

Roland Garros

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Paris, France

Yannik Noah

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Questions in English.

Q. Could you describe what the emotions were like for you walking out back on that court during that performance and the love from the crowd that you got?

YANNICK NOAH: It's always an emotion for me to come here, just coming to the stadium. I come here all the time, all the time, but here was special because it's the first time I come here to sing. I feel more comfortable coming with my racquet, really. I know a lot of people come here just to see some tennis, talking about tennis fans, so I felt a little nervous. After a couple of minutes I felt at home even though it was my microphone instead of the racquet.

But it's always special for me to come here. You know, it's like I lived my best moment here, so it's always special whether I'm walking around the stadium or outside courts. I have memories everywhere here, including my first kiss. So there's everything happen here for me.

So today was special, special because 40 years was special because I had most of my kids here, and, you know...

Q. Do you think of yourself as a tennis player who became a singer or who sings or a singer who played tennis for a little bit?

YANNICK NOAH: When I was losing tennis matches, I was telling people I was a singer. So when I fuck up onstage I say I'm a tennis player (smiling). At the end of the day, you know, I felt like 100% tennis player, since I was like a kid. I was still a tennis player when I was captain, even though I started to sing. I was always in my heart and body to be a tennis player.

Then time goes on, you know, and my music career is much longer than my tennis career. I have been singing for 30 years now.

For me, tennis like some other time, like another life. Once every 10 years, you know, they remind me I was a tennis player. I see a lot of people, because this thing was special, especially in France, that a lot of people



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connected with this moment because I didn't win a Grand Slam for 37 years before me and now it's been 40 years.

So a lot of people remember this moment with a lot of emotions. So every 10 years, there is like a little ceremony. There year is a big one. But like, for example, tomorrow there is an event tomorrow at 12:00 here. And then in the evening I have a concert. I'm playing in a festival in the west of France.

So I like the fact of having to live both lives.

(Answer in French.) So the Frenchies, for my selection, it's going to be hard. No, that's a joke.

Q. You mentioned that of course it's been a while since a man from France won a Grand Slam title. Why do you think it's been 40 years? And do you see any young players out there that you think have the potential to end that wait for this country?

YANNICK NOAH: I have to be very diplomatic about this one. I'm not much into tennis these days. I don't follow that much. The only time I see French is like, you know, when one is doing okay, like a couple years ago I was following Gaston. Then I understand there are some new players coming up, Humbert.

I don't even know their names anymore. Some of them I know, I mean, but I don't think if I walked past, I wouldn't recognize. So I don't know much.

Since there is not one that's been like winning anything major, I think it's not gonna happen the next few weeks (smiling).

Q. Could I just ask, why do you think it's been this long...

YANNICK NOAH: Why? Well, because I'm not coaching anymore. (Laughter.)

Q. Had you ever played with Mats before?

YANNICK NOAH: Mats? Music?

Q. Yeah.

YANNICK NOAH: Oh, yeah, many times. Many times. Maybe a hundred times.



We had the same passion. I believe I stopped playing a couple years before him, and when I did, I had my band, and when he stopped actually was the first one before me who had his own band. He had a band, and they toured in Sweden and they toured, I believe, in Spain. Actually one day I was in Spain like shooting a commercial, and I get to the hotel and I see at the hotel Mats Wilander and band. I said, When are they playing? They said, Tonight. I couldn't believe it.

Yeah, Mats started before me, actually. Then he stopped. But in the meantime after that we played a lot of senior events. During the senior events we jammed many times, because I was always trying to put into my deals to come with my band and play for the players party, which was a great idea. During this year jammed all together, so it was Mats most of the time, but also Johnny Mac, Jim Courier came a few times, and a lot of players, even Leconte was singing. So everybody would sing.

THE MODERATOR: Questions in French.

Q. Could you tell us your emotion when you stepped in court and the fact that your children were there as well, and there was so much cheering for you?

YANNICK NOAH: Gilles and Amelie have been talking about the vision about what they wanted to do for me for some months now. At first I was very happy, but then it was in the long run, and then it became more precise.

Today, tomorrow, the 5th and the day of the final as well something was scheduled to happen. I was in Cameroon at the time, I was in another life, and yet another life.

