

Roland Garros

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Paris, France

Nicolas Escude

Press Conference

Q. Hi, Nicolas. First question, the basic one, of the result of French tennis after two rounds, what stock do you take for the Federation?

NICOLAS ESCUDE: Well, the results are not good, as you can see, but I don't think the Federation can be held responsible for everything.

Of these results, you saw and heard the players, girls and boys, in the press conferences, and you were able to ask them questions, which doesn't mean that the Federation does not take its responsibility. But for the past two years we've been setting up quite a lot of things for the training of the players, girls and boys, from the youngest age from tennis school, with modernization, the way the Poitiers Center works, the way the National Center works.

Okay, we are in a major here in Roland Garros, a Grand Slam tournament. Our goal is for everyone the same: To see our players shining, and it's not the case today. But the first ones to be both penalized and in a way responsible for the results are the players. They are thought to be unhappy.

Q. (Off microphone.)

NICOLAS ESCUDE: Obviously, for the French players, with the Americans in the U.S. or the Australians in Melbourne, there are additional expectations obviously for the home players. Especially this year for us, there's the 40-year celebration of Yannick's victory. But let's not forget that girls have won here in Roland Garros and elsewhere in Grand Slam tournaments since then.

Yes, everybody is aware of that, but now I guess you're sufficiently professional, and you know tennis sufficiently well. If I were to ask you, Did you expect a Frenchman to win Roland Garros this year? Well, no.

For Caroline it's a bit different. In view of her position and ranking, in view of the results she had at the end of last year, as I said at the time, the objectives are different for her.

Every time she goes to a tournament, she wants to go all the way. Obviously she is looking for a Grand Slam tournament, so it's a huge disappointment for her, first of



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all. I'm not saying she missed her match completely, but the fact that she was ousted so early is a disappointment.

From what I read of what she said, she wasn't happy with her result.

Q. Obviously as you were saying in the preamble, we can't hold the Federation accountable for everything, but for the past three seasons it's been more or less the same here. You said a lot of work has been done, many things have been organized. So what is missing so we can see a Frenchman or French girl in Roland Garros or at least in the second round?

NICOLAS ESCUDE: Well, first of all, we haven't got a seeded French player. This is the work of every day you have to be ranked so that you can be top seed. We need to have more boys in the top 30, for example, and it's not the case yet.

To tell you what's missing in each boy individually, I don't necessarily know, but we are with them. We are supporting them with the work done by Paul-Henri, with Ivan now, with Seb for the Davis Cup, Bennet for the girls. They are there every day with their staff, but we can't be with them at all hours to see what's happening in the competitions.

Yes, there is an undeniable logic, which is that our French No. 1 is in the top 40 today, but it's a pleasure to see him making progress at least for him. This is Ugo Humbert that I'm talking about.

We all know that for high-level players it's based on individual projects. They pick their staff. They pick their physical preparation, their physical coach, and they have their own objectives, and they have to set up the right means to reach their objectives.

But, unfortunately, today we are not there, or at least they're not there, at least I think. I don't think they're satisfied with their results.

Q. A year ago you asked players to be accountable and to be more responsible and stabilized. Do you think they heard you?

NICOLAS ESCUDE: Yes, I think so. I was talking earlier about Ugo. If you look at where he was before and now his structure, the fact that he asked Jerem to take him

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into his hands to work on his physical fitness, his diet. If you look at Hugo Gaston, he ended his collaboration with Marc Barbier, and now he is calling upon Younes. I believe I've been heard, yes.

And from the discussions I have with some of them and from the feedback I get from Paul-Henri or Ivan, yes, I have been heard. But the ones you should ask that question are the players. Sorry to say it again.

Yes, as a Federation with a Grand Slam tournament here at home, we are also highly disappointed, but the first ones to be disappointed are the players.

Q. Before the tournament Yannick Noah was saying to the French young players, If you want to win something, you have to pack and go abroad. Here you have coaches who have never won and you are surrounded by people who never won anything. What do you answer?

NICOLAS ESCUDE: Jo and Gael never trained with a foreign coach, Richard as well, and they didn't win a Grand Slam. So it doesn't mean anything. It doesn't mean anything.

Q. You talk about structure and physical preparation. You didn't pronounce the word "mental," which is at the very core of individual sports, and in particular tennis. Do you think there are enough efforts made on mental preparation in tennis now? I'm thinking in particular about Caroline Garcia, who hasn't lost her technical tennis since last year, but she talks a lot about emotional management. This is something we hear from many players, girls and boys.

NICOLAS ESCUDE: I believe this is not just French. This is something that is very important for all high-level sports. Now it's a topic that I have been able to tackle as soon as I got to the technical lead in order to support as best as possible all the youngsters we can train, but then it's the same thing.

Would you say that our best players individually get the right structure at the mental or psychological level? Do they work with someone? Do they dare talk about it? Because we've seen in the past that many players were working with someone but didn't want it to be known. I agree with you fully. Apart from the pure case of Caroline, this is something that is most important.

But as I've said again and again, this is a word that has been overused in France, and it's a kind of hold-all. He was winning because he had the mental strength; he lost because he didn't have the mental strength. Don't forget the essential thing: Tennis means spending hours and hours in the court working physically and training.

