

# Laver Cup

Saturday, 21 September 2024

Berlin, Brandenburg, Germany

## Team World

### Ben Shelton

### Captain John McEnroe

#### Press Conference

C. ALCARAZ/B. Shelton

6-4, 6-4

Team Europe - 4

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THE MODERATOR: Ben and John, thanks for coming. Ben, can you please give us your recap of the match.

BEN SHELTON: Yeah, a tough one for me, because I thought for a lot of the match I was playing at a pretty high level. I thought I had so many break chances. I don't know what the exact number of breakpoints was. Five? In three games, was it? Three separate games, five breakpoints?

I thought I had a lot of good looks in the first set, get him to 40 almost every game. Some of the times he came up with the goods. I hit great returns on some breakpoints. Missed some. That was the one thing that I just wish I would have converted on.

Yeah, two loose service games. Other than that, I like the way I played. I thought I was playing at a pretty high level, moving well, playing the type of game style that I want to play. I just wish that I could have cut out those two loose games and converted a little bit better.

That's what I'm working towards. But the game style I was playing today, apart from what I talked about, is kind of where I see myself in the future. I think I could make a few better tactical decisions in big moments of the match. When I change line of my forehand, what balls I change direction on so I don't get burnt on the next one is a few little things.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

**Q. Talk about your style of play, you served and volleyed first and second serve the first two points of the match, and then very sparingly after that. Was it an attempt to ambush him, or what was the thinking?**



# LAYER CUP.

BEN SHELTON: No, I was looking for it at the right moments. I also kind of wanted to see what he was going to do with the return of serve, which he was more committed hitting the ball and trying to get it down today. Last time I played him, he was pretty exclusively chipping the forehand when I went big into that corner.

So I wanted to see if he was block chipping it, because that's a great play for me to serve and volley on and get some balls above net level.

I think for me it's something that I want to mix throughout the match. Some matches I'll do more; some I will do it less. I wish I would have mixed it in a little bit more in the two games that I got broken today, just to throw him off a little bit and give him a different look.

**Q. Obviously Carlos is a very difficult player to play against. Could you just talk about what it is that makes him so hard to play against? Maybe compared to some of the other top guys, what stands out for you?**

BEN SHELTON: Yeah, one of the things about the top guys is the better you play and the better you hit the ball, they actually hit the ball better as well. The more rhythm that you give them, they really get to find their game and feel more comfortable.

With Carlos, obviously a great offensive player, a lot of weapons with the groundstrokes and the volleys, but his footwork is a weapon as well. He can extend points, counterpunch, play defense.

It's pretty good passing when you're at the net. I think that's one of the things, I guess, being an all-court player, that makes it difficult playing against him. I felt there were plenty of times today I thought I was in control of the point and hit great shots, and he either got an angle past me or got a lob over my head.

That makes it a little difficult to just commit to keep going into the net and keep flying in when he's making those plays and coming up with shots.

**Q. A question for Mr. McEnroe. Where do you see Ben and the U.S. tennis overall in three or four years?**

CAPTAIN JOHN McENROE: I see Ben in the top 5 in the world if he keeps progressing. I think he's got the ability. He wants it. He's worked at it. He's better than he was to me a year ago, more complete.

As you can see when you play -- I mean, in a way, he's a legend. He's 21. He's won four slams. He's one of the fastest players. Ben hit some great drop shots. He hit some incredible shots off those shots. Ben absolutely roped that return on the first breakpoint. I guarantee you 95 out of 100 people wouldn't have gotten it back, and he makes you play.

But I think he's going to be up there with those guys, and that would be great. You know, I think American tennis is getting closer. You saw Taylor was in the final. Frances has been in a couple semis. Ben's been in the semis. We're going to make the breakthrough. Ben, I believe, is going to make a breakthrough in the next couple of years.

**Q. Picking up on what you said about the better you hit the ball against the top players, the better rhythm they get, has that been a challenge for you in the sense that when you get into a match like that, you end up hitting your best shots when they hit their best rhythm, so if they occasionally give you a bit of junk, that's when you're more likely to make a mistake?**

BEN SHELTON: Depends on the player. Everyone is a little bit different. Like you play a guy like Jannik Sinner, he doesn't give you that much junk. Everything is pretty clean. He's sound off both wings, big server, pretty consistent with his speed, hits his spots.

