

Tennis Channel

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Martina Navratilova

Media Conference



THE MODERATOR: Thanks, everyone, for joining us today. This is Eric Abner with Tennis Channel public relations. Before we get started, talking about our coverage this year at Roland Garros, hard to believe it's our 18th year of being there.

This year we're going to offer close to 2,500 hours of live tennis between our original network, our second network, T2, and our subscription service, Tennis Channel+.

People who have Tennis Channel+ will be able to choose from 16 courts at once and more than 900 matches, and all of the matches that are televised at Roland Garros this year, whether they're televised on the Tennis Channel platforms or on the platforms of our friends at NBC Sports, will be available for on-demand replays when they conclude on TC+.

I just want to point your attention to T2, which has grown tremendously since we introduced it a couple years ago. T2 is free to everyone in this country, and it's going to have live tennis throughout the French Open again this year.

What that means is we can take a match that is at Court Philippe Chatrier, put that on one channel, take a match from Suzanne Lenglen at the same time, put that on the other channel. Or any other place if we think those matches are among the two best matches going on at that particular point of time.

T2 is not limited to outer courts, it's not limited to first few days at Roland Garros, it's going to show the best players best competition, just like Tennis Channel. It really has become a second Tennis Channel only it's absolutely free.

And we're now doing this every week throughout the year. I'm bringing it up because you haven't already started watching T2, I highly encourage you to do so during the French. And finally, if you have any questions about the network, you could download the apps of Amazon Freevee, ROKU TV, Plex, et cetera at the end of this call and be watching in two minutes absolutely free.

Keep your eye on it. On Tuesday, June 11th, T2 will

introduce Women's Day, which will be a day exclusively devoted to WTA matches every Tuesday moving forward on T2.

Last thing from me, we'll have close to two dozen analysts and announcers at our French Open coverage again this year. This includes Hall of Famers like Jim Courier, Lindsay Davenport, and obviously today's guest, Martina Navratilova, Martina has been part of our family this the first major we ever covered, which was the 2007 Roland Garros.

Now going to waste anybody's time trying to accomplish -- to mention all things she's accomplished in her career. We'll be here forever. I just want to take a second to thank you, too, Martina, today for taking the time today as you get ready to go to Paris.

We'll have about 30, 40 minutes of Q & A right now, and then we'll make the transcript and recording available later on. For anything related to Tennis Channel, please reach out.

Q. Martina, Djokovic is a betting favorite, but with Alcaraz, Sinner, and Nadal all battling injuries, is Novak an even bigger favorite?

MARTINA NAVRATILOVA: Well, it's a crazy men's tournament because there's so much unpredictability at this time, including Novak, because obviously he's playing this week in Geneva as a wild card. Decided he needed to get some more matches in because he wasn't that successful and didn't play that many tournaments, and so feels he needs some more match play.

But then the other guys are questionable, or maybe they end up being 100 percent but we don't know. So the unknowns are pretty large right now, and obviously if injuries come into play, then Novak is an even bigger favorite to win.

If everybody is healthy, then I think it could be, should be an interesting tournament. I think it'll be fascinating anyway to see who comes through.

But Novak, it's been Novak against the field in all the majors other than the French Open. But now that Rafa is obviously not playing his best tennis, he's the favorite even



on the clay.

Q. Is there any doubt in your mind that Novak is the GOAT of men's tennis?

MARTINA NAVRATILOVA: Well, he's got the biggest number of majors, but as we said before, the measuring stick has changed, the way we measure greatness. If you just take the majors in, he's the greatest.

If you take the most wins at tournaments then Jimmy Connors is up there.

It's just really hard to compare generations because so much changes.

But what's changed the most is how the players really just concentrate on the majors, and the tour has become more of just a warm-up or practice type of situation, unfortunately.

Yeah, I mean, nobody is going to catch him now, and if anybody catches him in the future, we may all be gone by then. So for now, he's the GOAT.

Q. I wanted to ask you about Chrissie. I'm definitely in the mood to celebrate the 50th anniversary of her 50th Grand Slam title, her first title at Roland Garros. You guys played a lot throughout the years, of course here in Paris, everywhere else; the most iconic rivalry in tennis maybe. If you could give me some insights and thoughts on what it was like to face her on the clay, what made her so special, and why is she the OG queen of clay?

MARTINA NAVRATILOVA: Well, first off, they need to give her a statue, too. If Rafa has a statue there, then Chris should have a statue, also, as the winningest female. That's number one.

Chris just didn't miss. She was very accurate with her shots. She moved effortlessly. She grew up on the clay. So for an American, she certainly knew how to slide and how to use her feet.

Her balls were low, so it was hard to find an opening because you were always hitting lower balls. The ball was not sitting up and you had to really -- it was hard to create an opening.

The serve maybe could have been a weakness on other surfaces, but on the clay you couldn't really attack it because the ball stayed low, once again, and she defended so well.

Then of course there was probably the best return in the game until Monica Seles maybe came around. She had no weaknesses. Her forehand wasn't as good as her backhand, but it wasn't a weakness. It just wasn't as good as her backhand.

