

Roland Garros

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Bernard Giudicelli

Guy Forget

Gustavo Kuerten

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Welcome to this press conference. We have with us Bernard Giudicelli, president of the French Tennis Federation. Guy Forget, Roland Garros tournament director. Virtually we have connected with Gustavo Guga Kuerten, Roland Garros ambassador and Roland Garros three-time champion.

We will start with Bernard Giudicelli, president of the French Tennis Federation.

BERNARD GIUDICELLI: Thank you. Hello, everyone. Welcome to the age of online press conferences. Thank you for being here today and for the interest you have shown in the official launch of the Roland Garros Pro Series project, strategic partnership between Roland Garros and some of the WTA and ATP tournaments contested on clay.

I'm delighted to have been joined on this journey by some of the most prominent advocates of clay court tennis. There is Gustavo, of course, whose passion makes him a wonderful ambassador for playing on clay, as well as Guy Forget, tournament director of Roland Garros.

Then representing the ATP and WTA international tournaments, some of which take place in France, others further afield in Europe or South America. We have Christophe (indiscernible), Luiz Carvalho, Thierry Ascione, Denis Naegelen and Xavier Pujol.

This strategy partnership between Roland Garros and your respective tournaments is a testament to your commitment and support. It is a reflection of the importance we all attach to pushing forward in furthering the game of clay.

We each have our own story to tell. The Rio Open first, the only ATP 500 event that takes place in South America and is Rio de Janeiro's largest annual sporting event. The Rio Open has its own distinctive flavor reminiscent of its host country, Brazil. Fans are treated to a unique experience, are served up a cocktail of art, gastronomy and music.



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The ATP 250 Argentina Open is South America's most long-standing tournament on clay played out in a place that is steeped in history. Previous winners, including Guga, Gaston Gaudio, and not forgetting Rafael Nadal, have gone on to win Roland Garros.

The Barcelona Open Banc Sabadell first started 67 years ago. Over the course of several decades it has played host to some of the greatest players on tour, including Bjorn Borg, Mats Wilander and of course Rafa Nadal again.

The Open Parc Auvergne-Rhone-Alpes of Lyon, the Lyon Open, has been played in the unique and lush setting of city of Lyon's Parc de la Tete d'Or ever since it was founded in 2017 by its ambassador Jo-Wilfried Fred Tsonga who continues to promote the tournament to this day. It has quickly become a go-to event in men's tennis in no small part due to the fact that it uses the same clay as at Roland Garros.

Last, but not least, the The Internationaux de Strasbourg is France's leading women's tennis tournament which is usually played in the week leading up to Roland Garros.

Besides being an international sporting event, The Internationaux de Strasbourg is a beacon for a co-responsibility and parity. With these values at the forefront, the tournament has become a landmark event in the women's sporting calendar in France with worldwide women. Each year, especially this year, the best players on the WTA Tour go up against each other in Strasbourg.

I'm delighted to announce that today marks the official launch of the collaboration between Roland Garros and these five tournaments. More tournaments have shown their interest in taking part and will be announced in the weeks and months to come.

This one-of-a-kind collaboration is about all the reflection of the strength of the Roland Garros brand around the world and especially in South America, the fruits of the solid relationships we have built with this region and its tournaments, which launch the beginning of the clay season each year.

So now I'm delighted to pass the word over to Guga and then Guy so they can each tell you about their own relationships with clay and why it is so important to defend it.



Guga.

GUSTAVO KUERTEN: Good morning, Guy. Good morning, Bernard, everybody. I know it's afternoon in Paris, but still 9:00 here in Brazil. Just to see you guys in the press room, it makes me feel, my hands are sweating, wants to be there. My heart to be always connected with the tournament.

Congratulations to get this far. It's been a year nobody could expect. I believe these initiatives to grow and connect people and power, that's what feed us to believe, to have hopes.

That's how my relation with Roland Garros and clay born. It's much more about the dreams, believing in the impossible, putting all my feelings, all my passion at the court and I discovered my life beyond tennis, beyond Roland Garros, beyond the clay.

I had my best, happiest, and toughest and hard times down there at the court, sweating, fighting. But at the end you learn. You fall but you stand up again. That's the meaning of clay for me. It's just connected with my human spirits. It gave us so much of a way of learning and approaching life on having better perspectives on tough circumstances like today.

