't think there is any question about that. The sport goes on no matter what, and we have witnessed that in every sport over time.

The opportunity is there to market these young kids in a way that I don't think we have successfully done before. Yes, Serena started the event and brought electricity, but all in all, to me, having been at 40 of those, 30 as a commentator and another 15, absolutely electrifying event in part because of Frances and Carlos and others.

So this was a great event. That just shows you that if done properly, we can sort of use that to our advantage, hopefully, "us" being the sport of tennis.

Q. Frances and Taylor, both of you in the last few months have played extraordinary matches under very trying conditions, you at Wimbledon, you at the US Open, enormous fans for you and for your opponents. How do you put the blinders on and avoid sort of those fan-boy moments, given who you were playing in those circumstances and who you will be playing this weekend?

FRANCES TIAFOE: I don't know. Taylor is much more locked in than I am. Ask him (smiling).

TAYLOR FRITZ: I don't know. I think one of the biggest things I maybe struggled with when I was younger is you're facing that other person on the side of the net, whether it be Novak, Roger, or Rafa, and a lot of it is not thinking about who you are playing. You're just focused on the match, and it's about playing the level of tennis that's coming at you from the other side of the court. A lot of it is you can't get in your head about who you are playing. You might beat yourself.

I think that for me, anyways, I feel like I improved a lot

over the past year or so, so I have that confidence. I'm ready to beat those guys. You know, when I step on the court with them, I'm not thinking so much about I'm playing Rafa, I'm playing Novak. I'm just trying to play my tennis, and I believe that, you know, if I play well and the level that I have, it's enough to beat those guys.

FRANCES TIAFOE: Yeah, no, in all seriousness, I just genuinely love playing the best players in the world, seeing where I go, where I stand, you know, with them.

As far as the fans, there is nothing more I love than playing a packed stadium. I think if you don't like playing in the biggest stadiums of the world packed, I think it's probably the wrong sport for you. Yeah, get them involved and show the world what you can do on the world's biggest stages. That's what I really get up for.

Q. Alex and John, Alex, I know you were just saying about how much you enjoy playing team events. It's going to be obviously a bit different playing Andy with the crowd over here. Your thoughts on approaching that? John, what would you be advising Alex? Because for the first time he will be working with you sitting courtside.

ALEX de MINAUR: Well, look, I'm obviously going to be playing Muzz in his backyard. I'm genuinely pumped for that. It's going to be an incredible atmosphere, whether it's for or against me, but I'm just ready to live for the challenge, just play the man in front of me, and that's all I can try to do.

In these teams events, you have often matches where you're not playing in front of home crowds. You're playing away matches. I still think it brings a different fire and energy to me, which I'm hopefully going to bring out from the warmup tomorrow and play some of my best tennis and see how I can go.

JOHN McENROE: Obviously it's frustrating, obviously, when people are against you. It's understandable in this situation. But it's also quite rewarding when you're able to overcome that. It's actually exciting.

So there is a definite upside. It's not difficult to get up for a match like that. Alex is that type of player, anyway, so I don't need to tell him anything about that. You feel it out when you're out there and see what you're up against. But you prepare for the worst anyway in terms of that, but also, it inspires. Again, it's like what Frances just said: If you don't embrace challenges like that, you're in the wrong sport.

Q. I've got a question I guess for all of you. When you knew that tomorrow's doubles match was going to be Federer's last, were you all clamoring to play and be part of that, or were a lot of you stepping away from that pressure?

JOHN McENROE: I would say that it would be safe to say that everyone would like to be part of that. No one was running away from that one, believe me. I don't think it gets a whole lot more exciting than that, to be part of sort of history.

We had to flip some coins there (smiling). Except for Jack, maybe.

Q. John, if you were a player approaching this weekend, what would your mindset be and what do you hope your players will bring?

JOHN McENROE: If I was a player, I'd be super pumped up, because we haven't won this as a team, and I did love team events. "Enough is enough" would be the mantra. This format is suitable for us. So there is no reason why we can't or shouldn't win this at this point.

I mean, obviously if you look at the rankings, we're the underdogs. That goes without saying. That's been that way from the beginning.

But also, again, if you can't get up for an event like this with the upside of, you know, what you're going to get in terms of recognition, everything about it, it would be crazy.

I don't think I need to tell any of these guys a way to get up for this. If anything, we would be like almost too pumped up in a way, so just bring it down so that we don't do something that hurts ourselves ultimately. You know, make them beat us.

There is a lot right now going on on their side. Who knows what's going on exactly. I'm not sure they know exactly what's happening in the next couple of days, especially on the weekend. That, to me, allows us to sort of -- we have a better idea of where we're headed. That doesn't mean it's going to be easy.

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