

Laver Cup

Friday, 20 September 2024

Berlin, Brandenburg, Germany

Steve Zacks

Tony Godsick

Captain Bjorn Borg

Captain John McEnroe

Press Conference

ANDREW KRASNY: We'd like to welcome you to a very special press conference with some gentlemen who probably don't need an introduction but I will do so.

First we have Team Europe Captain, Mr. Bjorn Borg. We have our CEO of Laver Cup, Steve Zacks. We have Mr. Tony Godsick, CEO of TEAM8 and chairman of Laver Cup. And last, but not least, the one and only John McEnroe from Team World.

Welcome, gentlemen.

As we celebrate our seventh edition of Laver Cup and officially kick things off today, we'd like to welcome all of you. I know John and Bjorn have lots to do today as we have a very prestigious Cup that one of these gentlemen are going to go home with. I want to open questions up to John and Bjorn as they need to sneak out in just a couple of minutes.

We will have a microphone brought to you.

TONY GODSICK: Let me just say welcome to the Laver Cup, everybody. I see some familiar faces, and thank you for taking the time to come to Berlin. We are super excited.

I just would like to say that the company I started with Roger is called TEAM8, so we figured this is the eighth year since we came up with the idea, so we figured that's a pretty good anniversary to get together and talk to you about how everything is going.

We have had great sponsors and partners from the beginning. Every year this event has gone from strength to strength. We have been to bucket-list destinations, some incredible cities: Prague, Chicago, Boston, Geneva, London, and obviously here in Berlin. We are super excited where we have been.

We have had the world's best players play from the beginning. Obviously very excited to start in Prague with Roger and Rafa and others, and we're super excited this



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year. Obviously Carlos Alcaraz is with us, which is, after having such a great run as of late, to get him into the Laver Cup fold, super excited. But we have had everybody. So it's been wonderful.

Then most importantly, we have had legendary captains. You know, I said this last night at the gala, but these were my sort of heroes growing up. I was a horrible tennis player, amateur, really bad junior tennis player, but these were my big, big heroes. So to have them be the inaugural captains, it was a great decision, but it was a decision I didn't realize how powerful it was going to be.

So this is the, unfortunately for all of us, this is their last year as captaining these teams, but they are going to be a part of this event forever. They are part of the fabric.

I just wanted to say publicly thank them, say to all of you, they have been instrumental in helping us get to where we are today, and I know that they will be as important for us in the future and help the next captains, legendary players like Yannick Noah and Andre Agassi, help us go to the next level.

I just wanted to personally thank Bjorn and John for all their efforts. It's not just during this one week. They can tell you how many phone calls and text messages and conversations and no arguments, but deep, deep discussions about the event that go on all year. I really just wanted to thank them.

So thank you, Andrew, for that.

ANDREW KRASNY: Thanks, Tony.

Questions for John and Bjorn?

Q. Bjorn, you're known in the British press in particular as Ice Cold Borg. How easy is it to stay ice cold by Day 3 of a competition with this unique, tense scoring system?

CAPTAIN BJORN BORG: First of all, I'd like to thank Tony and Steve, thank you very much for being involved with Laver Cup. It's been a great thing. And to see my good friend John on the other side, sometimes we don't like each other so much, but we're good friends. (Laughter.)

But to be part of Laver Cup, have the players, like my team and John's team, is such a great thing. For me, every year it's my favorite week to come and spend time with the players and spend time with these guys and see John. Even if we are very competitive in one week, we

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are very good friends.

So I'm going to miss Laver Cup a lot. It's a sad thing, but like Tony or Steve, you know, we're going to be part of it. We're going to be involved. We're going to come and watch and follow the Laver Cup, because that's our thing.

I'm going to be sad when I leave Monday. Of course when we have the Cup back to Europe, I'm going to be very happy. (Laughter.)

It's a special moment. I think it's one of the greatest events, is Laver Cup, and to be part of it for seven years, it's been fantastic.

Q. A question for Steve and Tony maybe. I read about the speculation that the Laver Cup maybe take place also in Saudi Arabia in the future and also that it may be including the women. What can you say about those two separate topics?