I think you can manage and connect more tournaments for them to become confident that they can go through, especially on this crucial time that clay needs to get going, that we understand, as Semana Guga, we have the value of Roland Garros on our side. It makes a huge difference.

I believe for the tournaments, it will be important for them to have this extra power. As you have a unit of goals and objectives, it's not easier, but you have a better chance to get your results and to get successful.

As much as the tournaments can get together, as much as this spirit of Roland Garros can give us the chance as in Rio, I'm seeing Luiz is with us in Rio, we already living this partnership many years ago. The players came here and they already planning on be in France, on how I'm going to arrive for the clay season.

I think this makes a lot of sense. As I told you, I'm a fan of clay. Perhaps I'm the guy who you give the most applause and the best arguments for this initiative. But it's good to be part of.

So thanks a lot to call me for these circumstances. I'm waiting for the next year, see the Philippe Chatrier, now the cover and everything, smoother. And please enjoy for all of us. Congratulations.

Say thanks from the ballboys to the sponsor, the people

who really make it happens, the doctors, I'm sure many people down there in Paris that are giving us the opportunity to be at home safe and watching this great tournament again.

BERNARD GIUDICELLI: Guy.

GUY FORGET: As a tournament director, I'm very proud to be sitting here. I want to thank, of course, Guga for being by our side for many years. It's great to see you. We can't wait to have you back here in Roland Garros. I know how much you like the place. To support clay, above all.

I think nowadays we've seen in the last few years that unfortunately some of the clay is losing a bit of its importance either in the calendar or on some courts because it is much easier when you build a court somewhere to have a synthetic court than a clay court. Guga made a perfect explanation of what clay brings up to you.

The first one that I see, one of the first positive things about clay, is comfort. The feeling you get once you walk on the clay court, once you slide on the clay court, it is just an unbelievable feeling that you will get on any other surface in the world.

Therefore, when you talk about clay, you talk about injuries, I think clay for that reason is a wonderful surface to play on.

As a kid, Guga, that's why I think you did so well on that surface for many years, clay teaches you how to be patient. Clay teaches you how to wait for the right moment to strike. Clay teaches you how to use the spin, whether it's on a dropshot, whether it's on a topspin, to be patient.

Whether for your physical ability or mental abilities, we believe that clay is probably the best surface to learn to be a good tennis player.

I want to thank all the other tournaments that accepted to be part of the Roland Garros series, to promote the clay the way it should be.

As a tournament director, I'm once again very proud to have all of you. I see Denis Naegelen, who is here on the call with us. Thank you, Denis, for what you do for tennis, on clay. For all the ecological friendly things you do in Strasbourg. All of our friends from Barcelona, Rio, Lyon, as well. Thierry is on the call, as well, with us.

I think this is the beginning of a new step. We want to share our strengths all together. We'll be happy to answer all of the questions you might have because I think it's the start of, once again, a long process.

THE MODERATOR: We are going to open the floor now to questions.

Q. I wanted to get your thoughts on the short-term future. Obviously there's a lot to look forward to with great tennis in the years to come. Your overall thoughts on how you think the coronavirus will affect the game moving into 2021, and what kind of plans you have in place to make things happen for tennis.

BERNARD GIUDICELLI: Listen, I will answer to the question by the question. Who knows? Who knows really?

We have to face some challenges in the next few months in the same way that we faced the challenges in the past few months. So we have to move forward because I think now we have to try hard to make tennis possibly played everywhere in the world.

For our responsibility in France, we decided to play Roland Garros with a few attendants. We are going to play Bercy with a few attendants, as well. This is our future.

We cannot see what is going to happen, let's say, in January and February. We will see. We have various options. We are professional. We have professional staff with us. We are engaging many aspects of the game. Now we have to add another one, which is the sanitary issues.

I understand how difficult it was for the players, for the staff, for the entourage to accept the decision of testing, the decision of social distancing. Anyway, we have to face our president of the republic said it was a war. I don't believe it is a war. It is incredible circumstances.

When I was kids, I used to hear my grandparents speaking about war. The matter that they have to face was the life or death. Now we have just to face a virus.

We have to be positive. We have to be optimistic. That's the way that I believe we have to face the future.

We don't know the future. We don't know it. But we are optimistic and we want to make tennis go forward. We have to have some life around the court.

Q. I wonder if I can ask one or two of the other tournament directors on this call, from Strasbourg or Barcelona, how difficult do you think it will be for you next year if, for example, there are maybe no spectators allowed at tournaments?

