

Laver Cup

Friday, 22 September 2023

Vancouver, BC, Canada

Team World

Vice Captain Patrick McEnroe

Ben Shelton

Press Conference

B. SHELTON/A. Fils

7-6, 6-1

Team Europe - 0

Team World - 1

THE MODERATOR: Thanks for joining us, Patrick, Ben.

Ben, your feeling on the match today.

BEN SHELTON: Yeah, I thought it was a great match. Pretty high level from the start, you know. I thought Arthur was serving great from his side of the match. There was a lot of problems that I had to try and solve out there, but yeah, just really excited to get a win for Team World.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. Pretty clean match. Just talk about the serve, too. I think the first four games in the match for both of you guys, nobody surrendered a point on serve. You played as clean a first set as you could, other than getting behind in the tiebreak.

BEN SHELTON: Yeah, honestly when somebody comes out of the gate serving the way Arthur was, it puts a lot of pressure on you to match it with him serving first. So I felt that pressure from the start.

I felt pretty good about the way that I responded. Each game when he came up with a great service game or some good points, I feel like I shot right back at him. You know, I think that it was really big for me in the first set to be able to stay with him all the way.

When the balls get big here, at the end, before the ball change, it's tough to get anything on the serve and anything on a lot of balls. You saw it fluffing up. There was one point, I think it was the tiebreaker and then the first set, first point, and I'm literally seeing the ball fluff up as the ball goes on, long rally.



LAYER CUP.

Yeah, I think that's what made it the most difficult about serving today, and I thought that I handled it really well.

Q. The tiebreaker, how did you manage to turn it around? What was helping you? Was it the team behind you cheering for you, helping you, you know, cheering you on, or was it a bit of the experience like you have obviously had some big recent experiences on a big stage? What do you think was helping you through that?

BEN SHELTON: Yeah, I think the team energy had a huge, played a huge part. I have played a few tiebreaks lately, and, you know, knowing that when you're only down a mini break, it only takes one or two points to completely flip the tiebreak. I put a lot of trust in my serve down 4-1, and then, you know, I just put in my mind that I wanted to scramble and try to get one of the next two points.

I ended up getting a little lucky on a stretch return that went right over the net and I was right back in it. When you're down early in a tiebreaker and you get it back to even, you feel like you have the momentum. So from there, at that point in the tiebreak, I got really confident. It kind of bled into the second set, as well.

Q. You obviously played some huge matches recently. How does the pressure compare when you're playing for yourself at the US Open to have all these teammates to kind of play for?

BEN SHELTON: Yeah, it's different pressure, for sure. I love, you know, the type of pressure of playing for a team. You know, in the back of your head, it's always you don't want to let them down, but also, the win is so much greater when you get to do it for them and Team World, not just for yourself.

So there is a lot on the line playing for a team. Obviously at the US Open, a lot of big matches, some of the biggest moments of my career and it's a different feeling. Maybe a little bit larger stadium, more people, loud atmosphere, but here, with the team energy on the line, even though it's only day one and early days of this competition, it was a pretty high-pressure match.

Q. With your energy that you bring in, it kind of feels sometimes Rafa-esque with your left-handed game and the forehand and your celebrations on the court, as well. Do you have any thoughts on that? Do you consider your game could be similar to Rafa's in any way?

BEN SHELTON: I think that's a huge compliment, so thank you (smiling). But yeah, I think at times on the court, you know, the way that I love to fight, that I don't give up, could be some traits that I saw or learned from Rafa growing up. You know, he was one of those guys who replicated it every match, every tournament. You could only hope to have a fighting spirit like him.

But yeah, I think that some of the things that, you know, we have seen him do on the court definitely help me out on the court, showing some emotion, showing my fire, and trying to really come after the guy that I'm playing.

But, yeah, thanks for the compliment (smiling).

Q. Ben, to you first, what was it actually like playing that match from point to point? What did you feel? What were the nerve situation? Patrick, your comments and thoughts on Ben's performance?

