

Laver Cup

Thursday, 21 September 2023

Vancouver, BC, Canada

Team Europe

Captain Bjorn Borg

Vice Captain Thomas Enqvist

Andrey Rublev

Casper Ruud

Hubert Hurkacz

Alejandro Davidovich Fokina

Arthur Fils

Gael Monfils

Press Conference

TODD WOODBRIDGE: Good afternoon, everybody. Thanks for being with us. Todd Woodbridge here. I will be working on the broadcast team in commentary for the Laver Cup. Here to get things underway with our first press conference.

A warm welcome to Team Europe. I'll go through the team led by this end, Vice Captain Thomas Enqvist, Gael Monfils, Alejandro Davidovich Fokina, Casper Ruud, Captain Bjorn Borg, Andrey Rublev, Hubert Hurkacz and Arthur Fils. Welcome to you all.

Let me start, if I could, with you, Bjorn, today.

CAPTAIN BJORN BORG: Yes.

TODD WOODBRIDGE: I will ask you to tell us a little bit about your team and how things have been progressing in this lead-up to tomorrow's matches.

CAPTAIN BJORN BORG: Well, first of all, we all are happy to be in Vancouver. Some of the guys have never been here before, so it's an opportunity to play in front of the fans here and the tennis people in Vancouver.

I have a good team. I'm very happy with my team. We had a good practice the whole week. I think it's going to be very interesting match. Unfortunately we lost last year in London. That was a very big disappointment.

I know that all these six guys are very eager to bring back the trophy to Europe, but people who come and watch the match are going to see good tennis. It's going to be good matches, as it's always been in Laver Cup.



LAVEL CUP

This is the sixth year Laver Cup exists and it's great.

For me personally, I mean, it's the best week of the year for me personally, and spend time with these great champions here, it's such a nice thing. The team we have together, it's wonderful. It's a very close team, and it should be in that kind of way.

I'm looking forward to it. It's going to be very exciting tomorrow. Like I said, we are all ready to play.

TODD WOODBRIDGE: As Bjorn mentioned, we've got a lineup all set, out at 11:00, and get our matches underway with Ben Shelton taking on Arthur Fils. The second match in the day session is Francisco Cerundolo taking on Alejandro, who has got some work to do to get up to speed with time changes and everything like that.

And then Felix Auger-Aliassime in the evening will take on Gael Monfils. The fourth match of the day is the doubles with Tiafoe and Paul taking on Rublev and Fils.

So I will come to you, to the vice captain, to Thomas Enqvist. You had a different lead-in, because you had players coming in a little later, had some changes. How have you managed to get everybody on court and ready to get started tomorrow?

VICE CAPTAIN THOMAS ENQVIST: Yeah, I agree with Bjorn. We had really good practice days, even if we had a couple of difficult flights coming in here. Having said that, I need to say thank you so much for the guys, because right away they put on the blue jacket and they really come together and they support each other. They have a lot of fun.

They have been working really hard on the practice court. We had a really good, nice team dinner last night where everybody is super excited to get together and play. We are really looking forward to this.

TODD WOODBRIDGE: Arthur, let me start with you, the youngest I think in the team, came in late. You're first on the court tomorrow. These are big, new experiences. Tell us about what it's like being in a team like this and experience in the Laver Cup for the very first time.

ARTHUR FILS: Yeah, it's amazing to be part of the team. We have great champions like this. I mean, I'm the new one, so the rookie (smiling).

I'm really happy to be part of the team, and tomorrow I have two great matches. First against Ben, and then in doubles with Andrey. So I will do my maximum to help



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the team and to win some points, yeah.

TODD WOODBRIDGE: Gael, from almost the youngest Frenchman to you...

ANDREY RUBLEV: To the oldest. (Laughter.)

GAEL MONFILS: Try to be polite with me.

TODD WOODBRIDGE: I knew he would kick in for me. Perfect.

Tell us about your experience here. You have done so much in the world of tennis but this is new, you have watched it from afar. To be a part of it but also to be more of the senior player, you need to be one of the leaders.

How is that in your first time here?

GAEL MONFILS: It's great. It's always great to be in the team. Like a little bit different but the first time also I play with Arthur. We couldn't manage to play on Davis Cup together. Then with the other guys, you know, we know each other for long time also, and it's just great.

As I say to all of them, I'm there, you know, to loosen up everybody and definitely to help them, you know, to help them. This competition, it was in my bucket list. It looks great, looks fantastic. Definitely that type of format that I love to play and compete, team spirit. I was very flattered when I received a call, and 100% be ready tomorrow for a good one.

TODD WOODBRIDGE: Alex, were you flattered to get the call? You had a difficulty arriving in late, having to adjust. What about your experience so far in joining this team? I think you bring that little extra attitude. Would that be fair? Andrey has a little bit of that, but you bring it also.

