

Laver Cup

Thursday, 19 September 2024

Berlin, Brandenburg, Germany

Team World

Captain John McEnroe

Vice Captain Patrick McEnroe

Francisco Cerundolo

Ben Shelton

Taylor Fritz

Frances Tiafoe

Alejandro Tabilo

Thanasi Kokkinakis

Press Conference

TODD WOODBRIDGE: Welcome back, everybody. Welcome to Team World. Great to have you guys in here for your press conference.

Just to name-check everybody, a warm welcome to our captain, John McEnroe, and his vice captain, Patrick McEnroe. To Taylor Fritz, Frances Tiafoe, Ben Shelton, Alejandro Tabilo, Francisco Cerundolo, and Thanasi Kokkinakis.

Let me start with you, John. Good to be back? As we look potentially to a three-peat for Team World, how do you feel about that?

CAPTAIN JOHN McENROE: That sounds like an incredible thing. Since this is my last year, and it's been a blast, it would be amazing to go out in style.

So we're going to go out guns blazing. We've got a great group. There is a lot of energy in that building right now, and it's going to be even more over the weekend. We're pumped up to give it our best shot.

If they lose -- don't lose for me on my last one, okay? That's all I'm saying (pounding table).

TODD WOODBRIDGE: Patrick, are you used to that kind of pressure from your older brother?

VICE CAPTAIN PATRICK McENROE: I have been hearing that for many years, so yes. But it's been an honor for me, thank you to my brother for having me as his right-hand man for these amazing years with Laver Cup. Thanks to the guys on the team. It's just been an



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absolute privilege. We are super excited for the weekend.

TODD WOODBRIDGE: Taylor, first up, highest ranked in the team now coming off a sensational run at the US Open, have you had a little time now to reflect on those couple of weeks?

And the second part to this question is: I asked Alexander Zverev about who was going to lead their team. He said they didn't need a leader. Would that be something you would like to take on in your team?

TAYLOR FRITZ: For that part of the question, no. Like, John's our leader. It's always like that. It's always going to be like that. The captain is always in charge.

In this competition, it's just up to each of us to do our part to get the points. You know, one person can't win it. Everybody's got a job to do.

To the first part of the question, it was nice. I had a couple of days off, relax, just enjoy some time off after a long two weeks. Then started to get back into it a couple days before and some good practices here. You know, getting myself ready to go for this weekend.

TODD WOODBRIDGE: Frances, what did you make of your mate in the last 24 hours striking a pose on the catwalk? Have you seen him?

FRANCES TIAFOE: No, he actually looked really good, actually. Pause. Pause. It's crazy.

No, he did really well, honestly. I wanted to clown him but couldn't. He opened it up too, so that's never easy. Obviously you don't know the direction you are going while you're walking.

So he did really well. It all came out really good. It looked really good on social media. So well done.

TODD WOODBRIDGE: On the tennis front, has it been a good feeling for you to get back in the groove and be playing such good tennis?

FRANCES TIAFOE: Yeah, definitely feels good to be playing, you know, really well again. Obviously, you know, a tough stint there for a while. But feels good. Feels good to be here once again, alongside a ton of great players. Yeah, so let's get another one.

TODD WOODBRIDGE: Ben, back again after a successful run in Vancouver last year. One of the things



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when we sit in broadcast and we watch is the Laver Cup brings a little bit of that feeling of what a college team is like. It's a united front. How much have you enjoyed doing that in a professional environment?

BEN SHELTON: Yeah, it's a lot of fun for me. Pro tennis is a lot different from college tennis. Usually everything is on your own shoulders, so it's nice to be able to rely on your teammates sometimes.

Team World, we got a lot of guys that are reliable, especially Taylor Fritz. You know, that guy is solid as a rock. Crazy.

Yeah, I think it's a special event for me to be a part of. I'm just grateful that two years straight I got to come out here and compete, because I love the team atmosphere and I love cheering on my guys and competing when I've got guys cheering for me on the sidelines.

TODD WOODBRIDGE: Alejandro, an opportunity for you to be in a first Laver Cup. What was it like getting the call to come into the team?