BEN SHELTON: Yeah, I thought at the beginning of that match I was a little nervy going from point to point. It felt fast and felt like, you know, he was playing well and he was kind of on top of me, dictating points and kind of the rhythm of the match.

Then, you know, I kind of looked around to see if there was a game clock running out like usually we have at ATP tournaments. I didn't really -- I didn't see anything. So I started taking more time, and I was waiting to see if -- I mean, I don't think I was going over, like 25 seconds is normal, but I was waiting to see if I got a time violation and nothing happened.

So maybe there is not a time clock in this event, which, you know, when I was down Love-30 and took a little bit more time in a couple service games, I thought it kind of helped me dial things in and change the rhythm a little bit of the match.

Like I said, I wasn't trying to go outside the rules or go too slow, but just taking a little bit more time without seeing the clock run down I thought helped me.

VICE CAPTAIN PATRICK McENROE: Craig, I think I got a text from one of our kids at our academy after the match and said, He's going to be a fixture on the team for a long time, meaning Ben.

I said, We can only hope.

Because the obvious attributes he has as a player we all see on display on the court, but I think the biggest thing in this environment is his energy and attitude, and that's why we wanted him to be the first guy out to set the tone for the team, because he's got an incredible mentality and attitude for a team event.

Obviously his college experience has a lot to do with that

too. It was just a perfect -- that's the first time we have ever won the first match.

Q. Any learning curve today or this week with the black courts and the theater lighting and kind of a different environment?

BEN SHELTON: Yeah, I think the days of preparation leading up definitely helped me a lot. I wouldn't say I was in fine form the last few days playing, you know, practice points with other guys on the team or just hitting the ball, but when I came onto the court this morning, I was warming up with Tommy Paul, I felt like everything was perfect.

You know, the way that I was hitting the ball, the way I was moving, serving, returning, it was like I was back to that rhythm that I like to be in.

So maybe there was a learning curve during the week, but I felt really comfortable out there today, and I guess I have Tommy Paul to thank for that for giving me a great warmup.

Q. You talked about adjustments at one point. You were talking to John McEnroe and he was quite animated with his hands. How did he help you today? What were some of the adjustments he helped you with?

BEN SHELTON: Yeah, he really kind of helped me find my position on the return of serve. That was kind of one of the keys. You know, he was telling me, Keep doing what you're doing on the service game. It looks great.

We didn't talk about that as much. But we were more focused on what serves I was covering, what position I'm putting myself in to take away certain serves and what I'm doing with returns on big points.

Early in the match, or earlier in the match I think I had a 15-30, and I sat really deep in the court, shanked a forehand return. Missed it. In those big moments when I had second serves later in the match, because of what he told me, I stepped in a little bit and had some huge winning shots and attacking shots off the return because of that advice.

Q. Patrick, what do you make of the moxie that he showed in the tiebreak coming back?

VICE CAPTAIN PATRICK McENROE: It was pretty special. As I said, he's sort of built for this type of environment, and as he said, he feeds off the team. I think the team really feeds off him. He gives you a lot of energy when he's out there. As someone who is part of the team, you respond to that as well.

It was great. It was, like you said, he was down in that

breaker. I thought Fils played an amazing first set, played really, really high level, and Ben just hung with him, and when he got his chance, he was able to pounce.

Q. Looked like Frances was out kind of front and center and the rest of your team cheering you on throughout the game. Did you get any advice, any kind of words of wisdom?

BEN SHELTON: Yeah, you know, the three guys who are probably on me and then most during the match were Chris Eubanks, Frances, and Taylor Fritz, guys who have kind of, you know, taken me under their wing since I have been out on tour, giving me advice when I have played players that they have played before.

So to be able to have them in my corner during the match, you know, top American guys, guys who have had great results this summer, beaten a lot of top players, to be able to kind of see how their minds work during the match, something that I haven't been able to see before, was really cool and special for me. Now it's time to go out and cheer for my team.

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