

# Laver Cup

Thursday, 21 September 2023

Vancouver, BC, Canada

## Team World

**Captain John McEnroe**

**Vice Captain Patrick McEnroe**

**Taylor Fritz**

**Frances Tiafoe**

**Tommy Paul**

**Felix Auger-Aliassime**

**Milos Raonic**

**Francisco Cerundolo**

**Ben Shelton**

Press Conference

**TODD WOODBRIDGE:** Good afternoon, everybody. Welcome back to all of those in the room, but a very special welcome to Team World who come in as the defending champions, which is a nice thing to be able to say, I would think, John, if I can start with you? You must be pleased to be able to be back here with the trophy that's behind you. Tell me how your week has been so far with all of these boys.

**CAPTAIN JOHN McENROE:** Yeah, I think that was known as a rhetorical question, I believe. It's awesome that we finally did it. We're excited. I think anyone that's followed this event knows I love it and what it means to me, idolizing Rod and having Roger part of it and the team spirit which I always loved as Davis Cup.

Awesome to be back. I love our chances. Love our team. As the great referee Mills Lane used to say in the boxing ring, "Let's get it on."

**TODD WOODBRIDGE:** Pat, as vice captain, you have been involved in Davis Cup as a captain highly in American tennis. You have a team here that I'm sure you're very proud of what they have been able to do with all the American players over the last few months. Talk as a whole of the team, but in particular...

**VICE CAPTAIN PATRICK McENROE:** Obviously, you're right, I was there when at least three of the four Americans, the veterans, I call them now, were starting out in the juniors, so to see how far they have come, it's amazing, now they are the veterans of the team when



# LAYER CUP.

they were sort of the young team.

Now we have obviously Ben and Fran here and Felix back is amazing. So it's just a great team. You know, a great bunch of guys. We love this event. We're excited that for the first time we have actually won it, and I think we feel we can do it again.

**TODD WOODBRIDGE:** Francisco, new into the team. I read you're going to be trying to get the guys to be speaking a little bit of Spanish. How is that going?

**FRANCISCO CERUNDOLO:** No, it's going bad. (Laughter.)

No, super excited to be here. Of course I have to speak every day in English, every minute. I'm learning a bit more, but yeah, the guys are really nice, except Foe, that I don't understand anything that guy says.

Yeah, super happy to be here. Sorry, Foe, but yeah. (Laughter.)

**TODD WOODBRIDGE:** What about your matchup tomorrow? You're out on court, first day, and very important to get off to a good start, second match. You take on Davidovich Fokina. Your thoughts on that one.

**FRANCISCO CERUNDOLO:** Yeah, super happy to play tomorrow. Super excited. I want to be out there fighting for this team. Yeah, it's going to be a tough match. Fokina is a great player. He can play really good.

But yeah, I will focus on my game and try to play my game and try to get the win for the team.

**TODD WOODBRIDGE:** Felix, a home tie, if you like, for you, to be able to play Laver Cup in Canada. Is it extra pressure for you or actually a great opportunity to get going?

**FELIX AUGER-ALIASIME:** No, I don't think extra pressure. We are here to compete. We want to win. And to have I think the home crowd and to have the people with us to do that, I think it's going to be great.

Had a great experience winning last year, but it was away, so to speak. So it would be nice to do it at home and kind of like celebrate with the people here and kind of keep, yeah, keep the trophy in our hands.

But excited to kick it off tomorrow night. I think it's going to be a good day. Looking back on the years before, we know how important the first day is. Have to get a good



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start.

TODD WOODBRIDGE: What about playing Gael?

FELIX AUGER-ALIASSIME: Yeah, he got me the last time we played a couple years ago. I'm a different player now. I believe in my chances to win. It's going to be a good one. I think entertaining one as well for the crowd.

**Q. Tommy, you've had a chance to celebrate the victory. You have had that practice of the celebration. How good would it be able to do it as a playing team member?**

TOMMY PAUL: You know, I'm really looking forward to it this year, hopefully put some numbers on the board for Team World and hopefully the celebration is the same (smiling).

TODD WOODBRIDGE: What about coming up tomorrow in the doubles?

TOMMY PAUL: Yeah, I'm looking forward to it. Me and Foe getting out there, should be a good one. Any time I'm on the court with Foe, it's normally high level. So hopefully we can get out there and play our best tennis, and like I said, get some numbers on the board.