ALEJANDRO TABILO: Yeah, it was unbelievable. I was with my family, so I told them. Then we all couldn't believe it. It was really nice. Just so happy to be here, especially with all these guys.

Hopefully we can come out with the win and we're all going to be supporting each other, like always, and going out there with everything we've got.

TODD WOODBRIDGE: I noticed just a little earlier out on court, you had John on the side of the court with you and looked like he was teaching you some backhand moves, some volleys. Is it quite special to have that type of knowledge being delivered to you?

ALEJANDRO TABILO: Yeah, it's pretty surreal. I mean, with legend in the sport like he is, giving us tips and everything, it's nice. Obviously going to try and use that for the rest of my career. Just definitely going to help this week and hopefully for the whole year, rest of the year.

TODD WOODBRIDGE: Francisco, you're back again. You know what it's like to be out on court, and you're going to be out on court the first match again against Casper Ruud. That's an important one, because momentum is huge in this competition. You did it well last year. You ready to go up against him this year?

FRANCISCO CERUNDOLO: Yeah, of course. Super happy to be back this year after last year. I really wanted to come back and play for the guys, for John and P.

Yeah, we had great experience the last year, so hopefully we can have the three-peat this year. And to start the competition for me and for the team, it's really

excited. It's a nice responsibility to go out there and try to get the first point for the team and start, yeah, upping us in the scoreboard.

TODD WOODBRIDGE: Thanasi, stepping in the shoes of Alex de Minaur, but when we look at the lineup of both teams, you're the Grand Slam doubles champion in this mix.

THANASI KOKKINAKIS: Don't forget it. (Laughter.)

TODD WOODBRIDGE: What type of chats have you been having about the combos that you might be involved in?

THANASI KOKKINAKIS: I'd hardly call myself a doubles specialist.

TODD WOODBRIDGE: No, I wasn't calling you that.

THANASI KOKKINAKIS: No, I'm ready to be used when needed.

TODD WOODBRIDGE: But the point about doubles I was trying to make...

THANASI KOKKINAKIS: Hectic. No, I was ready to peel oranges, honestly, this week. I was going to be an alternate, but I'm happy to get the call-up. Obviously sad for Alex. I get along with all these boys well. Frances is a clown.

I'm happy to be here, I'm happy to play tomorrow, I'm excited. Whenever he needs me to play, I'll be ready. Yeah, it should be a fun atmosphere.

TODD WOODBRIDGE: Well, I guess the point I was trying to make, though, is that doubles, particularly for Team World, has been crucial. It's been one of those points you have been able to rely upon, so there is a little bit of stress, I guess, within that.

THANASI KOKKINAKIS: Yeah. As I said, I'll be ready. I don't mind coming back on the doubles court. Should be fun. I think I have played maybe three this year. I don't know how much confidence that gives you, Johnny (smiling). But I'm 1 and 2, so we're looking good. (Laughter.)

TODD WOODBRIDGE: Mate, I was trying to set you up perfectly. (Laughter.)

I will open questions to the floor. Who would like to go first? Anybody?

Q. I asked the same question also to Team Europe. I was wondering how tennis fanatic are you. Did anybody found on the YouTube video of epic Wimbledon final between John McEnroe and Bjorn

Borg and watch it?

CAPTAIN JOHN McENROE: No and no. That's my answer. What's YouTube, by the way? (Laughter.)

Q. John, this question is for you. I just wondered, this being the last year with captains changing and Roger retiring and we don't know about Rafa, the competition feels like it's evolving a bit. I'm wondering the direction you see it going in the next few years?

CAPTAIN JOHN McENROE: I think it would be important, as I've said every year that I've been here since it started, that it would be important for tennis in general that this event be successful. I believe the idea was to try to make it like the Ryder Cup, which I think is a pretty huge event for golf. I think it would be great if it was similar in our sport.

I think it needs to be given a specific time and doesn't make it so difficult for the players to support this, because our Babe Ruth -- you know, he's a famous baseball player -- but one of the hugest guys in our sport historically is Rod Laver. So to have his name is really important. And obviously Roger being involved is really key. Is maybe most important that he remains involved. I believe he will, and I think that's important for this event. And it will evolve.