TONY GODSICK: The beautiful thing about the Laver Cup, which sort of solidifies the fact that we know we're successful and people liked us, is we have been contacted by so many different countries in the Middle East, Western Europe, Eastern Europe, Asia, obviously we've been to North America a lot, South America, so we are spending a lot of time looking to where we can go in the future, and so anyway, to be seen where we will go. But, you know, next year we are in San Francisco.

In terms of the women's Laver Cup, we're going to get this one right first. We're going to keep building it. Our goal is to be like the Ryder Cup, and the Ryder Cup has a 90-year head start on us. I think they're on their 97th year. I think actually we are doing really well, considering that we are a historical event like they are but with no history yet, or very little.

In the future we look at different opportunities. I have literally the best events team in the world in any sport, bar none, so if there are opportunities for us to do adjacencies or other events, I'd love to do it, because I know it would be successful knowing exactly how we do this one.

So we will see what happens in the future, but we are open and we entertain a lot of different opportunities, so let's see.

ANDREW KRASNY: Tony and Steve are going to stay a little longer, if we have any questions for John or Bjorn, please.

Q. John and Bjorn, I just wanted to ask you where you kind of see this event seven years on from where you started within the wider tennis landscape then compared to now?

CAPTAIN JOHN McENROE: I see it exactly what Tony just talked about. I think the goal is to try to get the stature of a Ryder Cup as it is in golf. I think that they are well on their way to do that.

I think it would be important for our sport that it succeed in that way, because it's sort of that format, unique. One week the players are playing against each other, the Open, next week they are teammates, and there is something about that that can make it even more interesting as a spectacle.

We're looking to try to bring the sport up. It's a worldwide sport that I'd like to see grow even bigger in the States. You know, we have had issues. So obviously the more people we get paying attention to the sport, the more interest for kids to play it.

CAPTAIN BJORN BORG: No, I agree with John.

CAPTAIN JOHN McENROE: For once he agreed with me. (Laughing.)

CAPTAIN BJORN BORG: He likes to talk all the time (smiling).

CAPTAIN JOHN McENROE: Tony, by the way, since you said Bjorn and I were your two idols growing up, just out of curiosity, when we played the Wimbledon final, who were you rooting for?

TONY GODSICK: Nobody to get hurt. (Laughter.)

ANDREW KRASNY: Any more questions, or Bjorn, do you want to address where you see Laver Cup in seven years?

CAPTAIN BJORN BORG: Today is huge. Laver Cup, everybody wants to play, all the players. Team Europe, Rest of the World, they want to be part of Laver Cup. It should be that.

So in the future, all the players want to play. My team, I only have six players, and everyone cannot play, but for me, it's one of the biggest events. Players are very positive to come and play Laver Cup.

We had a dinner, like, two days ago. The feeling with the players to dinner, they tell stories, we have a good time. For them, it's very important too, because they play every week and they're not getting together like they can do at the Laver Cup.

So it's popular event. For me, best event. Players love it. So in seven years from now, it's going to get bigger and bigger and bigger.

TONY GODSICK: One more question for the captains, and then they have to go do their day job.

Q. We are coming to U.S., but how about Sweden? How would you feel about that?

CAPTAIN BJORN BORG: What about Sweden? I love Sweden. (Laughter.)

Q. How do you feel about Laver Cup coming to Sweden?

CAPTAIN BJORN BORG: I hope in the future, definitely. I hope they come to Italy, too, or other good countries in Europe. But I think this year was very popular, they talked a lot about Laver Cup. I don't know if we are the last year, me and John, to be the last year, but it's getting more and more popular. People talking about it. That's the way it should be, yes.

ANDREW KRASNY: Gentlemen, do you want to sneak out? You've got some work to do, I'm sure. As Tony just mentioned, you've got a day job.

John, best of luck to you. See you in a little bit.

Bjorn, best of luck to you. See you in a little while.

(John and Bjorn exit.)

ANDREW KRASNY: Talk about idols growing up. I share your sentiments.

So questions for Tony or Steve, anyone, as we get ready to kick off the seventh edition of Laver Cup here in Berlin?

Q. I have just got a question about the women's participation. You mentioned the Ryder Cup, and there is the Solheim Cup for the women, a separate cup. Do you think it's feasible to combine it, or would it be a better idea to sort of separate it from the beginning and make a new start with the women, from your experience?