TODD WOODBRIDGE: Milos, I remember last year. Playing with this group after being away from the game is probably an important step for you as you come back.

MILOS RAONIC: Yeah, it's a great honor and privilege to be picked. There is definitely a lot of people in rankings way ahead of me, but to have the captain's support to come here and be ready in case needed, normally somebody would have to be here to be ready if they need to replace me, so hopefully I don't have to replace anybody.

There is a great team here that can really take this all the way. They did it last year, and I think the chances are in favor, and I think it's going to be incredible for me to watch and support and then also just get back in that team atmosphere of tennis. You know, being two years away from tennis completely is a long time, and to be back, it's a lot of fun, as well.

TODD WOODBRIDGE: Talking about fun, they say that you're all the fun in the team, Frances. Is this true? We kind of know it's true. What's your role? What part are you going to play? Will it be a serious part?

FRANCES TIAFOE: Yeah, I think I'm playing a discipline factor for everybody. You know, having everybody just come in and just do the right thing, get the proper rest, be a true professional. That's what I bring to this team. (Laughter.)

TODD WOODBRIDGE: Taylor, is that tongue-in-cheek?

TAYLOR FRITZ: Absolutely.

TODD WOODBRIDGE: How is it being in this environment? Has he been giving you a lot of flack about your new role from New York, modeling? What have you boys said to him about all this?

FRANCES TIAFOE: I have been ripping him. Not really. Honestly, I have been showing him love. He actually looked good when he was walking. He was walking really fast. He usually doesn't walk that fast.

He looked great. I mean, the outfit was great. Super serious, which he holds a serious face most of the time, so that was all right.

Yeah, he looked good. I've got to give credit where it's due. I just need a Hermes suit whenever he's ready. That's all it is.

TODD WOODBRIDGE: On a serious note, Taylor, when Team World has come into this before, they have been underdogs. Would you say that you are favorites this time, or how are you looking at it?

TAYLOR FRITZ: Look, in just the format, how it's always gone, it always comes down to the wire either way. Europe has always been the favorite, but it's also been really close almost every year.

Yeah, maybe, maybe we might be the favorites this year with winning last year and we have such a strong team, but we I guess can't be thinking like that because it's probably going to come down to the wire either way, so we have to treat it like it's all the other years.

TODD WOODBRIDGE: Ben, what about you coming in. When you look at the last 12 months, rocking down in Australia, making quarter, what you have just done in New York, sitting on a bench like this, that's a big, big 12 months. How have you been able to handle that?

BEN SHELTON: Yeah, being back in a team environment, I feel really comfortable, really excited to be on this team with these guys, guys the last few years I have been watching tear it up on tour, been watching tear it up in this event, so really happy to be here. Excited to be kicking things off tomorrow. Looking forward for the chance to set the tone for the team.

TODD WOODBRIDGE: I asked Team Europe about the trash talk that you spoke about. How much trash talk are you going to give them or are you going to leave that to Foe?

BEN SHELTON: No, I think it will be a collective effort, but I guess you'll have to wait and see.

TODD WOODBRIDGE: We have to wait and see. Before we open it up to the rest of the field out here, what about your matchup first tomorrow against Arthur?

BEN SHELTON: Yeah, I'm really looking forward to it. Coming into this event I thought I was going to be the rookie who never played before, probably playing against someone with a lot of experience, playing in this type of situation, and I end up playing someone who is younger than me (smiling).

I'm looking forward to it. I think it will be a great match. Like Tommy said, we're here to put points on the board.

TODD WOODBRIDGE: We've got everybody. I will pass it over to Chris and open to questions in the field.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

**Q. Patrick touched on it already, but John, as someone who has always kept an eye on U.S. tennis, seeing this group here together, it's pretty impressive. Could you talk about that? Also the guys with the experience and then bringing on a new guy like Ben also.**

CAPTAIN JOHN McENROE: I think it's a great mix. I think these three have shown over the years they have helped each other, gone at it against each other, trained, and have fed off each other, and that's made them better players. They are this close now, making that breakthrough.

That's a great thing. Then bringing Ben in the mix, you know, as a young buck who is going to come with a lot of energy, a lot of ability, keep pushing.

You're referring to Americans, right? We're heading, you know, in a great direction, I believe, next two to five years. One to five. Next year even.