But I think, you know, we just went through three greatest players that ever lived we were just watching. So it's like, what's going to happen? Well, suddenly things seem to be doing okay. We've got some energy in our sport, and I think that this would help with it, this event.

Q. This is to John and to Patrick. This being your last year steering Team World, what would you say has been the highlights for you two with Laver Cup? And what would you advise Andre taking over?

CAPTAIN JOHN McENROE: Well, don't pay attention to these guys. (Laughter.)

First of all, you know me well enough to know that Rod Laver was my idol. Roger Federer to me is the most beautiful player I have ever seen play on a tennis court. To be able to look on the other side and see my greatest rival and great friend, Bjorn Borg, and have my brother as my right-hand man, it's pretty hard to top that for me personally.

Without a doubt, you know, when Frances won that final point in London would be the greatest moment in the history for me, I'll let Patrick finish, but when we finally got -- I was starting honestly to feel like the Washington Generals with the Globetrotters. None of us wanted to feel that. So that was an incredible moment. We carried that through last year.

Now we have a chance to go out unbelievably, like three in a row. So that would be incredible.

VICE CAPTAIN PATRICK McENROE: I would advise those guys to just put everything into it, because it's really special to get these players together, playing on a team. That's something really unique in our sport.

So I remember the year before, we won it for the first time. John and I were in the hotel room in Boston, and let's just say that he wasn't a happy camper. You know, the competition is very important to us in addition to the camaraderie of the team, you know, for the event itself. It's super fun, a great event, but we want to win.

Q. This is also a question for John and Patrick. Drawing on your experience as captains but not just Laver Cup but also Davis Cup, sometimes we see that a team is bigger than the sum of its parts. How much can the team spirit compensate for the fact that -- obviously I ask this question with the fact that the European team has higher rankings in this particular Laver Cup -- how much can team spirit compensate for that?

CAPTAIN JOHN McENROE: Well, I believe that every one we have played, 9 of the Top 10 have been Europeans. So I think that team spirit, I'm glad you brought that up, because I think that's something that has helped carry us eventually to victory and kept us really close in others.

So it's an excellent point. It's very true. And I think you can lift each other up.

And I forgot to answer your other part. As far as Andre, Andre will bring something different to the table. I'm more sort of hopefully inspirational leader in a way. I'm not going to sit there Xs and Os. Andre is way more analytical. He'll bring something different to the table, but I think he's going to do a great job.

Q. Team Europe, when they came in, talked about their dinner last night and how important it was and the stories that were told. There was one particularly funny one. I'm wondering, with you guys, when you had your team dinner last night, Ben, was there anything that was particularly funny that came out of that dinner?

BEN SHELTON: No comment. I don't recall. (Laughter.)

No, I think that the team dinners have been a really cool thing that I have been a part of the last two years. We have a lot of characters on this team. You know, added Thanasi this year, it's gotten out of control.

But yeah, I can't remember any specific stories right now that we talked about. I know last night Johnny Mac dropped a few gems, but --

CAPTAIN JOHN McENROE: We cannot reveal these stories. (Laughter.)

VICE CAPTAIN PATRICK McENROE: There is a reason why it's only team involved in the dinner. That's it. So there you go.

CAPTAIN JOHN McENROE: These cameras are everywhere for Laver Cup. One of the few places they are not is at the team dinner.

Q. Building on the team, for John and Patrick again, how much can these team events do for the individual players in their development?

CAPTAIN JOHN McENROE: I actually believe it would be better to ask the players themselves, you know, because we're around, I'm at the majors, I'm around here and there a couple times, but it would be probably more interesting to hear what they had to say about whether or not they feel it helps, hurts, whatever.

That's your cue, Frances, Taylor.

FRANCES TIAFOE: I think it helps a lot. You know, playing alongside great players, obviously all these guys are some of the best players in the world, and we are obviously playing against stiff competition. So it always helps. Especially right after the US Open and then trying to end the season strong, I think it really helps.

I think having Johnny Mac and P-Mac on the sides, getting their insights about the game and being around greatness, obviously that helps. This is a great event. I think it brings everybody together, and you display obviously new talents that are out here, because, you know, it's a different show. It's not the Big 3 that everyone speaks about. I think it's all great, and everyone enjoys it and comes back for a reason.

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