TONY GODSICK: That's a very good question. Look, there already exists the Hopman Cup. I don't know what shape and form or when it actually takes place now, but there is an event, I think it's now in the spring or in the summer, it used to be in January before the Australian Open, which combines men and women.

The format is very important in this one and we spent a lot of time before we started, making sure, we tried to get it right. We didn't know it would be as successful and it would sort of hit and stick as well as it did, but I think all of a sudden if we change this and added women to it, it would sort of be like the Hopman Cup that kind of exists already.

So I think we will continue down this path. I started in

women's tennis 32 years ago when I started working for IMG, and I was very fortunate to work with Monica Seles, Lindsay Davenport, Anna Kournikova, Daniela Hantuchova, I married a WTA tennis player, Mary Joe Fernandez, I have two wonderful kids with her, so I'm a women's tennis person in my blood. So if the opportunity exists for us to do something, I don't think we can call it the women's Laver Cup. I think we'd have to call it something else and create it, but the format works. So hopefully in the future we can figure something out.

Q. One of the big talking points is whether there is too much tennis, players are getting injured too often, we have three of the four majors within a 15-week period, and this year we have the Olympics, as well. Is there too much tennis going on for the Laver Cup to have, A, a place in the year, and B, a place so soon after this peak hour of the tennis calendar?

TONY GODSICK: That's a great question. I think that question has been asked for the 32 years I have been in the business, is it too crowded.

Look, I look at the metrics of this event, and what's important to me, like, for example, here at the Uber Arena, we were just told yesterday that this will be their highest-grossing event in their history. They have only been around I think since 2008. That says something about the Laver Cup.

So is there too much tennis? There could be too many other tennis events, per se, but this one is working. We have sold-out crowds. Every player loves to play. We have the biggest captains, the best sponsors, we have renewed sponsors already once, we are about to announce a bunch of new sponsors, one today that will be on the court today you will see is Hugo Boss, we have a big sponsor, a global sponsor that we will probably announce in about two weeks.

Everything is working. So the question is: Is there too much Laver Cup? No. I think there is not enough Laver Cup probably.

The other thing about the calendar, and I think Roger Federer said this a lot: Just because there is a lot of events in the calendar doesn't mean you need to play the entire calendar. So, you know, Roger used to build in breaks. Now, maybe he can afford to because he was going deep in a lot of tournaments, but you're free to kind of do what you want as it comes to the schedule. Sure, there is some ranking implications and things like that, but I don't think the calendar is too crowded.

Now, the other thing I will say is I think, you know, we started, this is our seventh edition, and I think the other team competitions, like, for the Davis Cup, for example, has changed multiple times their format since.

This one is going from strength to strength. Davis Cup is a wonderful franchise, and so it will find its way, but there have been other things introduced during the seven-year period, as well, United Cup and other Cups. There is a lot of tennis, but that's the beauty of tennis. This is such a global sport.

PGA golf really takes place just in the United States. Now, there is obviously a rival tour going on at the moment, but the beautiful thing about tennis is it's global. So you need to feed that global appetite. I think there is a lot of wonderful events in tennis right now, so we should keep building them to innovate. Because if we stay the same way and just have four Grand Slams and a bunch of men's and women's events, some combined, some not, I don't think we'll be able to compete in the marketplace if we don't come up with some really creative events like the Laver Cup.

Q. Now that they are not in the room, this might be a bit easier to ask. Is it possible to put into words to pay tribute to John and Bjorn as captains and what they have brought to competition over the last seven years?

STEVE ZACKS: Sure. Thanks for that question.

You know, we didn't realize, I think it was said, the broad influence they would have. I think, you know, the way they love Rod Laver, see him as, you know, their hero, the way they respect each other, the way they compete still, the way they care about winning, and then their leadership, so they couldn't have been better.

I think they sort of embodied all of the attributes we'd want in this tournament. And, as you can see, great spokespeople for the event, you know, how much they believe in it. They are tough to replace.

Tony has mentioned many times we never intended for them to be the captains for the first seven years, but they were just so good at it, it was hard to think of replacing them. But we have done a great job in, you know, attracting fantastic replacements. We couldn't be happier.