**Q. John, the sport has changed so much since you started playing. Surface, equipment is all different. People are moving so much better now. I'm just wondering...**

CAPTAIN JOHN McENROE: Wait. Hold on. That's where you lost me. (Laughter.) Why don't you throw a pie in my face while you're at it.

**Q. That's a Roger Federer quote. That's not me. Wondering if you think there is anything worth preserving or passing on to these guys about your style of play, coming to the net specifically?**

CAPTAIN JOHN McENROE: A wood racquet? (Laughter.)

You know, a lot of that depends on court surfaces and balls and, you know, that's a lot of what's changed. Wimbledon changed their grass.

US Open for a while was, you know, slowed their courts down. Australia, a lot faster. When Roger came back after that injury, I think that was helpful. But the bottom line is this is a game, you're out there playing one person. This is about heart and will and determination, you know, your athleticism before you even get to all the stuff that's changed.

Obviously with the equipment, the game is quicker. Guys, you need to be even better and better athletically, more explosion. That's a beautiful thing to see those type of advancements.

Sometimes you work a little bit with, like, the courts and can get different sort of types of games, because I think the most fun to me is watching different styles at work.

**Q. Specifically when you're working with someone like Ben, or Milos, the massive serve, are you pushing them towards the net more? Are you encouraging them to serve and volley?**

CAPTAIN JOHN McENROE: Well, I suppose, you know, when I see someone serve that big, they serve so big that at times, you know, they're not even at the service line by the time the ball's potentially coming back, and it depends again, depends on the individual. You know, you try to get in some ways to understand, you know, what makes that person tick like when I was working with Milos.

But of course I would have people that can do a lot with the serve to keep coming at people. This happens to be a pretty slow court, and the balls fluff up pretty quickly. It's not as easy to do that, for example. Whereas if you play in Indian Wells, you know, looks like it's much slower. The Open would be more doable. It sort of depends. But I do advocate at the very least mixing it up.

**Q. One for the Canadian contingent. Felix, you mentioned Gael getting to you last time. What did he do well and what do you have to guard against tomorrow?**

FELIX AUGER-ALIASSIME: It was three years ago, when I played him, he was I think the quickest player I have ever played against. Defensive skill and his court coverage was something I had never seen before.

Had a chance to play many other players throughout the years and him in practice, so I know, you know, what to prepare for tomorrow. So I think, you know, that's better than the first time, of course.

But that's of course his big quality is still today at his age

and later stage of his career is court coverage and just how he's able to make you play that extra ball and force you to do a mistake or force a little bit. I think he's won a lot of matches doing that. Going to have to be careful with that.

**Q. Is there an advantage of times past, or do you play your game is potentially as today? How much better are you suited to face him?**

FELIX AUGER-ALIASSIME: Well, of course overall I'm a better player than I was three years ago, but it's a match tomorrow, and we never know what can happen. Sometimes we don't know how he's going to feel, how exactly I'm going to feel.

But at the end of the day, the most important is to get to the finish line and to get the win, especially for the team. I think, you know, when I'm in these events it's not just playing for myself. I get really pumped up to play well for my teammates and get points, you know, for us and for the team, really. So not just about myself tomorrow.

**Q. Milos, you're here as an alternate, kind of in the tennis bull pen. Have you talked to John and Patrick at all about what kind of role you can play? You have been in the game so long. With a young team like this, is there a motivational role you can play?**

MILOS RAONIC: I think it's more been just coming out, making sure, first of all, I'm ready. It's obviously been a lot of up-and-down from my side of things, but then also just doing anything I can to help, like, if anybody needs a hit at any point or whatever they may need to be at their best level, that's really the biggest thing I can help in. I have kind of made myself available, whatever they need, and go from there. Help them get the job done.

**Q. Another question for Felix and Milos, it's the first time that Team World has hosted a home tie outside the USA. Have you sensed a buzz in Canada about the fact that Canada is hosting this event?**

FELIX AUGER-ALIASSIME: Yeah, I'm not sure everywhere in Canada, but I think in Vancouver. Yeah, I think for sure it's not a city that like in Montreal and Toronto where they are hosting a Masters 1000 event every year. So they don't get a lot of high-level tennis. I think for sure there is a buzz in this city specifically.

I mean, you know, the last few years it's kind of a buzz about Canadian tennis overall, and I think it's nice to bring this kind of event here, to have all these great players play in Vancouver and also encourage, you know, kids. This morning seeing kids like from around here that play in different clubs around here to come out and see the event and see us practice, I think it's great to have that. I would have loved to see that when I was growing up here.

