

# National Bank Open

Sunday, August 13, 2023

Toronto, Ontario, Canada

## Karl Hale

### Press Conference

#### PRESS CONFERENCE

KARL HALE, Tournament Director

THE MODERATOR: Karl Hale, our National Bank Open, presented by Rogers, tournament director is with us. Karl is here to talk about some highlights about the tournament and take your questions.

I'll start you off with an easy one. What are your thoughts ahead of today's finals?

KARL HALE: Well, I think it's representative of the new wave of tennis with these new players. You know, Sinner, Rune, Alcaraz. So it's a new generation.

It's an exciting final because they have contrasting styles, de Minaur and Sinner, so it will be a great match.

**Q. The doors haven't opened yet today, but already this week the attendance record for the National Bank Open has been shattered. What are your thoughts on this record-breaking week?**

KARL HALE: It's a culmination of tennis in Canada for the past 10 years. You know, credit to Milos, Genie, Daniel Nestor, all of these players that have kind of helped get tennis on the map in Canada that the tennis fans can follow, and also the non-tennis fans.

And what we've seen here this week and, you know, we had 32,000 people come for the 407ETR Free Family Weekend. So we're seeing the non-tennis fans starting to come to the tennis event, which is a much broader audience.

So it bodes well going into the 12-day model and the future of tennis, and not just the tournament, but tennis in Canada.

**Q. Speaking of that 12-day model, I'm curious your thought-process behind what went into that and just what it will do for this tournament going forward.**



KARL HALE: Well, you know, obviously, it will help grow the sport in Canada. 12 days coming in 2025. More broadcasts, more fans, bigger draw size, a 96-draw size, more activations on site, more innovations.

So I think it's great for the sport of tennis and also tennis in Canada.

**Q. Carlo Alcaraz came for the first time to Toronto this year. What was the buzz around him that you got when you were speaking with people on site, and what did he share with you about his first Toronto experience at the tournament?**

KARL HALE: He, obviously, loved Toronto. He really enjoyed the experience. We really looked after him. The team was tremendous. And his team is very much like Rafa's team. They're a family. They're very close-knit.

He played -- you know, it's a tough tournament for him, the first one after Wimbledon, and he played well. He had a very tough draw.

But the buzz around him is something we've never seen before opening weekend. You know, the fans that were courtside to get autographs, we have never seen that in the history of our tournament.

So, again, it really bodes well for the future of our sport that he is taking the torch over from the Big 3. And we'll see a lot bigger things from him to come. Plus, you know, the others of Rune and Sinner who aren't so happy to see that and want a piece of that too.

So the future of the sport is in good hands with this young group.

**Q. I wonder if you could say a little more about that non-tennis fan and what you've noticed. Was there specific outreach to sort of the outer circle of the outside tennis to attract it, and what have you noticed? How do you know they're non-tennis fans?**

KARL HALE: Yeah, I think the marketing team took an approach and the tournament took an approach to really try to penetrate that audience.



You know, the grounds, as you can see, is much different than in the past with the food and beverage area, the retail area, the new Michelob Ultra Lounge.

So the experience when you come on site -- and you could see it after, I believe, it was Wednesday when the matches finished early. The fans stayed on the grounds and really enjoyed the experience of the different activations and the food court.

**Q. Karl, you mentioned that in a couple of years the draw will be expanding to 96 players, and I'm curious to know what kind of conversations you've already had about maybe expanding the site or maybe just accommodating the numerous people and kind of the longer event in a couple of years as well.**

KARL HALE: Yeah, we're still working through that model of when the event will start, when it will finish, and how that will look. The good news is we have two years to work on that.

But the site can have that capacity to service the players and the fans, et cetera. So, you know, we'll look into it and come up with something that I'm sure everybody will enjoy.

**Q. Not to dampen the mood, there are some big challenges for the tournament. Next year, it's an Olympic year, and the tournament will take place during the second week of the Olympics, so I guess it's going to be very similar to what happened in 2012. Are you worried about the fact that it's going to be the women's tournament here during the Olympics instead of the men, which is historically a weaker product, without anybody getting offended, hopefully. And also going towards 2025, with the expansion of the draw, it will also mean bigger locker room, more training courts, bigger transportation fleet. How are you thinking about dealing with that? And also, is it going to be a traditional tournament, Wednesday to Sunday, or are there margins for maneuver there?**

KARL HALE: That's a lot of questions.

**Q. Sorry.**

KARL HALE: So the first one, we're looking forward to next year. We're going to start on a Tuesday because the Olympics finishes on a Sunday.

We've been in talks with the players. The female players are really excited about being in Toronto. So we think we're going to have a great draw, and we're over that hump over the past.

So we're looking at it as an opportunity, and we're going to finish on a Monday. So it will be a great new edition to the tournament to finish on a Monday night and, hopefully, grow the TV audience.

What was your other question again?

**Q. It was about the expansion of the draw and all that entails. So locker rooms, training courts, transportation.**

KARL HALE: Yeah. So all of those services will have to be expanded, but we have the capacity here to house that. So it's, you know, not a worry for us. It's something we look forward to.

We have one of the best locker rooms on the tour with our Champion's locker room and services, and the players love it. And we've added a sports science area right across from the locker room that's the top in the sport.

So all good things. It's very, very positive.

**Q. And then there was the question of the calendar. This year, in China, they will do something very special, like, I think Thursday to Wednesday, these kind of things. I was wondering if the Canadian Open, with Cincinnati, I think about, like, a ying-yang solution where you put together 12 days tournament in three weeks instead of four.**

KARL HALE: That is the case. It is, you know, three weeks instead of four.

So we're working with Cincinnati, the WTA, and ATP to figure out what that looks like. We haven't firmed that up yet, but it won't be a traditional, obviously, Sunday-to-Sunday type of model.

We'll probably finish midweek, but it hasn't been determined yet.

**Q. In terms of infrastructure, we know that you're quite limited on this current site. With the week we had in Montreal, I know the roof question will spark up again. Do you plan on bringing those questions together, both tournaments, to kind of maybe expand the site a little bit in terms of fans to be able to watch tennis in Toronto?**

KARL HALE: So we'll start donations in this room (smiling).

No, it's, obviously, a very expensive thing that we've been looking at. And pre-COVID, we looked at it, but we've had

other things that we've had to take care of at this time.

So it's not on the top of the plate at this time, so we'll continue to look at it. But it's not something that's going to happen imminently. We have a 12-day model coming up, so that's what we're looking at at this time.

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