Bjorn and John both said they will be captains as long as it's good for the tournament. So we decided this was the right time, and as Tony mentioned, with the strength of the tournament and the attraction, we got fantastic captains to take it forward.

TONY GODSICK: Let me just add to that. I think this was one of the real reasons that Roger and I and Steve and my other partners created this event is because Roger felt that there was really no platform for retired legends to come back to the game. Where do you go? Do you get invited to the Royal Box? Yes, you do. Do

you get invited to the US Open? Sure. You get invited to these events. But that's in some very nice box and they don't actually have access to interact with the next generation of players.

I don't have to tell certainly any of you who cover tennis on a regular basis what a tennis geek Roger is, but he really is into the history of tennis and what was it like for the last generation, the generation before.

So with this event, the platform literally is players are sitting on the bench with the Borgs and the McEnroes. They have Rod Laver here as well. This year we obviously have Boris and Michael Stich and Steffi Graf. These players don't get a chance to see them maybe ever again.

Even Roger barely spent any time with Carlos Alcaraz because they just sort of missed each other. They practiced once at Wimbledon and that was it. In that period of time when they missed each other, he went on to win four Grand Slams and he's now in the conversation to one day potentially be one of the greats.

The Laver Cup will provide a meeting place each and every year for these types of players, which I think is important for the history, for the optics, for content. People want to see these interactions. So hopefully we're bringing a little of that to The Tennis Channel.

Q. Tony, eight years ago when you and Roger were in that car at the Rolex Shanghai Masters and considering and conceiving of this event, could you imagine then to where it is now and the attention it's got? And then looking ahead, I know you have said some positive things about the future, but in another seven to ten years, where do you think the event will be?

TONY GODSICK: Thank you, Craig. No is the answer to the first question. When we discussed in the car of doing something for Rod Laver, we actually didn't get past what that would be. It was like let's do something with him to honor him. Shortly thereafter we sketched it out. But never in my wildest dreams did I think that we'd be able to create such an incredible event so quickly.

Everybody in here knows you're only as successful as your team. I know it's very cliché, but I actually found a wonderful master promoter, brand builder, in Steve Zacks who runs a very tight ship and is so creative, loves what he does 7 days a week, 24 hours a day, literally.

But no, and obviously the timing was right, as well. Roger was still playing, and I think one of the people who runs the ticketing business, I don't think she's working at Tennis Australia anymore, I think she retired, she used to call him The Ticket Magnet. When he came to an event, tickets would just go. We were very fortunate to be able

to launch it with Roger and Rafa, Bjorn and John. So the answer is no.

Now, seven to ten years from now, just knowing some of the deals we have renewed and where we are going, I know that we are going to continue to grow. I mean, it's really exciting.

Will we have some changes to it? There are people that are presenting us changes all the time. Would you stay in our city for three years? Would you let us partner with another city and go back and forth for five years? Would you come back to a place where we have already been because it was so successful for us? All these things we are listening to, and they are flattering.

We will be in San Francisco next year. The owner of the Golden State Warriors, we went to a game, Roger and I and Steve, last year when we launched it, they are talking about how the Super Bowl is coming to the area next year and the Laver Cup. I'm, like, the Super Bowl and the Laver Cup are mentioned in the same sentence? That's like super cool (smiling).

Yeah, this will go on. Like doing Roger's schedule each year, it's very hard because he has four kids and stuff, and I see his schedule for '25 and '26, we go that far out, and it's already marked, like, Laver Cup. That's what we hope happens with all of these guys. I know I have told John and Bjorn, You're going to be back next year, you're going to be back.

They're, like, Yeah, yeah.

No, but they really are. They are going to be here and they're going to have a lot of fun. That's what we hope happens and stuff. So we are looking forward to the future, and have been very happy so far.

Q. I have a question for Tony or Steve, because Roger once said he wants the event coming to Asia and specifically China because of the Asia swing and the Chinese swing is currently happening. I'm wondering, are there any Asian cities or specifically Chinese cities reaching out to you guys to want to hold this event in the future?

