

Laver Cup

Sunday, 24 September 2023

Vancouver, BC, Canada

Team World

Captain John McEnroe

Felix Auger-Aliassime

Ben Shelton

Press Conference

AUGERALIASSIME-SHELTON/Hurkacz-Monfils

7-5, 6-4

Team Europe - 2

Team World - 10

THE MODERATOR: Thanks for joining us, for your time.

Felix, your thoughts on a big win here tonight.

FELIX AUGER-ALIASSIME: Yeah, every win is important in Laver Cup since, you know, points get more important once we go in later stages of the event.

Every win is good. It was nice to share the court with Ben. I thought we played a good doubles because they weren't playing bad at all. They were playing good. To get out of this one in straight sets just shows how many options we have in our team in terms of the quality and depth that we have.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. Ben, I know you guys still have work to do and you don't want to get ahead of yourselves, but just considering the US Open and coming into this as a rookie, leading it off with the singles and getting the win tonight with Felix, I've got to imagine this is the stuff of tennis dreams for you?

BEN SHELTON: Yeah, definitely a great last month for me, stuff I have really enjoyed, but also trying to put in the back of my head and keep pushing forward, moving forward.

You know, the more matches that I can play like this where I feel like I'm having fun on the court, enjoying it and playing at a high level, competing at a high level, you know, the better and better I feel about my tennis.

When you play someone as locked in as Felix, he



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definitely keeps me in line on the court. He's a leader out there, and I enjoy a lot playing with him.

CAPTAIN JOHN McENROE: Ask these two guys a question, I'll stay afterwards, but they've got to sort of recover. Ask these two and I'll stay, okay?

Q. For both of you guys, what about the chemistry tonight? You're trying to get to know each other's games and play through each other's strengths. How did you dictate things throughout the night? Obviously you have a quick consultation before you're serving or receiving, but how did that play out tonight in terms of the strategy between you two?

FELIX AUGER-ALIASSIME: Well, you know, we both have strong serves and good returns. I thought we did that really well today, which is an important part of doubles these days. You know, if you can dictate from the first shot, I think we both did that really well.

I thought the energy was good. We don't know each other's game, of course. We haven't played for many years, but I think the energy was good, which builds up the chemistry, like, just having a good moment, you know, on the court. Nothing feels awkward out there.

That was it for me. I think the energy was just so good.

BEN SHELTON: Yeah, I thought things were clicking between us on the court today. Playing with a guy like Felix who loves to play downhill, has a massive serve, you know, plays strong off the return and volleys as well as he does, and as athletic as he is, it's pretty easy to figure things out.

You know he's going to find forehands and rip them. That's an easy ball for me to move and poach off of. I thought things were fairly simple playing with him out there, and I really enjoyed being able to play an attacking style of tennis.

I thought that we complemented each other well. Like he said, at the end of the day, a big part of doubles comes down to the energy, and he really brought the energy and lifted me up in the moments I needed it today. I hope that I brought it and lifted him up in the moments he needed.

FELIX AUGER-ALIASSIME: Definitely.

Q. Seems like since the start of Felix's match yesterday, you two have really been pumping each other up. Ben, you were talking to Felix a lot during

... when all is said, we're done.®



that match. Were you guys friends before this? Is this the start of something special here?

FELIX AUGER-ALIASSIME: Might be, might be, definitely (smiling). I have created friendships, created good friendships with the guys over the years in this event.

No, since the first time I saw Ben, I saw a guy who was just -- I love to see guys who love competing and are happy to be out there and they bring this good energy. He's focused, he's driven. You were saying, like, it's been an incredible month for him, but it feels like he's been there for longer than a couple of months. Feels like he belongs and he acts that way.

It's great to see, and I get along well with him and I think a great family also. It's great.

BEN SHELTON: You know, I have always looked up to Felix since I have been out here on tour from such a young age, doing the things that he's done in this game already. Being as focused as he is on his craft and as hard-working, that's something that I can aspire to do in the future.