DENIS NAEGELEN: As Bernard said, we don't know what's going to be the next six months. But we have realized something almost a miracle this year, to open the tournament the week before the French. We were

lucky because it was a question of timing and territory. Strasbourg is in the east of France. The virus, when they authorized me to open, was not too high.

The situation the next week increase a lot. We probably would have not received the authorization to open one week after. This was the reason why probably Paris was so strict on the attendance. They only could have a thousand people a day. I had 1,500 a day, almost 2,000 a day.

I was lucky. I mean, Strasbourg was lucky because we could have a good audience. And for the future, clearly nobody knows what's going to happen.

My worry is really what's going to be the economy. We are supported by sponsors. We are supported by the local authorities. They have spent a lot of money this year to support the industry, to support the economy, and also to support the sports event.

I don't know what's going to be the financial situation in the next six months. But I hope that (indiscernible) still be alive and we'll be still alive.

XAVIER PUJOL: Good morning and congratulations for this initiative. We are very proud to join from Barcelona.

First of all, our tournament, as you know, is end of April. This is allowing us to make a lot of benchmark with different tournaments that they are already playing.

Nevertheless, we are working in a very close manner with ATP, also with local authorities, and with all the key sponsors, to evaluate the different scenarios.

One scenario, as you know, today is the most limit scenario is to have only media coverage for the tournament. What we are setting up is already our extended surveys in this workplace scenario that we want to be optimistic, as was mentioned before, and we think that end of April, probably also weather, understanding of how we can control and prevent the sickness, is going to allow us to organize the tournament, probably not in the same manner as 2019, but with different conditions that they are played today.

Q. Guga, your thoughts on the breakout performances of Stefanos Tsitsipas and Diego Schwartzman?

GUSTAVO KUERTEN: For me it's easier to see myself back there on the court (laughter). His hand is much nicer than mine, for sure. But I'm look prettier (smiling).

It's delightful because he's a great character for tennis, Schwartzman. For us, back here in South America, it gave us again the extra power to believe, to get going. Argentina deserves this.

I believe it's for the first time they have women's and men's on the semis. That's very hard. Sometimes it's difficult to explain for the people. Because we are so intimate and so deep at Roland Garros, we believe it's normal, every year there is a semifinalist, a champion. But it's very, very difficult to get there.

For Tsitsipas, it's a new step forward. He call me back in the beginning of the year. I told him I'm already coaching my sons, at their school, not tennis, mathematics and stuff like this. I couldn't travel.

We all know that he has a great potential to go farther. The tournament perhaps is in the best scenarios and deserved. I saw by the movements and following last three, four months, to put on the tournament was so tough. To get this alive, to see Guy and Bernard smiling now, that's what we need. We need to get through. We need to win a little, to make it happen.

That's what the tournament deserve to the end. A South American player that give an extra flavor. The best two players in the world right now. Still the main contents, if we see this final to happen, that is the most possible to really do. Will be amazing, you know, one fighting for the record of slams and the other one just having the right challenger to see if he will be able to get through and put himself in a better position to end up with these majors records.

I believe once you really go deep, you want things to happen. You give yourself your best. You have your rewards. I'm very happy about the tournament itself, to see these great personalities, the players in the best scenario possible in the semis. Also special as Guga. As I joke in the beginning, in the beginning of the year, I had the connection a little bit closer with Stefanos. Argentina player, for us, it makes a lot of sense.

And two gods. Once you have the meets there, the guys that everybody wants to watch. So the tournament deserve. We are in great hands to give us this trophy anyone that will be down there in Monday with the victory.

BERNARD GIUDICELLI: Let me add something, Guga.

Roland Garros with you and with South America is not only a love story, because realistically today we have in France 70% of courts made of clay. We have in Argentina 94% of courts made of clay. It's not totally a surprise to see one female and one male in the semis or to see two juniors in the quarters from Argentina today.

It is why we want to be more linked with you. We need you. We need you because you are the landscape, the most landscape of tennis in South America. We need to protect you. We need to engage you. We need to

promote you as the providers of the clay players worldwide.

GUSTAVO KUERTEN: Thank you. Hopefully with this motivation we have already to celebrate Bruno's conquer on the doubles final. Hopefully in the future we have a newcomer player, men's or women's, defending Brazil in the last rounds. It would be amazing.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, everybody.

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