

National Bank Open

Sunday, August 14, 2022

Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Karl Hale

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Hi, everyone. Thank you for coming. Karl will be doing a tournament recap for everyone and then taking some questions. Karl, up to you.

KARL HALE: Thank you. Thank you for coming, everybody. Thank you for helping us this week by covering the event.

As you all have seen, an amazing, outstanding record-breaking event. We had 14 Grand Slam champions. Seven No. 1s. Serena retiring. A sellout night on Wednesday night. Spectacular week of Canadian tennis with our Canadians back on track, Bianca and Leylah.

Amazing activation and enhancements this week. We had our 300 level that was filled during the week. We had our Mental Timeout Initiative that was well received.

Serena Williams used the relaxation zone. A lot of the players used that area, the quiet rooms. One of the only ones on tour.

The food court was a home run or, should I say, an ace.

So all of those initiatives that the team worked so hard on throughout the year came to fruition and were very, very successful.

We're left with a great final to come with Simona Halep. And a bright future. And, I guess, most importantly, the fan experience was tremendous. And support during the week left us with a record-breaking event. So here we are today to watch a great final. So thank you.

THE MODERATOR: Questions?

Q. Sounds like it's going to be a tough one to top moving forward. Can you share with us some specifics in terms of attendance and ticket sales in terms of putting money back in for Tennis Canada this year?

KARL HALE: Yeah, I mean, our record is 138,000. And



we're going to surpass that today, depending upon what the final numbers are.

It was our strongest week of selling on the men's or the women's tour. Tuesday was record-breaking sales as well. Once we announced Serena's retirement.

So the future looks really bright for tennis. I think one of the important things is that, you know, to grow the event, we're now penetrating the social fabric of Toronto and Canada. So a lot of non-tennis fans are starting to come to our event.

Q. There's always some good stories in the tournament, as Eugene Lapierre said too in Montreal. And, whatever, if the seeded players move forward or not. Here, one great story this week was Serena's retirement. Is it the principal story that you will get in your memory for the next year about this 2022 edition?

KARL HALE: Yeah, I think, you know, it's a very good question. I think Wednesday night is a night that everybody that was here or experienced it on television, fans, players, staff, partners, will never forget.

Because, not only was it Serena Williams' retirement night from our tournament, but also Bianca followed that match. And everybody stayed until midnight to watch that.

But as an event, on a whole, it was our most successful event with all of these new enhancements. Adding the 300 levels that we haven't done since 2009. Having them filled. Having our standing room filled.

Having the site full during the day. At night, people, you know, congregating, eating, using our retail, and having a great experience helps us grow the event going forward.

Q. Did you have any advance knowledge that Serena was going to be dropping such a big bombshell on us here this week? And what was your reaction to that? And maybe a favorite Serena memory of her years here in Canada.

KARL HALE: I had an inclination that she was retiring. I didn't know the bombshell was coming on Tuesday.



Very grateful that she won Monday and we could have this experience for all our media partners, fans, and partners this week.

You know, the memories with her, she's a three-time champion. She really supported our event throughout her 21-plus years of playing this. Really gracious person.

It was celebratory. It was sad. Because you want to keep her playing forever. But that doesn't happen in sport.

So just happy that she was here. Because six weeks ago I never imagined her and Venus would be here.

Q. It was announced at the start of both events that Montreal was getting, I believe, a 10-million-dollar grant from the government for enhancements on site. I think I read Toronto's getting some money as well. What would you see earmarking that money for? And, long-term, what's some growth that you would like to see to continue to build this tournament up?

KARL HALE: Well, the team, you know, we surveyed the fans. We talked to our partners. So we go back to them and the team with Gavin Ziv, Rob Swann, etcetera. We'll determine the areas that we want to enhance for the tournament.

But as you see, we spent significant funds this year enhancing the site. Which really worked well. Everybody experienced a great event because of that.

Q. The fund, the tennis is getting more popular amongst 65-plus people. And also a lot of young people.

KARL HALE: That's everybody (laughing.)

Q. If there's any plan to help the seniors to buy the tickets at a discounted price? And also the younger kids, who are 18. Because a lot of young players are coming up. Coco, 18. Zheng, 20, 19. I think a lot of young Canadians are really moving forward in terms of tennis. So is there any plan for having them coming to this event and giving them some discounted tickets?

KARL HALE: Yeah, well we have our Free Family Weekend. Which is, personally, one of the highlights for me this year. Because we saw so many young girls and women congregating to watch Bianca and Leylah.

Which bodes well for the future of tennis. Not only on a participation side, but you never know, you always see the pictures of the young girl with a star player and then 10 years later they're a star as well.

And moving forward, of course, senior tennis and junior tennis are vital to the growth of tennis and we appreciate the support.

So we'll look at different initiatives of what we can do. But we're grateful for the support that they play in tennis for the tournament in Canada.

Q. The Mental Timeout Project. How much pride did you take in being one of the first people to launch such an initiative? And you said Serena had made use of it. What was the general reaction amongst the players?

KARL HALE: Very positive. And the Positivity Postcards was a big part of that. Because we engaged the fans who signed these cards that we could give to the players. Thousands of those were filled out and given to players. They read them all.

So it's great to make sure that we're part of the conversation. As we know, mental health is prevalent and a very important thing for our tournament and Tennis Canada.

So it's a great first step. We'll go back and look at the positives and try to grow the program.

The relaxation room was a hit. A lot of the players used it. And the Positivity Postcards and signing the pledge, it was really, really a good initiative.

Q. Did you have the chance to just talk a little with Serena before she leaves? And what she said to you about maybe the Canada's events.

KARL HALE: Yeah, I mean, I have, not just Serena, but the players, you know. They really love Toronto and Montreal, the events. They continue to get better.

The staff, we're proud Canadians. We're very friendly and kind towards the players. We have a great player gifting program. Throughout the year we engage the players and keep that continuity going.

So, not only Serena, but a lot of other players commented when they left, about how much effort we put into taking care of them.

So when they're on the tour they will typically travel 30 to 40 weeks a year. And after Wimbledon they feel at home coming here. Because of so many familiar faces and they're taken care of.

So, Serena in particular, she said after the match that she

thought she played really well. She thought she could give a little bit more. But I think she was happy with the way she played. Not the result.

Now she's looking forward to three weeks of very interesting engagement upon her retirement.

Q. She didn't say that she would like to have the relaxation room some years sooner?

KARL HALE: No, no, she didn't. She didn't say that. But again, that relaxation room is one of the only ones on tour. I think we're the first ones to put forward such an initiative. So the players are very appreciative of that.

Q. You have been the tournament director for 16 years. Could you share your vision for the next year, for the next tournaments?

KARL HALE: For next year? Well, we have the men coming back. I've already started, as of Monday, discussions with the male players to engage them to come back to Toronto.

So what we expect is to have another record-breaking year. Engage our fans, have better enhancements on the site, improve the facility and have another spectacular tournament.

As far as specifics, we'll have to go back and discuss those.

Q. A lot of Romanian fans for Simona. I know it's hard, but is there a way to figure out approximately how many tickets were sold to the Romanian fans? I don't know, it's hard to make, but is there a way to do it?

KARL HALE: The Romanian fans are very, very important to our tournament. They create an electric atmosphere. They're great fans. They're the type of fans you want at every tournament. With their flag waving and their chanting.

I can tell you, it's in the hundreds that come to all of her matches. And we have a lot of different groups that do that with their different cultures.

But they're a special group for Halep. So what a final we're going to be in for today. So we're looking forward to it.

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