ALEJANDRO DAVIDOVICH FOKINA: Yeah, after today's flight, I just have couple hours here and not have enough time to be with the team, but I feel that they are hungry to have food (laughter) to have the trophy come back to Europe. And then, you know, we know each other very well since these years, and I think going to be a great team and we are going to have so much fun.

TODD WOODBRIDGE: Now, Andrey, I have a question for you. Ben Shelton, he said he's looking forward to playing here because he has the chance to trash-talk when he's out on court.

What do you think about that?

ANDREY RUBLEV: Nothing. I mean...

TODD WOODBRIDGE: Because you said that the other

team provoke in this competition. You kind of feed off that.

ANDREY RUBLEV: I mean, I don't know. Ben, I know him well, and he's super nice guy. I know even if he will do something or try to provoke, it's not personal. I don't know. Probably he will make me smile with this. (Laughter.)

TODD WOODBRIDGE: That has kind of the wrong effect. What about coming up playing with Arthur tomorrow? What about coming out and playing tomorrow?

ANDREY RUBLEV: Playing doubles tomorrow.

TODD WOODBRIDGE: Yes. Yes, talk about that.

ANDREY RUBLEV: I mean, we'll see. Going to be the first doubles with Arthur.

TODD WOODBRIDGE: Have you had a practice yet?

ANDREY RUBLEV: We have had one practice, and if he will play the same way like he played on practice, I think we have good chances.

About Tommy Paul and Frances, I think last two times I play against Frances doubles, I think I lost. So it's time now to try to win.

TODD WOODBRIDGE: Very good. Hubi, you're called the calming influence of the team. You've got to have, like, this smiling assassin to be able to rev these guys up. With a massive serve, you come in as the powerhouse for the team. Is that fair?

HUBERT HURKACZ: Hopefully.

TODD WOODBRIDGE: What about when you have all these different personalities you have to keep under control?

HUBERT HURKACZ: No, it's super cool to be here, part of the team. Having all the guys, having Bjorn, Thomas as the captain, it's a real honor to be part of Team Europe and I really been enjoying the experiences.

We had a fun dinner last night with a good atmosphere, and so I think everyone enjoyed that, and I think that brings us closer together and it's going to help to bring the really good energy during the matches.

TODD WOODBRIDGE: Casper, finally from me, Boston you came in here, played that first match. I think even in your own words you said you were slightly nervous. Since then, your career has gone to new heights. You come in kind of as the Scandinavian leader amongst these guys.

CASPER RUUD: Yeah.

TODD WOODBRIDGE: Sitting next to Bjorn now, it's got to be a much more comfortable than it was a couple of years ago?

CASPER RUUD: Yeah, hopefully. It's a different situation. Like you said, last two years for me have been real exciting, up and down like everyone will experience, but I tried to advise Arthur yesterday, since he's playing the first match, how it feels. I did it two years in a row, first in Boston and then in London.

Last year in London I was probably even more nervous because we had Roger, Rafa, Novak, and Andy watching. Looking over at the bench was motivating but also nerve-racking. Told him he'll do fine.

It's great to be back. When I came to my hotel room and took my jacket on, immediately wearing the blue colors, it's a great feeling. Playing for Team Europe is special. Also under the Swedish captains that we have, Bjorn and Thomas, it's really exciting and I'm ready to give it my all this weekend.

TODD WOODBRIDGE: Fantastic. I'm going to pass it off to Chris and he's going to lead the rest of the conference.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. I just wanted to ask you about the French connection here. Interesting because you have one guy on this end who brings a ton of experience to the team, and then you've got the new guy over here. I just wondered if you could talk about that dynamic and what you see in those two.

CAPTAIN BJORN BORG: I think for people to see a young guy like Arthur here, he's been doing really well this year. Upcoming guy, and he has a great future in front of him. To see him play, it's going to be very interesting and for the people, for anyone.

Gael has been around for many years, big personality. Everybody loves to see him play. What he's doing on the court, I think it's one of the most or best personalities you can see, that people really enjoy and like. Still, he play unbelievably good tennis. He had a great summer this year. So to bring two players, I think Arthur can learn few things from Gael, because he's been around for so many years, so to have these two guys on the team, I'm very happy with that.

For them to be part of the team, they can provide so many positive things for the team. That's very, very good.

Q. Gael, are you the type of person to take him under your wing, give him advice?

GAEL MONFILS: I mean, I know him for a long time. We have been chatting, you know, even before he cracked the top 100 and before he won his first title.

Always told him, you know, Feel free to call me. We had this long chat and everything. So of course, you know, he's from France, so I want to protect him and him to be even better than we have been with those three other guys.

For me, being here is a real pleasure, and I can't say, like, thank you enough to Team Europe because I will see my guy shine, and, you know, this is different.