MILOS RAONIC: I think it's a big deal. I don't think you have this thing go on 10 years ago that you can really consider -- like, we were playing, last time I played here was Davis Cup at UBC in front of 2500 people. This is a whole different thing.

That is when you're hosting a Davis Cup tie and it has to be in Canada, right, because you have that home advantage. The fact that it would be considered by such an international event that's sold out, all the cities it's gone through, and some of them sold them out in minutes, like, I think that goes a long way.

There is a lot of other great cities on the West Coast, but to think Vancouver is a spot that should do it I think says a lot about Canadian tennis, the passion for tennis throughout Canada, and where Canadian tennis is.

**Q. To John and Patrick, everybody who's at the table here have had amazing results over the last couple of years, and same with Team Europe. How important do you think it is that the guys at this Laver Cup can really shine without having Roger, Rafa, Novak, Andy in the mix, because when they're around, they get all the attention, but to see the two teams, all the players get an even range of attention and the importance for men's tennis on that?**

CAPTAIN JOHN McENROE: Well, I think this is, you know, a great test for an event that I believe in, the Laver Cup, because of what you just talked about there: the opportunity. We don't have these all-time legends, but you could have future Grand Slam winners all over the place. You don't know.

That's exciting. They get a chance to sort of stand up. I think this is where hopefully tennis will realize the gift it was given -- this is my opinion -- by having Rod Laver and Roger Federer associated with a team event like this. I think it would be a shame if this thing didn't continue to, you know, exist in the calendar.

As a matter of fact, I think it needs more of a stand-alone time so all players will feel like it's not something that's, you know, scheduling-wise even an issue. I think that's become one.

But I won't get into the minutiae of why, because, you know, it's too boring and too frustrating actually to have watched this over the course of my entire professional career, watching tennis shoot themselves in the foot, in my opinion. You know, hopefully they won't do it with this, because I have seen it on numerous other occasions.

You have been around, George, almost as long as I have. You can write a book about it.

**Q. John and Patrick, we had Team Europe in here not long ago, and I asked Bjorn about his motivation to win the Cup this year after losing it this year and if he had any messages for you guys. He said they, Team World, think they are in good shape but they're not, and we're ready to win it this year.**

FRANCES TIAFOE: I love that.

CAPTAIN JOHN McENROE: That doesn't sound like him.

VICE CAPTAIN PATRICK McENROE: He's always so nice, Bjorn. Maybe he got upset that they finally lost last year.

I think, first of all to Craig's question, this is a great opportunity for our team, you know, and these guys, because there are so many great personalities here, and they deserve to be on the biggest stage, and this is one of the biggest stages. I think it's awesome for tennis. We got a taste of victory last year, and we intend on getting another taste this year.

**Q. Felix, you're playing Gael tomorrow.**

FELIX AUGER-ALIASSIME: Yep.

**Q. I asked him if he's coming for you, he said you're coming for him. Do you have a response?**

FELIX AUGER-ALIASSIME: That's usually how it goes with Gael, how he plays and the way I play. So I have to go for it but not, you know, overdo it, in a way.

It should be interesting. I think it's a good matchup, and also personalities, I think we both like to get pumped and get the crowd involved, and it's going to be some good shots, good defensive shots from his side. You know, hopefully I can come in and put pressure on him and ultimately get the win, which is the most important.

Yeah, should be good (smiling).

**Q. Ben, you had a great summer in America, US Open. What's still making your unique style of celebrations? Do you have anything new planned up here for the Laver Cup?**

BEN SHELTON: Yeah, I guess my one celebration kind of went viral at the US Open, but I don't think normally in tournaments that I play I'm one who has a signature celebration. I think this is a team event, so if there is any celebrating that I'm going to be doing, it's with the guys who are going to be on the bench next to me or cheering for me. So that's kind of what I'm looking forward to the most.

(Questions in French.)

**Q. If I can, John, what would you like to see tomorrow night from Felix against Gael?**

CAPTAIN JOHN McENROE: I mean, to bring his passion and energy. You know, his joie de vivre, for the game. (Laughter.) You know, that's one of the things that I believe separates Felix from most other players. I mean, we all know how talented he is and his ability, so he's just got to show it and express himself and feel good about it.

I think that's, you know, it's a great matchup. It is a great matchup.

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