You know, I feel like sometimes I can get unfocused or, you know, be looking around during practice or not locked in all the time.

You know, one of the greatest things about Felix is his professionalism, discipline. That's really cool to be around, see the way that him and his team work. That's been pretty special for me ever since I have been out on tour, so yeah, definitely a guy I look up to and respect a lot.

Q. You had four match points on Hubert's serve. It was tough to get over the line there and finally finish it. You definitely had some looks. What were you saying to each other to push yourself to get it done?

FELIX AUGER-ALIASSIME: I mean, we don't have time to say much, but we just stay positive. I think it's more when we got to the bench that was important to react well, and I think John had some good words for us to put this behind us, because of course you get excited like you want to finish, and, you know, had a look at an overhead and of course you wish you put that away or I wish I put a backhand away.

But it's all good. At the end of the day, I knew we had a break up and need to remember that there is Ben Shelton serving after that, so it's like we were in a good position. They were in a way worse position than we were. Nothing to get worried about.

Q. Ben, start of the year, quarterfinals, Australian Open. Then you went through without winning two

back-to-back matches till the US Open. Then it clicked and you have continued that. You're so young yet with such little experience at this level. How have you managed to keep that going through US Open, through here? How exciting is that, do you feel about all that?

BEN SHELTON: Well, back-to-back singles matches, I had some success in doubles, and so that's definitely something that gave me some confidence, you know, going into this event. That's singles and doubles, confidence that I could put points on the board for the team and that I had been pretty fine-tuned in doubles throughout the year.

In terms of singles, sometimes it only takes one. Still trying to find my way out on tour. I don't think I'm perfect at all or found my game exactly the way I want to, but it's a lot of new experiences, different places and surfaces I have never played on, but, you know, being here in North America, indoor hard court with a huge crowd, it feels like home to me. Not much time change. So these conditions I feel suit me and I have enjoyed playing this event so far.

(Questions in French.)

(Questions for John McEnroe.)

Q. John, the second set when the guys had the four break opportunities...

CAPTAIN JOHN McENROE: Talking about the four match points?

Q. Yeah, I'm thinking there is an opportunity there for maybe things to go sideways for players if they're not wired right. Did you say anything after that sequence? How impressed were you by the resilience in these young guys just to gather themselves and close it out?

CAPTAIN JOHN McENROE: Well, I think Felix said what sort of happened, which was basically, look, Ben's about to serve. He's pretty formidable. Forget about it. It's easy to say and maybe a little tougher to do, but they were in a great position.

They were playing well. You know, got unlucky in a way, so it was sort of a crazy game. I said, Look, you entertained, that was great. Unbelievable game in a way, a lot of things happened. Just get back to business. That's what they did.

So that's a great sign. I think Ben brings a lot of energy, obviously. I think that's rubbing off, you know, like Felix, you've got a guy that's very, very, you know, needs to maybe -- I think it helps Felix, you know, actually, the team atmosphere. Hopefully it will help him this year the

way he did last year. He's a great kid. He is very professional. Sometimes you need to blow off some steam.

Maybe at some point Ben will maybe get a little, because you want to see that, that exuberance and sort of just loving competing. But older guys, you know, Who the hell is this young guy? Rub them the wrong way. I think I did that also. In a different way (smiling).

They don't want some kid walking in and taking over. There is a good chance that's what's going to happen.

Q. In a singles environment, you usually tell your players to play to your strengths, but when you get in this doubles scenario, how does that change from a coaching perspective?

CAPTAIN JOHN McENROE: Obviously doubles is completely different than when I played. There is guys staying back. It's more of almost like, in a way, two singles guys -- you know, they're almost playing their own version of singles on a doubles court. So you have to try to sort of infiltrate some understanding of court positioning. Ben actually gets that. You know, he did a great job, actually, and some sweet feel. The correct volley to hit at that time, really well done. I think Felix volleyed very well also.