Q. Andrey, I saw you at the photo shoot last night and you were having a lot of fun. As you were breaking up, I think you had one of the tennis balls. Did you take a step back and try to put it into the Laver Cup trophy?

ANDREY RUBLEV: Yeah, Gael provoked me. Gael or Arthur? Gael.

Q. You almost sunk it, right?

ANDREY RUBLEV: Yeah, the second. The first one was out, the try. The second was better.

But yeah, Gael he put (indiscernible).

Q. The reason I bring it up, Andrey, I know you follow basketball...

ANDREY RUBLEV: I don't follow. Gael follows.

Q. But you look like a guy who totally enjoys yourself. I know you have an interesting background. Your father was a boxer.

ANDREY RUBLEV: Yeah.

Q. Your mother was a tennis coach?

ANDREY RUBLEV: Yeah.

Q. I read somewhere where you actually practiced boxing. How do you think that helps you on the court? You have to be able to move around a lot.

ANDREY RUBLEV: I don't know. Helps to be probably... I don't know. I mean, when I was a junior, like, 14, yeah, from young age, maybe 14, 15, because I was not really doing fitness and I didn't really have the fitness coach, I think boxing helped me a lot to coordinate a bit better myself. Moving-wise I was not, yeah, because of this I was more coordinated. I was maybe a bit more confident

in myself.

Then when I was practicing on court, some things were not, like, disturbing me or was not painful, because sometimes in boxing you hurt yourself much more, and for sure it give me a lot of endurance. Because there you need to have a really big heart to be able to keep intensity in the boxing, and for sure that part of workout help in tennis to have good endurance.

Q. The US Open, I mean, it wasn't just the heat and humidity. Ended up playing your best friend in the quarters. What did you learn? What did you take from that?

ANDREY RUBLEV: I don't know what to learn. It was a great match. I mean, the conditions was not easy, but the conditions was not easy for everyone.

The same for Daniil, the previous day for Novak and Taylor, and sometimes this is part of the sport you have to play in those conditions. Sometimes you play completely, everything is super windy or rainy or super cold, so you need to adapt and that's it.

Q. A question for both Casper and Andrey, you may have different perspectives. What does a week like this do for you? What does it give you as a player and a person as part of a team?

CASPER RUUD: To me, I think it's nice to have your typical opponents be teammates for once. When you're playing Davis Cup or United Cup or whatever, you have your countrymen as your teammates. But here it's, you know, anyone from Europe can be your teammate.

You kind of connect or create a connection or a bond that you can kind of use for the rest of the year. The next year it's easier to kind of, to know each other, to set up practices. At least I felt like that helped a lot for me when I did first year, and Boston was kind of easier to ask the guys to practice in the future and so on.

It's just really fun competition. Yeah, you have to learn all the good and all the bad sides of your teammates. Especially Andrey. (Laughter.)

Q. Andrey?

ANDREY RUBLEV: I forgot the question, but I'm not agree with Casper (laughter).

Q. I will direct this to Casper but this is for any of the players. It feels like a really cool thing about Laver Cup is the fact that you have all these different generations of tennis under one roof. You have all these legends walking around. It feels like you guys play different types of tennis over the different generations. I don't know about you, but when older

tennis players talk to me, they love complaining about no one coming to the net anymore, staying on the baseline, people playing this boring style of tennis. When you're at an event like this, do you feel like it's an opportunity to try out these older types of tennis, or incorporating a bit more transitional game, or are you kind of done with that? You're just doing your own game?

CASPER RUUD: I think...

Q. Anyone can answer. It's for you, Casper.

CASPER RUUD: I think to me, I just do anything I can to win the matches that I play. To me, I'm not going to come to the net because my volley is not really great. I'd rather play forehands and backhands from the baseline. I think the modern kind of tennis is, you know, people are returning so well, so, you know, serve and volley is not that easy to do anymore because you have people like Novak, for example, who is maybe one of the best returners in the world kind of took it to a new level, and people who try serve and volley against him know there is a good chance he's going to pass you. So I think people have become so great from the baseline, so coming to the net maybe doesn't help as much anymore.

Yeah, sure, you're not playing for points here in terms of rankings, so it's maybe easier to kind of let loose, but at the same time you want to win every match that you play for your team and you kind of go back to what you usually do well.

For most of the guys on this team, I don't think serve and volley is necessarily the best tactic. I think Hubi is the one that will probably come more to the net, and it's great to have a player like him on the team who actually does come to the net, and especially for doubles.

Yeah, it's a good mix of any play style. That's also great with tactics when we talk with captains about who are we going to play. When we see the lineup of the other team, we can choose I'd maybe like to play this guy more than the other, and then you can kind of do tactics based on this.