STEVE ZACKS: Definitely we have had conversations, and we -- you know, that's part of, as we were discussing what the future holds, is we want to get to some new world cities, including China, as you said. So, you know, it always comes down to the specifics of what we can work out, and at the same time, we are always conscious of the player travel and, you know, what will fit for them and to co-exist nicely with the tournaments on the ATP Tour.

So, you know, we think that would be a really, you know, perfect future step, and we are looking at it right now.

Q. You talked a lot about John and Bjorn. You're also looking to the future. Can I just ask, with the new captains, Noah and Agassi, they are different in the sense that John and Borg were of the same generation and were rivals. Okay. Very end of Noah's career overlapped with the very start of Agassi's, but essentially they're different generations. Do you think that will create a different dynamic for the Laver Cup in future?

STEVE ZACKS: Well, you know, each new set of captains is going to have a different just sort of feel to it. I think, you know, much like Bjorn and John are very different, at least from my spending time with them and learning about them, you have Agassi who is very analytic and thoughtful. Obviously incredible professional. Then at the same time, you've got Yannick who I would describe as a lover. I don't know what he'd say about himself.

I think their styles are very different. I think it will make for real entertainment once again and huge stars for people to get excited about. I know also what's very important to us is that they are inspiring to the players and, you know, it all starts with the players really.

So, you know, it's another attraction for them to be able to come spend a week with these two stars, tell the stories, as Bjorn was saying, and learn from them. I think they are going to be fantastic.

Q. You mentioned sponsors earlier, and it's notable that you have the symbols, the logos of Rolex and Mercedes behind you. I think Champagne companies have been involved in the past. What is drawing these luxury brands in particular to the game and Laver Cup? How did tennis become so glamorous and prestigious to attract these kind of names?

TONY GODSICK: Tennis has always been a sport that's attracted luxury brands. I think the demographics work. It's a global sport. It's elegant. You see some of the biggest fashion houses in the world are sort of created, you know, Lacoste, by tennis player.

These events are super premium. They are not just tennis events. I'm not just talking about the Laver Cup but I'm talking about the Grand Slams, Masters 1000s. These are events to be seen at, too. They are social things that are popping up all over, these events.

I think Roger, in the last 20-plus years, has really, he sort of likes that air, the premiumness, these luxury brands that he's been associated with. Rolex is the largest sponsor in the sport of tennis. Just think about it. They are at all the Grand Slams, Masters 1000s, they are the founding partner of the Laver Cup. They have really

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taken this platform, along with others, and using it as one of the sort of big marketing pushes.

But obviously it comes down to data and to the audience, and I guess these brands have felt after doing their research that tennis provides them with, attracts the consumer they are looking to ultimately buy their products.

STEVE ZACKS: Yeah, to build on what Tony was saying, specifically about the Laver Cup, when we created it together, we wanted to differentiate from the existing tournaments. Clearly, you know, the rivals becoming teammates was a key theme. The wish was would Roger and Rafa ever play together, these big rivals coming together.

As we were building the brand, trying to find an identity, we realized, all right, rivals becoming teammates, this is tennis unrivaled. So we followed that path, which was really about, you know, making it something that's unlike anything else in tennis.

Part of that was the black design and what you'll see out there. Really, when you look at any picture, you know it's the Laver Cup. I had come from the luxury brand environment. Clearly Roger's attracted many of those sponsors. So we followed what we knew we had been successful at and continued to build on that.

Then, you know, what we always say is our goal is to give people an experience that is so great that they want to do it again. As we do that, that's how we'll keep going on and on and on.

So we invest very heavily. We bring the greatest lineups we possibly can. We make the court and all that unlike anything else. The hospitality is beyond any other level. And we benchmark to make sure we stay that way.

TONY GODSICK: And we have a long-term view on this event. It's not a short-term view. We invest. We had digital boards on center court before some of the slams did. We're a three-day event, not owned by a federation.

So we have really invested. I think if you had a chance to walk around the inside of the Uber Arena and the outside and the Fan Zone, you see that there is a large expense on purpose being invested in creating this brand. You know, it doesn't go unnoticed by our sponsors. Sometimes maybe it goes unnoticed by some members of the press who have never been to the event, and so that's why personally I'd like to thank every single one of you in this room for actually taking the time to come to the event, because I think once you come and you see what's happening, it gives you a better understanding of what we are all trying to build together.