Yesterday, when I landed, I thought, Oh, my God, today we're going to display the win. Then I felt a strong emotion. I don't know why. It seems that the older we get the more emotional we get.

So a movie was broadcast and was very well set up. There were the seven players that I played that actually gave a testimony, and it was very nice.

After 14 years, because they talked about a match that they had lost, for most of them they had actually beaten me quite a few times. So for Lendl it was certainly painful to talk about it, but it was great fun.

And beyond this, well, you know, I realized and I went to sleep early because I knew that today would be a special day. Getting into the central court, well, was not a problem to me for an exhibition match, even though it could be more complex, it was okay. But for a concert, I was more anxious.

Here people came here and had their tickets for some months, and they happened to have a concert, but they

were tennis fans in and out. So I felt a bit of attention. But then, in the end, I relaxed and it was cool. I spent a lot of time here in general, you know. Not only on court.

I dropped by to see Gilles, to see Amelie. So it's not as if I would drop by every 10 years. I'm actually here quite often.

There was a question about my children, true. Well, there was last night's event. They came here for this purpose. Those that live in Paris were there, of course. They didn't come on purpose just for that event. But with what is going to happen today and tomorrow, I'm glad they're here, not only my kids but also my grandchildren.

Because something will remain if I should pass away. I went to a box match. There was Tony Yoka, and we had a walk with two of my children and they said, Isn't there something for him? And nothing had happened. Nothing had been organized.

So I'm quite honored to have this organized for me.

Q. 40 years ago, with hindsight, it seems that we had something spontaneous, something human that doesn't exist anymore. Things seemed to have changed when you see 40 years ago and today's tennis. What is your outlook of things?

YANNICK NOAH: Tennis, as society, have changed. So we are talking about extra media coverage. At the beginning of the '80s, which was the beginning of the star system in the tennis field. As you all know, the media equipment has changed, and has changed also the game. The balls have changed. So the game style has changed, as well.

As a spectator, what has really struck me and what we could have avoided is the code of conduct, because it's too rigid, in my opinion.

But I'm not playing anymore, and there is less proximity with players nowadays, according to me. Even if they have a million followers everywhere in the world, it doesn't seem that we get close to tennis players.

It's not a matter of them having less personality. It's a matter of being booed also when they played. When we watch matches, I'm quite surprised by the level, by the levels of the top 10 but also the top 60, the top 100, they all played very well.

Q. I would like to go back to the concert performance that you gave. You had your runner-up as well with you playing guitar. 40 years ago you would play with a racquet, and that time you actually played the guitar, and with someone who became a friend.

YANNICK NOAH: You know, the tennis era has been long finished for us. We have done a lot of concerts together. Our inside joke together is that people know him because he actually lost to me when actually he won three times a Grand Slam. We had an exhibition match for an association called Les Enfants de la Terre.

He was saying the runner-up of 1983, but Mats won actually seven Grand Slams. So it's a joke, you know.

He's a friend. He's a genuine friend. We had a lot of parties together. We spend holidays together. We gave concert performances together.

It's a great thing that we kept this relationship. He loves music, just as I do. Playing here, once again, people that see Mats in Philippe Chatrier, they think, oh, he's the one who lost to me when actually he won so many Grand Slams.

But you know him. He's very humble. He's the greatest player. He's the coolest guy. He is the only one to have replayed a match point when he was 17 years old. I would have stolen the point. And he's very humble. He's the greatest guy I have ever known.

You know, when you play a concert 1 hour and 15 minutes, you can have a few false notes or make mistakes, and warm up. But as a runner-up, he managed to play without any problems. It's knock, knock on heaven's door once again.

Q. We have talked about mental health a lot recently in tennis. There are women and men players that were close to burnout. This seemed to have happened to you after you won Roland Garros. What do you think about this? What do you think about this phenomenon that is gaining momentum? Because it seemed to be quite exceptional and not often to be found at that time.

YANNICK NOAH: No, in my time it wasn't that exceptional. A lot of players really had a drop of pressure, so to say. For me it was here or not far from here. It happened. That's it. You dream of playing, but a lot happens around the tennis player, things that are not visible. Even when you're not a tennis player, one person out of five suffers from mental issues. Even if you're not an athlete.