Q. Hubi, what do you think?

HUBERT HURKACZ: I mean, as everyone here as a team, we're gonna try to play our best tennis and, you know, I like to come to the net more often than Casper, I would say probably. You know, same with Andrey on the right side who likes to hit forehands, heavy forehands.

So, yeah, just obviously having Bjorn here hopefully we'll get some tips how to play some good volleys. Yeah, we just, you know, gonna play our game and prepare for the matches tactically and then mentally.

Q. Arthur, last weekend you made your Davis Cup debut. Now you're making a debut here. What are you expecting from this weekend?

ARTHUR FILS: I hope that my Laver Cup debut will be better than my Davis Cup debut. (Laughter.)

I don't know. I will try my best. I will learn from them. They are all playing great and better than me, so I'm going to sit on the bench sometimes and watch them play and cheer for them. I don't know. It's so nice to play this event. It's a big one. I watch the TV all the years before, so really proud to be part. I will do my best, yeah.

Q. Casper, the other day Roger was asked what advice he would give to any of the young ones that are playing Laver Cup. He said they should refer to players that have had the experience. If you had to give one bit of advice to Arthur, Alejandro, what would you say to them?

CASPER RUUD: I think it's a good chance that matches go to a match tiebreak here. You have seen it so many times before. A 10-point match tiebreaker to decide the match and even the tie I think at this stage. So be prepared for that. Even if you lose the first set you only need to win one more set and you get into match tiebreak.

Obviously the matches are quicker than normal, but I would just say, you know, enjoy. Of course you want to win, but we know that you do your best either way when you're out there on court.

Yeah, me and Andrey who has also played before are going to do our best to help our fellow teammates who are here for the first time, and hopefully that experience can help a little bit.

Yeah, just enjoy but give it your all. I mean, it's a trophy worth fighting for. It's much more fun to hold it than go in the locker room on Sunday and not being able to win. That's the advice I would give.

Q. Gael, you're used to being a fan favorite. You're a veteran. Tennis fans around the world love you. You're playing in Canada and playing against Felix, our young star tomorrow. What do you think of that challenge of facing the crowd as well as probably a really good young player?

GAEL MONFILS: I don't know if it's a challenge or not, but it's going to be fun, you know. I know Felix for a long time. As well, he's been around.

It's going to be cool. It's going to be cool. It's more challenge because, to be honest, I want to play good for my teammates. I feel it's even a little bit more serious than the tour. The guys, you want to win, you play for

your own. Now you play for the team.

It's just, you know, I will have as much fun, but I know you play for team, so it's a bit different. You know, for the crowd, I got some specialties for them. (Laughter.) I'll be all right.

Q. You're coming for Felix tomorrow?

GAEL MONFILS: He's coming for me. (Laughter.)

Q. A question for anyone. You guys lost the Cup last year obviously first time in five years. Any messages to Team World about really wanting it back?

ANDREY RUBLEV: I don't know. Good luck, World. Let the strongest win. (Smiling.)

CAPTAIN BJORN BORG: Of course it was really disappointing last year in London that we lost. This year, I mean, these guys, we have six great players here.

ANDREY RUBLEV: Last year? (Laughter.)

CAPTAIN BJORN BORG: They played one doubles.

We have six great tennis players here. They are very competitive. Even me and Thomas, we hate to lose. We love to win. It's the same with these guys.

You see here during the week it's going to be very competitive, prestigious, no one likes to lose. Same with us. The other team too. They think they're in good shape, but they're not. I'm just telling you. We are ready to beat these guys. (Laughter.)

ANDREY RUBLEV: You put it first... (Laughter.)

Q. Bjorn, we know Roger has historically competed for Europe, and this year he's not doing that. So is he going to be consulting with you guys in any way to help Team Europe win the Cup this year? And so since we don't have any of the big three this year, do you think you'll have to step up a little bit more as a coach for all the younger guys for this year?

CAPTAIN BJORN BORG: I think regarding Roger, he's going to be involved with the Team Europe, of course. He's here. Definitely I have been speaking to him not every day but we have a good contact, and he's going to be there on Friday. The whole weekend, actually. That's a big help. He's been around for many years playing for Team Europe, so that's a big help, of course.

The big three are not playing, but I'm very happy with, like I said before, I'm very happy with my team here. We have six great players. I'm sure they are going to do really well.

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So I have no complaints. I mean, we have a great team spirit. Like some have said, we had a great dinner last night, and we have one guy here, a show guy here, likes to talk a lot, and he's doing that very well.

ANDREY RUBLEV: I was talking because you were not talking. (Laughter.) Then you finish...

CAPTAIN BJORN BORG: But we're very happy, and of course...

ANDREY RUBLEV: This year I'll be quiet.

CAPTAIN BJORN BORG: For Roger to be here, I mean, he's part of the Laver Cup. He's part of Team Europe. He's part of us. So he's gonna, of course, give good advice, of course.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, everybody.

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