

# National Bank Open

Sunday, August 15, 2021

Toronto, Ontario, Canada

## Karl Hale

### Press Conference



OLIVER WEAVER: Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you for joining us for this virtual press conference with National Bank Open presented by Rogers Tournament Director Karl Hale this morning.

We have a fantastic week of tennis here at the Aviva Centre so far, and we will be capping it off today with the doubles and singles finals. I will kick us off with the first quest.

Karl, how pleased have you been with how it's gone this week?

KARL HALE: This is our inaugural National Bank Open presented by Rogers. It's the best event we have ever had. Over 50,000 fans with multiple sellouts. Great player field. We're having a great final today with Reilly Opelka and Daniil Medvedev.

Having the tennis family back in Toronto was just tremendous this week, and that tennis family includes the players, the staff, and obviously our National Bank and Rogers, our sponsors, having our back the past two years to make this event so successful.

We had a vaccination clinic on-site where we had players actually take part in the vaccinations, as well. It was just a really, really great environment this week. Our bubble was very successful, very well adhered to, staff and players and their teams. The feedback has been tremendous on all accounts, and the weather held up for us.

Very, very happy with the event this week.

**Q. Congrats on pulling it off. I know how difficult it was to get this thing off the ground. Just how challenging was it? For those of us who attended some matches this week, everything seemed pretty seamless on center court, but I know it wasn't easy for you guys the last few weeks and months, was it?**

KARL HALE: No, you know, the truth is we have been working on this since last April when the pandemic hit, all the different scenarios we possibly could have. So it's

been a long time we have been working on this.

On the back end, the first three days before qualifying with the players coming in and teaching them the protocols, you know, it wasn't difficult, it was just time-consuming to get them up to speed. But once we got into a roll of the tournament, everything worked really, really well.

**Q. From a financial standpoint, and maybe it's too soon to know, but with the limitations in crowds, spectators allowed in both events, how much of a shortage is there? Are you happy with what you have been able to bring to the table to help finance the program over the next year?**

KARL HALE: Yeah, obviously it's a very difficult challenge, because fans and tickets are a big part of our financial model. The good news is that we had more than we expected. You know, a month before the event it was only 1,300 and we got it up to 5,000. So we are happy with where we are at. We're going to do better than we expected because of that.

We are just happy to have the event back in Toronto, and we're back on the tennis map.

**Q. Congratulations on pulling off another great event this week in Toronto. First, you mentioned about the vaccine clinic. Can you give us a rough estimate of the amount of players who participated in that clinic?**

KARL HALE: I think it was just a few. I don't know it off the top of my head, but under five, I would say, around that number. They were very happy to have it, because it's very convenient, and they have a tough time on the tour getting out to a vaccination clinic. So they are very appreciative.

**Q. Obviously you spoke to us a couple years ago, it was such a huge moment for Tennis Canada seeing Bianca win in Toronto. Last year of course the event gets canceled because of the pandemic. You bring the event back this year, and it's obviously very successful, but for you, looking forward, hopefully next year and beyond we have more fans and more courts to be used. I'm curious how you're looking to, I guess, change or evolve the event so it not only**



**remains a signature event on the tour but also one of the best in terms of a fan experience.**

KARL HALE: We just got a report from the ATP supervisor, and we look at all the recommendations that they have to improve the event, and the team, shortly after the event, meets on what we can improve.

However, this is a bit of an anomaly, we hope this year, and we're back to normal next year. Also, in the future, we expect that the Canadians will keep moving up in the rankings and having great events to promote tennis in Canada.

Our fan support was tremendous this week, and our night matches were just amazing and electric. We're thinking that will continue.

**Q. It's been a great week. I just got some insight from a couple friends of mine who are at the tournament this week, and they are brand new at tennis. They said they loved the whole experience and thought the tennis was exciting, but they also thought the whole experience of being there was cool. I know that this year was a bit limited as far as the live music or beer gardens, but how, going forward, do you see the tournament becoming more of almost like a festival-style tennis experience for people who are die-hard fans but also people who just want to have a good time at the sporting event through the day? How do you see that evolving?**

KARL HALE: Yeah, I think that's our event. It's an entertainment event. I think that will continue in the future. Obviously that's predicated on COVID and the protocols we have to adhere to in the future.

But the fan experience is really important to us. Our day sessions come to five, six hours, so we are going to continue that and evolve that as we go along.

**Q. I know with Cincinnati so close, I heard something just on Twitter that Tennis Canada, I don't know if you were involved in this, did you have to help make an arrangement for some of the players to get from Toronto down to Cincinnati? Medvedev and Reilly are playing today, will probably play on Monday or Tuesday. Do you have to help organize that with Cincinnati to get the players back and forth?**

KARL HALE: We don't organize it with Cincinnati. Daniil will probably play on Wednesday, because he's a top-seeded player. But what we do is we want to create a great experience for our players, knowing that when they come to the event they are treated extremely well, so we

hire a private jet for our semifinalists, singles and doubles, and their team to fly out tonight because it's very difficult to get to Cincinnati, especially in COVID and the flight restrictions.

They are very appreciative of that, and they will leave tonight. They will be ready to play Cincinnati tomorrow.

**Q. I was just wondering, do you think that the tournament has reached a new level this year and in which way?**

KARL HALE: That's a good question. I think this is an unusual year, of course. We didn't know we were going to have the event until recently.

What I can tell you is that it went extremely well. Players, fans, staff, media, sponsors, everybody was really happy with the running of the event, so we will take the learnings from this event and make it better in the future.

OLIVER WEAVER: What are your thoughts on today's final?

KARL HALE: I think it's a great matchup. They have played four times. Three of the times it's been 7-6 in the third.

It's really exciting to see Reilly come out here in Toronto, his first Masters Series final. I think it will be a great match. It can go either way.

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