So if add pressure to this, the feeling I had when it happened was that really people hit hard. I wasn't feeling good, and after this sort of hit hard, it was even worse. Then I felt a lot of solitude, and I found a solution at the time, which was to go and live elsewhere.

But it's normal, and you need support. You need to be understood. You have a lot of pressure on your shoulders. Sometimes for very young individuals who

are not ready for that. You can dream of winning a match, of training, and suddenly you represent something that is very heavy, weighs heavily on you, and it's not new.

I can't talk about the situation in other countries in the world, but in France, in my generation, it was hard. I remember Marie-Jo, my friend. I know, well, nothing was given to her, even though now in France she's considered as one of the best of all times. At the time she felt very lonely and was very much hurt. I won't say anymore. You probably remember that time.

Others are not that spectacular, because they are not that well known. But it happens a lot. Because there is a lot of pressure; your agent, the media, results, the level.

At the time in the '80s and even before, you had moments when you could relax a little bit. Now, whatever your ranking, you saw the level of the players today, if you don't come to the first tour 100% physically, then you're out. There is between the 10th, 15th player and the 80th player, the differences are very slim and subtle. There is a lot of pressure.

Q. In '83, you came with the colors of Cameroon on your wristband. Now you live in Cameroon. It's something very important for you. What position does that country occupy in your heart?

YANNICK NOAH: Well, the wristband is a Rasta band. It's not Cameroon. It's Rasta. So it was more of that. It was more of a look thing. Seeing the music I listen to, how much I loved Bob Marley. It was more the reggae, cool, Rastafari look on the tennis court where everybody was clean-cut and nicely dressed in white. Well, you had a few players with long hair and a headband, but it was the first generation like with Vilas, or it was a look in the beginning, at least.

Then once I showed that look, people said, Oh, he's showing his African roots. Then I thought, Oh, well, yes, it's true, I'm both French and Franco-Cameroon. I grew up here. I left when I was 10. My whole career took place in France. All my friends are in France.

But in my life, even though I used to go to Cameroon on holiday, I felt like going back there. Not to rediscover it, but I would say to discover almost the other part of me, the African roots that I have. It's something that is very enriching, and I'm very happy to be able to live that double culture in my life and to nourish myself with the local traditions and to prepare all this for my children.

Q. It's been 40 years. It's a long time ago. After all you went through, what position does this June 5, 1983 occupy in your memory and your heart?

YANNICK NOAH: Apart from my children's birth, it's the

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most beautiful day of my life. It's the most beautiful day of my life, as I said, and I'm full of gratitude for the tour I have had. I'm very happy that this is on film, this has been filmed. With time, I realize that every time I watch these images, I feel a strong emotion.

I'm absolutely certain that in 30 or maybe 20, 30, 40 years, when I die, these will be the images that will be shown on the news. It's right. It's fair. Because for the people of my generation, I believe that in France it was an important day for everyone.

I don't want to boast about it, but I receive almost daily testimonies, and even more today because you're talking about it, but everyone remembers where they were that day. For me, it's very moving, because when they talk about it, it's always with a very nice emotion, lovely words, a smile.

Even those who say that they flunked their exams because instead of working for their exams, they were supporting me and watching me. People of my generation, sometimes younger, often older, for them it was a day that counted. And I was there. I was at the core of that.

Q. You were talking about the code of conduct which is too strict. Hugo Gaston took a sanction of 144,000 Euros because he dropped a ball from his shorts. So do you think there is a danger for players above the 144th place who really need the prize money?

YANNICK NOAH: I can't tell you about the situation for Hugo Gaston. I don't think you have to pay a fine of 140,000 Euros because you dropped a ball. Something else must have happened. But then there are rules and you have to play with the rules. There is the rules of ATP.

Once again, I stopped following for a while, but when you're watching hockey, a hockey match, I like it when they fight at one point, when there's a scuffle.

And I think the reason why our generation had a strong link with the public at a time when it was not so much covered by the media, it's due to the fact that no one will say, At the time I used to love McEnroe because of the way he served or because of his game. They loved John because he used to break his racquet, because he used to shout and yell.

Does this mean I have to go? There is a ringtone. Is it time? (Smiling.) Well, you know, even the media, you know it's timed. Everything is timed. It's hell.