Carlos has a little more variety to his game. But if you just try to play on the same plane and beat a guy like Sinner off the groundstroke just pound for pound, it's more difficult than, like you said, junk balls or sometimes throwing the ball up in the air, changing speeds and spins, going off-pace sometimes.

That's kind of more of what I was talking about. You can't always just fall in love with pace and hitting the ball hard. Depending on the court, especially on a court like this, you don't get much out of hitting big shots.

Like he said, that one return I hit on breakpoint, 95% of the people wouldn't have got it back. On a different court, maybe that's 99%.

So, yeah, I think there is a lot of small things that you have to think about when you're playing different players. Everyone is very different. But I think that playing with a lot of pace and hitting every shot, looking the exact same is not usually the way to go for my game.

**Q. Ben, for me it was the biggest difference when you were in the neutral rally with Carlos. Neutral rally, what do you think you need to improve the most to be competitive with the best?**

BEN SHELTON: I think my quality of ball is there. I think

one thing that I have improved a lot is my backhand. My backhand has become much less of a liability in the last year. I think that's probably one of the things that John saw last year. When I was playing out here, I struggled returning when guys served wide serves on the deuce side. I struggled when guys pulled me off the court with the forehand to the backhand.

But I think now that I'm better off both wings, I need to make some better decisions tactically. I went line at the wrong time and got burnt on a few forehands where I was out wide where I should have gone cross.

Another one of the breakpoints I'm thinking of, I had a short forehand that I hit flat into the net, and on a court like this and using this ball that's not bouncing as high, I should have gone over the lower part of the net if I'm going to be that aggressive from that position.

So for me, it's watching more tennis, watching more tape on myself and the best to do it. You know, being a lefty, I have a great person to watch in neutral rallies in the history of tennis in Rafael Nadal and John McEnroe, of course.

**Q. (Off microphone.)**

BEN SHELTON: I'm watching John's volleys and --

CAPTAIN JOHN McENROE: Hey, I was a clay court player (laughter).

BEN SHELTON: So, yeah, I think that's kind of the next step for me, the next level in my improvement. Those are the things that are exciting for me. I love working on things.

I don't think I'm a complete player or the player I want to be yet, but it's also frustrating that I'm not there yet, but I'll keep working hard and staying to the process and try to make a few of those adjustments if I go out there and play singles again tomorrow.

**Q. Mac, what do you say to a charge of yours when you're courtside and you see these situations where somebody like an Alcaraz, your player will hit a great shot but he's coming back with something bigger or better? What do you say? What do you advise a player in those sort of situations?**

CAPTAIN JOHN McENROE: Well, first of all, that's what you dream about, playing the best, playing their best and lifting yourself up to that level. But the first thing is never assume the point is over till it's over.

A perfect example is what you saw, especially on a slow court like today, this is where the mental part of it comes in more, where you've just got to not take no for an answer. You've got to get that mindset. It's easier said

than done. It's easy for me to be the back-seat driver.

It's a lot tougher to execute that consistently, but that's the next step for me, for Ben. He's getting there. You've got to understand the situation, and, you know, know when to pull the trigger and all those decisions that hopefully become second nature, the more he feels more complete about his game. He comes out, you hit 140-mile-an-hour serve, but you've got six other serves. So it's a nice problem to have. But these are the type of decisions that you need to make consistently well against the top guys.

It's a great learning experience. Carlos Alcaraz is the most complete player I have ever seen at his age, so, you know, it's a great test.

**Q. John, today would have been the first time you have seen Carlos play singles from the kind of vantage point you had on court. Was there anything that struck you or surprised you that was a bit different from seeing him another way?**

CAPTAIN JOHN McENROE: No, because I actually have -- I'm not on the court, but I'm in the corner at Wimbledon, right behind the court at Australia. I have seep him up close and personal.

**Q. What jumps out to you?**

CAPTAIN JOHN McENROE: Well, for starters, he's one of the top five fastest players I have ever seen on a tennis court. So start with that. He's got incredible skill in terms of his feel. And for a guy who's six feet, half an inch tall, he packs a punch. He has one of the biggest forehands in the game.

The most fun thing about him, and hopefully it will go on to the other players, is that sort of love of playing. I have never seen a guy smile as much as he does even when things aren't going that incredibly well, and how quickly he can turn lemons into lemonade.

I mean, that's an amazing quality. It's hard to get. It's very, very hard. I wish I had some of that myself. So I really love to see that, just as an ex-player, watch -- I don't like it right now, but I like it when I see it generally, because I think he's great for the sport.

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