Q. How long is the contract for new captains? How

long are they going to be...

STEVE ZACKS: So we started with a two-year contract, again, with the idea of if we all love it together to continue, but, you know, it's giving them a chance who have not experienced it to get to know it and us to know each other.

As we did with John and Bjorn, we started off with a very short contract, and as we saw, it ended up seven years.

Q. Here are the best players of the world, basically. But the very best in the ranking, Jannik Sinner is missing, as well as Novak Djokovic, Olympic champion. Did they miss the invitation?

STEVE ZACKS: Look, the way the system works is each year the top three players for both sides get invited. In the case of the World, they all accepted, and more than that, as you go down the line.

On the other side, it always comes down to individual schedules and what are their priorities at that particular time. So we certainly have had Novak participate. We have not had Jannik yet. I know we are talking to him right now. We'd love to have him. But sometimes their schedules, sponsor commitments, and so forth make them commit to certain tournaments. They do need a break, and sometimes that falls on the Laver Cup week and we miss out.

You know, this year we've got 6 of the top 10, 9 of the top 20. Before the two withdrawals a week ago, we had 11 of the top 20 plus one of the greatest of all time. I think that's pretty incredible.

Q. Tony, you were just talking about the legacy of the event, you know, some of these younger players linking up with the likes of Steffi and Bjorn and et cetera, et cetera. Have you thought about bringing in members of Team World, Team Europe that have had success in the junior Grand Slams, like young Rafael Jodar, who won the US Open, and giving them an opportunity to taste what it's really like and to be connected to some of these legends and greats of the current game?

TONY GODSICK: That's a very good question. So the answer is yes, we have spent some time thinking about it. Some of the practice partners or the alternates that Steve speaks to in order to come are these types of players. I do remember years ago we called certain players that are doing very well today when they were still in the juniors or dominating challengers if they wanted to come.

You know, the nice thing for me being such a tennis fan is I have had a chance -- you know, I follow the whole game, from the juniors all the way through to legends,

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and I would like to see us do more of bringing in the superstars, I mean, the young superstars, the junior superstars, because they are the ones inevitably that are going to be here playing in the regular event.

It's no secret I have a son who plays in college. I love the college game. Maybe there is a chance for us next year to do an NCAA Laver Cup for one day, which might bring the top, you know, European NCAA college players to play against the top Rest of the World NCAA college players for a sort of a format similar to Laver Cup, but that could take place during half a day or something.

So the more people we can get involved with the Laver Cup, I think the better, and we will definitely do that. That's part of our mission is getting people together.

I mean, Rod Laver, they did it very eloquently, I thought Andrea Petkovic last night was so good at the gala, and one of the things that I think she was talking about is, you know, or had mentioned, and Todd Woodbridge did a fantastic job, too, is Rod Laver won "the" Grand Slam. We always call it Grand Slams. They are actually majors.

So Carlos Alcaraz won two majors this year. He didn't win two Grand Slams. It's not possible, actually, to win two Grand Slams. That was Dick Savitt who I think won the Australian Open and Wimbledon who mentioned that. Australian Championships, I apologize.

But Rod Laver won in '62 and '69 and took off 20 majors in between. He would probably have won, since three of the four were on grass, maybe another one or two calendar Grand Slams, and so just the fact for players these days, young and old, to get a chance to speak to him and hear about what it was like -- these players sometimes complain, I haven't been home for three or four weeks. Rod told me two nights ago that he would never go home for about seven months at a time.

So I think it's important these stories are shared with the next generation of players.

STEVE ZACKS: And we do love having some of the younger players, you know, be part of the event by being an alternate. You know, that's one of the toughest positions to fill, because everybody likes to be on the roster.

But yeah, as much as we can give them that experience, which the ones who have done it really treasure, or spread the opportunity to as many people as possible, we love it.

ANDREW KRASNY: Gentlemen, thank you.

Tony Godsick, Steve Zacks, and to all of you distinguished press, thank you for attending, and thank

you for showing so much love to Laver Cup. We guarantee that you will have three days of the best three days of your year.

Thank you all very much for being here, and we'll see you soon.

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