

# Omnium Banque Nationale

Monday, 7 August 2023

Montreal, Quebec, Canada

## Eugene Lapierre

Press Conference



**Q. After 21 years you are sort of giving the tournament to Valerie. Do you believe the tournament is in good hands?**

EUGENE LAPIERRE: You are talking about 21 years, but I'm counting 22 because there was one year with COVID that there wasn't a tournament, but I count it all the same, so it's 22 years.

I think you know Valerie a little. I know her for a long time, and she was a prospect for me for my success for a long time. I've been talking to the Tennis Canada establishment about her. I wanted her to take over.

First, she was a player, so we have nothing to teach her about tennis. She knows exactly what happens on the courts. She played all the Grand Slam tournaments. She traveled everywhere for years.

She stopped playing early, but that gave her time to work for ten years for Tennis Canada, so she knows everything about this tournament. And even more than that, in the time we have here she developed a natural leadership. She's not going to jump on the table during a meeting, but when she talks, everybody listens to her and trusts her, and I trust her.

She was really someone I want to consult every time I had a difficult decision to make. I always wanted her opinion because I trust her judgment. Until now I see she's proving me right. She did very well about all the announcements, everything.

She also did some television, so she speaks French and English perfectly well, and she knows how to talk. So I have no doubts.

So, for example, one of the first conferences were about the grants and everything, and I thought she did very well in all this. And her judgment is extremely good, and she's proving I'm right in everything I thought about her.

**Q. Congratulations for the 22 years. Are you getting bored when you see days like this?**

EUGENE LAPIERRE: I think these days are particularly interesting, on the contrary. Sometimes it goes well; sometimes not as well. I thought, you know, I told Valerie make sure you have nothing to do when you start the day because you never know what is going to happen.

Sometimes the weather is good, the matches are started, and there's nothing to do. Of course, you can always do something, but in a day like this today that's when you must absolutely make sure that everything goes as well as possible.

So, anyway, I still feel good being here.

**Q. According to you, what about this possibility of having a roof on this stadium?**

EUGENE LAPIERRE: The situation changed really completely. We thought we had some agreements for public funds, and this was also trying to have a long-term agreement with the ATP and internationally. I didn't really go into the cost of a possible roof. I guess it's very expensive.

We are still studying this, but something else happened. We had negotiated agreements over 30 years with the ATP and WTA and with the city of Montreal, and now we can't tell them. We have to maintain our position on the calendar because we had those agreements. It won't happen, so we don't have that argument anymore.

Of course, it's maybe not the best stadium compared with the other tournaments, but the players, men and women, just love this tournament. They know the crowd is always very numerous in the stadium, and we have a lot of success on the tour.

I don't think we're in a dangerous position for the future, but we never know. We saw what happens in golf. Beyond that, I'm now going to talk about the climate change.

We see what happens in the different tournaments. We saw what happened in Rome or last week. All the tournaments are affected. Once I went to Indian Wells. Before that it had never rained in this tournament, and now they had to stop the matches because of a sandstorm.



But lately then sometimes matches were interrupted because of the rain, and also it's becoming warmer and warmer. You can have heat waves. If it's 40 degrees Celsius, do you believe people will go and watch a match?

So maybe we are going into a new era, and maybe all sports events will need a roof or to be covered or protected. So, of course, we are going to keep talking about how to improve the stadium and maybe the possibility of having a roof.

Before COVID we were really about to sign that project, but now the situation has changed.

**Q. You are very much involved in all the negotiations and the development of the sport. How active are you still?**

EUGENE LAPIERRE: Well, I have a two-year contract still that can be renewed if everything goes well, so I'll keep working. I will also try to promote the internal public policy for tennis. This is something we need.

It's not going to be easy. I just can't come there and say I'm going to give you millions. This has been through Quebec, and the question is also how are we going to improve our facilities.

And also, there's a committee that has been created recently to work with the WTA. One of my major goals was really to create a connection with the Montreal citizens.

Of course, we want to attract tourists and everything, but it's the people living in Quebec who created the success of this tournament, and this has always been very important to us.

In 2021 it has started for a long time, and I could see that it was the inhabitants of Montreal who came and watched the matches here. There were more and more tourists also.

I went to see Cincinnati recently, and over there we couldn't say that there were inhabitants of Cincinnati in the crowd. Sometimes we were told here, why don't you play the final on the Monday, et cetera, and I said, no way, because on Sunday night everybody goes away. Then there's nobody left.

But here if it happens, it was not the same. We know that the people living here are part of the DNA of this tournament, and it's easier to sell tickets to the people living here than to people living in Belgium, for example.

So the reputation of the tournament also attracted tourists

from other places, but the strength of our tournament is that the fans live here, and they come year after year. The success is thanks to them for the great part. We created the family weekend.

**Q. Do you remember what year that was created? Can you recall how it happened?**

EUGENE LAPIERRE: That was exceptional. It's really a good reaction from all the amateurs living in Montreal because they all came. I'm trying to remember what year it was. I said even before I was the tournament director that we should do that, we should use it.

Of course, the tournament is there to earn cash, but also the issue of accessibility always was important. We don't want people to say there are only luxury cars parking here. No, what we wanted was that nobody could say to us that it was too expensive to watch the best players in the world.

So we were the first in the world to create tickets for days of practice. For tournaments these are days that are useless, and we thought that people might be interested in watching the players practice, so we were selling tickets for that.

So everybody can come and watch tennis. It's not very expensive in the first days of the tournament. You can walk around the park, and you can watch some tennis.

So this is a guarantee of accessibility to our tournament and to a great sports event. That was a good way of selling tickets to associations, for example.

**Q. You were talking about the importance of the team around you. So with Valerie there's now a new team taking over, and you were involved in that too. Are you making sure the transition goes smoothly?**

EUGENE LAPIERRE: Well, I was not the expert in all the different sectors, like marketing or labels, et cetera. We always had very good people for that, and Valerie was there too.

For me it's a good team she has, and most of all it was really a pleasure to work together. I remember meetings. In particular the meeting we had in February in the morning we were laughing so much, we were throwing ideas. So it was really a pleasure to work together, and this is still true now.

But since last year and this year we have many new people also that were added to the organization to develop even further the marketing part.



...quand tout est dit, nous avons terminé.

And also we want to go digital a bit more. So we see the results of that now. We will probably break a record. Sorry my phone is ringing.

So, yes, we have a new team, and I think this makes this tournament even better. The transition is going well, and I'm optimistic. I think everything will go well.

**Q. During those 22 years we were talking about, what are you most proud of in terms of what you achieved in this tournament?**

EUGENE LAPIERRE: Well, its development, but I also was very proud of our mission. It could be just a stand-alone event, and when it's finished, we say see you next year, but this is not how it is.

For me it's a tool in favor of our sport, and this is what I'm most proud of. I remember when we had discussions with Richard about the fact that we wanted a Canadian player in the last rounds, and we never achieved this because they were losing first round. Well, this is something we were able to do in the end.

So what we wanted to do is to train players, and this is what we are looking for in Tennis Canada. We want to promote the sport to have many players, men and women, start playing tennis, and we did that.

And I think we did it in the best way with the National Center for Tennis, and those two tournaments, Toronto and Montreal, gave us financially the possibility of achieving this mission.

So it's a good tournament, but our solid job starts on the Monday after the tournament. It's a successful event, but it also has a mission that we could call social economy. It has to work also for young players, for everyone.

And these players often afterwards help us to make this tournament successful. I remember Bianca, Felix, Alexis, and this makes things work in the long-term, and this is what I'm very proud of.

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