Q. If we are here today, it's because there is a prism on Roland Garros and clay, and the French seem to have trouble expressing themselves. We seem to be in the doldrums. Maybe we didn't prepare sufficiently over the past ten years. The takeover from the Musketeers. What do we do with the youngsters today so we can have one who can play on clay properly and knows how to play on clay?

NICOLAS ESCUDE: I get the impression that Arthur Fils can play on clay. Luca Van Assche is playing well as well.

What we do, we try even in Poitiers to get them to play as much as possible outdoors. As soon as the weather is good we play outside, outdoors, and as much as possible on clay. We try to spend as much time on clay as possible.

It's an orientation that we started over the past two years. There's no miracle if you want to shine on such a special surface as this one.

In view of the connection we have with Roland Garros, means that you really have to spend time on clay, and spending time on clay helps you for other surfaces. It's not just a good serve or you have to build the points. Our youngsters, boys and girls, spend much more time on clay today than they used to in the past.

Q. Last year you said we had to shake the French coconut tree. What have you done? Are you setting objectives for the players, for the coaches? What did you mean at the time, and what has been done since then over the past year?

NICOLAS ESCUDE: Well, everyone had to challenge themselves, whether it be the players, the coaches, whether they be in the Federation or not, or the management even.

We realized quite a few things. We challenged ourselves. Are we perfect today? No, we still have to improve in many fields, but we must be more precise or more specific. I'm not talking about workload or time spent in the field or scheduling or tournament scheduling. We work on all that, which is important for high-level sports today.

Honestly, the Federation has become aware of that, whether you talk about the physical coaches, the tennis coaches, everybody has gone to work on that.

Q. Ivan Ljubicic got to the Federation a few months ago. What is the result after these few months?

NICOLAS ESCUDE: Well, over the first months he started looking at how we work, how we are organized, trying to understand the French culture. He went to

Poitiers. He went to the Les Petits As. He went to the clubs to try and understand how the whole ecosystem works.

Today he is with Paul-Henri supporting our best players within the Federation. Obviously, working with the coaches and the players that we have on tour who are not necessarily in our structures.

So he brings his experience, his knowledge of the high-level tennis, and very high level, in fact, in view of the fact that he took care of Roger Federer. We work with him hand in hand on all these aspects.

We look at everything that can be improved. We also work on the competition schedule for some players. We try to work on lots of things and try to be as close as possible to our players.

Q. Coming back to Ivan Ljubicic, I believe is he preparing an audit, or is he going to report on what he saw? Did he tell you about that internally? Did you look at some possibilities in view of what he noted?

NICOLAS ESCUDE: I don't think there's an audit, so to say, because we talk every day. In fact, since the beginning of the tournament, even before the quallies, we have been talking to some coaches. We've been debating. We've been looking at the technical work for a given player, for example.

All this we've talked about to make our players more performing, but "audit" might be a big word, so to say.

Q. (In English.) You mentioned Yannick Noah before and the 40 years and especially wanting to do well this year. Is that a large burden for players coming up today, the 40 years? They keep hearing about it. For the women's side, 20 years. How do younger players experience this?

NICOLAS ESCUDE: Let me answer in French. We were talking about pressure earlier on. Above and beyond the whole ecosystem, we talk about the pressure on French players with Roland Garros coming up and during Roland Garros. And the fact that Yannick won here 40 years ago is something that crops up every year. I didn't hear yesterday after Rinderknech, but I know that during the match the public was saying, You're the last French player, you have to win.

Now, how can we use experiences such as Yannick's as we did when we created this mental and psychological poll, and he helped us there? He's not someone who is extremely available, so we can't really work with him all the time. He can help out when we need, yes, but I won't hide it from you.

Even I, as the national technical director, in my position and even before when I was a player listening to this constant, Hey, you know, we need a successor for Yannick Noah, listening to this again and again is a pressure, which is why it was a good thing when the girls won Grand Slam tournaments, especially Mary here.

Q. Question from abroad. I'm from Geneva. It's not much better in the U.S., in Australia, or in the U.K. really. These federations, which paradoxically are the wealthiest, don't you think they have a problem in view of countries like Denmark, Croatia, or Switzerland, small federations with not much money do have much better results.

NICOLAS ESCUDE: Is it a problem of rich men?

Q. Do you think the players get too much too early?

NICOLAS ESCUDE: This is something we've thought about, and we are working on it, the fact that we have to give our youngsters a culture of what high level means. When I say that they have to understand this, it means that at one point they have to buy into their own project.

No federation is going to get someone to win a Grand Slam tournament. It has to be the player who goes and looks for that win.

The Federation can be supporting, helping them to structure, but in no way is it an issue of money. So knowing whether at one point we gave too much help to our players, it may be a constant discussion. But we try to make them aware of what high level means, of what concessions they have to make, what investment they have to give, human and financial, to be able to reach their objective.

But I would say in the U.S. there are generations with Sampras and Agassi, or in the U.K. you have Andy Murray. Even us, if we look at the generation of Jo, Gael, the only thing they missed was a title in the Grand Slam. They won everything. Sometimes they ended up the season with three players in the top 10. Sometimes they just missed the Masters, and Jo in 2008, he was in the Finals. I believe we could stop this constant complaint if he had won it.

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