You see during John's matches, to take an extreme view, some people would go and support him and they loved him, but some hated him.

Then you had Connors, and you had a link which went beyond the game, which is something you can't have anymore now. So it's a bit special, because the three best have been here for 20 years so it's a bit special. So over time you get to know who Rafa is, but it takes time.

While at the time you saw one match with John, and when you left, you knew what he... And the code of conduct has broken in a way the link that people had with the players.

Technically, I would have to watch and to check and to talk about it, but I would say to me it was the beginning of the end as a spectator. When I watch a tennis match it's a show, really. And if it lasts three-and-a-half hours with people who for three-and-a-half hours put the ball just this far away from the line, I'm bored. Even though I know it's an incredible performance, but I want something else. I want emotion. I want something else apart from the game to happen.

When you have a three-and-a-half-hour match, what is the actual game? It's 45, 50 minutes. So if you decide that nothing is going to happen, it's a long time. To me, for me.

Q. The last time you were seen on court I believe it was in Lille for the finals of the Davis Cup, and Lucas Pouille was being swallowed by his friends because he just won. Did you follow him and his depression and his rebirth during the qualifications? Were you with him? I know that you used to be protective with your boys, your brothers, as you used to call them. Have you followed that for him?

YANNICK NOAH: There is a coaching for the Davis Cup, and there is my way of coaching. To me, the emotional part is very important in coaching. Lucas will tell you things are personal. You're talking about someone's intimacy. I'm not talking about the game.

The players will tell you I almost never talked about the technique. I follow all his matches. We have seen each other quite a few times. I'm happy. I saw the problem coming up well before we won the Davis Cup, well before that I saw the problem coming.

Sometimes victories can hide other issues. So I was very happy to see his emotions on those three matches as from the first court. He was happy to win a match. So this is great. I haven't seen the draw. Who is he going to play?

Q. (Off microphone.)

YANNICK NOAH: So this is very tough, but there is worse. But it's tough.

So great. I'm no longer a coach, so now they are my friends, girls and boys. So when things go well, there is a message. Now I have been a bit lost since I came in last night, but he sent me a message last night, for example.

Q. Yannick, we see you a lot in concert. We never saw anyone walking barefoot on the central court. What was your feeling with your bare feet on the clay court?

YANNICK NOAH: Well, the center court here is the best earth court, the best clay court in the world. It's incredible. You walk on it like you were walking on velvet. There is no stress. Wherever you go and play, there is always small pebbles. A few years ago Jean Gachassin thought or gave me the possibility of inviting friends after the finals.

So we had a nice meal paid by the Federation, with nice wine paid by the Federation, and I felt, well, I won 30 years ago, they can pay a few bottles of wine. No, I'm joking (smiling). It was absolutely great.

The main thing is that afterwards, I don't know, it was midnight or 1 a.m. after the finals, and we came down to the court. There was not the lighting you had now, but there was still lighting. We played, we hit some balls, and I played barefoot and I realized I could slide without destroying my feet. So it was not a special event, I thought. Well, should I put on my shoes or do you think Le Coq Sportif are going to be upset if I play barefoot? Because I'm showing their shoes. This is the new pair of shoes of the Le Coq Sportif.

Yes, I played barefoot, because onstage I'm barefoot, so I wasn't going to come with my shoes.

Q. We know you like the word "kiff," to like, in French. Do you like this day? We know that the word that you like is "kiff" in French, which is to like. Are you liking that day?

YANNICK NOAH: Well, I might surprise you, but I don't think seeing you here is unpleasant. For some of you, I haven't seen you since the Davis Cup. I want to believe that despite the tensions that happen sometimes, we have had good times together. When I came, I thought of the concert, I was told there is a press conference. I thought, maybe I'll see the old-timers, so it's great to see you. I don't know. It's cool. It's nice.

The children are here. They are having fun. Being here is great.

Q. We are caught up by the news Arthur Fils just won the Lyon tournament. He's 18. He's probably listening. What piece of advice could you give him from now on after his first victory in a tournament?

I'm talking about Arthur Fils but it could be any other future hopes of tennis.

YANNICK NOAH: My advice would be if you want, call me. If I have a piece of advice to give him, especially since I saw one set in Marseilles a few months ago, he was playing well. This time I saw a few points more. Even if I had some advice to give him, I wouldn't say it here (smiling).