So these guys really took it to them. I thought actually, like I think Ben said, the other guys played well. I wasn't expecting Monfils to play. I think he played pretty well. Hubert was bringing it.

You know, certainly with guys that haven't played -- I don't think on either team, honestly, I'm not sure, I think Tommy has played a little bit with Frances, but as far as almost anyone on either team, I'm not sure if anyone has really played much with anybody. So it's definitely a crapshoot, but these guys, they're learning quick.

Q. From the start of the Laver Cup six years ago, it's always seemed like Team World has had a great team feeling atmosphere, like they enjoy playing with each other, celebrating really well, obviously. This year, looks like you guys have this really great mix of youth and a real hunger to kind of battle on every point and win every point. What do you think of that? Why are you seeing success because of that?

CAPTAIN JOHN McENROE: Obviously in a competition it's about winning. I think we did have a good team spirit for years. It wasn't getting us a whole lot. We were close a couple times, but it's frustrating. You know, it's a little bit of that David versus Goliath.

It was huge, just the whole experience, last year obviously with Roger retiring at Laver Cup and Rafa being there and Novak and Andy playing as well, I mean,

it was an unbelievable atmosphere, and to win that, I mean, in the position we're in. Because this week is the first time we have ever been in the lead, so this is sort of a new feeling for us.

So that's good. But, you know, hey, we've got to take advantage of this now, and so I think these guys are getting it, because I think in a couple of years, I mean, obviously next year it's going to be a different story. We'll be back in Europe. A couple of guys, you know, Carlos, if he plays, it will be obviously a different story right off the bat. So we've got to take advantage of this opportunity and get some momentum.

I think once we got over the hump, obviously if you haven't done it and then you do do it, you have more belief that you can. You know, we came here and we sort of looked at what happened, a couple guys pulled out and we're, like, Wait a minute, not only could we but we should in our minds do it and come out.

The good news is these guys have stepped up, every one of them, actually. There is not a single guy out of the six that hasn't picked up a point for us.

Q. With the way these matches were played, especially today, there was explosive tennis out there, some amazing shot-making. You sitting on the side, is it tough not to get carried away with what's happening on court and remain in your position as captain and try and keep at a level, an even keel?

CAPTAIN JOHN McENROE: Have I ever kept at an even keel? (Laughter.)

I would say it would be tough. What I try to bring, which we may not need a whole lot of, but that energy and intensity, and I try to sort of get a feel for the player as much as -- I see them. I didn't go to Australia because ESPN didn't send us. So I'd like, in a way, to be closer to players and understand them more.

So I'm trying to get a little feedback from some of the guys, because all these guys have a couple people with them, whether it's Ben's dad, Felix, who -- you know, I know Felix a little better because he's been on the team, but my point is you try to sort of get a feel for what makes them tick and try to make sure they are kept on focus and maybe add that, even if I could add 2%, 5% hopefully at a given point, I hope that could make a difference.

But, you know, at this point, I'm hopeful that I could just sit there and we could win, because it's not like guys haven't played for years on the road. You know, we are in a great position. They understand that there is a big upside if we win obviously financially and just in terms of the momentum that we get.

These guys get it. There is enough combination of that youth and experience that's working for us.

Q. Have you decided what you're doing for tomorrow?

CAPTAIN JOHN McENROE: Tomorrow evening?
(Laughter.)

Depends exactly what happens. We have decided on what we are doing. We put together, I believe, a formidable group.

Has it been announced? I don't know if it can or should be announced, but I cannot reveal that at this time (smiling). But we had a meeting and we talked before the press conference. We're set to go.

Q. (Question about lead-off match.)

CAPTAIN JOHN McENROE: What's your guess?

Q. Taylor?

CAPTAIN JOHN McENROE: You'll soon find out. Doubles is first. Okay, so don't forget that part.

Q. (Question off microphone.)

CAPTAIN JOHN McENROE: Well, I didn't say that. There is a likelihood that he will be playing singles, so I'll tell you that.

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