Remember when Henri was hurt at one point and he was told, How long is this going to take? And when will you resume? He answered in the press conference, You can read it in the media.

I don't know Arthur sufficiently well. The parents I saw, I saw quite a few here. No...

Q. No, what I mean is for these newcomers, they are winning their first title. What can you tell them? Maybe there are things they should avoid. Maybe there are things they should do. What can we do to, maybe not to protect, but to help them?

YANNICK NOAH: It's difficult to talk in general. I'd like to answer, but it's difficult to give you a general answer.

The thing that surprised me most in a negative way after 20 years of not being a captain was the phones and the social media. This I felt very surprising, the fact that they were all that intoxicated by that. I wasn't prepared for that.

I was coaching, but at that time I didn't take into account the fact that after each training session or sometimes during the training sessions they were always outside of what was happening. So it's difficult to refocus someone, because you always have the vision of others. If I have a problem with a journalist when I'm a player, after that, we can explain things to each other, but there is a human healthy link.

But if you react to comments from people you don't even know, I believe it's something that is toxic, and I was overcome by that. For the three years when I coached, when I came back, I have the feeling that I wasn't able to give what I wanted to give because I was totally taken aback by that aspect. I wasn't prepared for it.

At the time we took some what we call some green time, meaning some time off. Meaning that you were in a quiet environment, and you were out of any toxic element.

But when you're supposed to take time off and you have these media, it's no use. So I was really overcome by all that. So I don't know that boy, Arthur Fils. So I believe that you can go very far being a Frenchman, but it's more difficult if you're French. More difficult, yes. You have to go and nourish yourself elsewhere, because we're used

to losing at all levels.

All coaches have lost. None of them have won. So you're surrounded by people who have all lost. When you win, you think, oh, what's happening? I don't know what to do.

This is what happened to me. What do we do? That's it. You have won. Then what? It's difficult.

But I have a job, mental support. If the players call me, I'm here. But time is passing, and I must say that things are changing and I follow less and less.

Q. Yesterday the Olympique de Marseille celebrated its anniversary as a champion, and Nicolas said it's wonderful. We would like to celebrate current victories rather than long past victories. Today we are actually celebrating 40 years of wins. Why don't we celebrate new wins?

YANNICK NOAH: If you want to wait 50 years for the next win, we can, you know. But as if since then we had had 10 victories we wouldn't celebrate that one. Maybe actually. Why not? Because it was a wonderful victory, actually.

I actually posted something on this yesterday. I was in Munich when the Olympique de Marseille football club won. I thought, oh, my God, that's wonderful. It's a great memory. They won the Champions League. We can celebrate other victories, but it's not either/or.

It's not because I won 40 years ago that we shouldn't celebrate others. Don't forget the girls. The women had some victories as well. We should talk about it, as well. Maybe celebrating my victory would actually entice others to celebrate Amelie's win or Mary's win. Victories aren't always on men's side but also on women's side.

Q. You were talking about the effect of match time, and there has been a lot of discussions on medical time, on toilet time, so on and so forth. And sometimes matches stop for seven, eight, ten minutes. Have you had that when you were actually playing? How do you perceive this? Is it why you're wary of tennis now?

YANNICK NOAH: I think tennis players have smaller bladders (smiling). I don't see any other reason. I'm talking about the juniors until the seniors. I never had that. You just actually pee before the match and that's it. I never saw anyone wanting to pee during the match. I think there is a bladder problem. Then there are also mental problems.

Physio time as well. If you have a tough match, well, you know the physical aspect is important if -- you don't need physio if you're okay. You might want to have a

massage, might want to do some stretching, but then it's a never-ending story.

If I'm physically diminished, that's part and parcel of the match, if you're injured, and I think sincerely that in 95% of the time they are not injured. It's just to break the momentum of the match. And it's essential when you follow the match someone is taking the upper hand at one point, and then the other would stop.

We can't coach as well. There is no -- coaching is forbidden. I don't want to be the only oldie talking about the old times, but something we could do together is to check this bladder problem. We definitely have to do something about it. It's strange.

I think we can wrap up with this, on this high note.

(Applause.)

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