She moved beautifully, and then she had the drop shot when she got you on your heels. She's well inside the baseline hitting drop shots that you never even had a chance to run for them.

Most of all, she just didn't miss. So it was hard not to beat yourself because she just got everything back and then she could attack, as well.

Q. Would you say Chrissie on clay in Paris maybe one of the toughest challenges you ever faced?

MARTINA NAVRATILOVA: Oh, no doubt, no doubt. I was just talking about that match when I beat her for the first time at the French. That was one of the best wins for me because number one, I completed the four majors in a row, got a pretty good bonus, but it was about beating Chris on clay in Paris.

I had done it other places on clay but never in Paris. Yeah, that was a hard out.

Q. Regarding the current WTA field, have you thought about Coco Gauff's relationship to Iga in terms of kind of butting heads against Iga and failing at this point in her career? And how do you think she can turn this into a positive and she heads down the road and becomes a more mature player?

MARTINA NAVRATILOVA: You said butting heads? Are they in a fight or are you just saying Iga can't beat her?

Q. I'm referring to Coco's 1-10 record and how --

MARTINA NAVRATILOVA: Yeah, 20 sets to 2, yeah. Well, I think Iga is such a solid player that she exploits your weaknesses. If you have a weakness, playing against Iga will show it. And so it is for Coco.

I've said it about Chris, it was hard to find an opening. It was really impossible to find an opening against Iga on clay. She moves so well. She's got the hard backhand that she hits pretty well and forces the action with that, and then she opens up the court with a forehand that runs you off the court or pushes you deep.

And she prepares so well. She can hit it either direction, so it's really impossible to read. And she can pick on Coco's forehand better than anybody else because she's

very accurate with it and she pushes her back.

Coco's forehand is pretty good against most people, but against Iga, it's too much of a weakness.

Q. If you were Coco's coach, what would you be telling her about ways to overcome this challenge?

MARTINA NAVRATILOVA: Well, you've got to improve the forehand somehow. You can get away with beating a lot of people with it, but it's just not as solid as it needs to be at the top of the game for her to really start dominating.

And she can dominate, but the forehand needs to get better. I would tweak the grip a little bit -- you don't have to tweak it too much. You can just do it a little bit at a time so that it still feels comfortable.

But she needs a bigger sweet spot, a bigger hitting zone on the forehand. It's a small hitting zone with such an extreme grip and it just limits you. I think on clay she should be okay. Hard courts, high bouncing hard courts she's okay, but low bounces it's really difficult to find an opening with it.

You don't want to keep harping on it, but -- and also make her serve into a bigger weapon, a lot more solid. She's got the height. She's got the physique for it, the strength and the technique, as well as the physique. I think she just needs to make that serve a little bit more of a weapon, get some free points.

Q. I want to ask you two questions. You mentioned a few minutes ago about Novak and his record based on what he's done at the majors, but when you look back, you, Chrissie, Jimmy all skipped so many majors. Five years in a row you didn't play the Australian, six years you didn't play Roland Garros. Chrissie says she has no regrets at skipping Roland Garros to play World Team Tennis for three years. Do you have any regrets when you look back at your record which we know is extraordinary?

MARTINA NAVRATILOVA: No, because we played what was important, and the French wasn't important back then. If it was like now you would obviously not be skipping it. It was just a different time. We were supporting the tour. I have no regrets. For us it was just a different measuring stick.

We played according to that measure stick. Now the measuring stick has changed, so we would be playing all of them now and playing fewer tournaments and really trying to peak for the majors.

But no regrets. I don't have any regrets, either.

Q. I'd be remiss if I didn't ask you about this latest development with the WTA and the PIF and their concluding together on the rankings and your thoughts on that.

MARTINA NAVRATILOVA: I have not seen that. I don't know. That's news to me. I don't know, but it seems the relationship is getting bigger. I knew that was a possibility.

Q. It was announced that the PIF is now the sponsor of the WTA rankings.

MARTINA NAVRATILOVA: I see. Yeah, I was flying yesterday and missed it, I guess.

Yeah, I knew they did it with the men already, so I just thought it was a matter of time. Not if, but when, and I guess the time is now. That's where we're heading, so just make the most of it, I guess.

You know my stance on Saudi Arabia. I think it's too soon, but the players have made their choice, so we have to go by that. I just wish everybody luck and hope that it's a good partnership and that it turns out the way they're hoping it turns out.

Q. I wanted to ask you about this recent spate of retirement announcements or probably going to retire, likely to retire this summer, various things we've heard from players, from Nadal to Andy Murray, Dominic Thiem, Alize Cornet, Danielle Collins. I just wanted to ask your thoughts on whether it's possible there's some kind of a common thread or reason for so many players making these announcements at this time of year.

MARTINA NAVRATILOVA: Well, no. With Murray and Nadal and Thiem -- with Murray and Nadal it's age and the body dictates. You hope that you can retire on your own terms.

But with Nadal, I think he got a lot more out of his body than we all predicted he would 20 years ago, because we thought he would burn out much sooner physically because of how physical his game was.

Andy had a bad hip, and he's given it everything he has, and now with that stupid ankle injury, he's probably not able to retire on his own terms. So I think everybody has got their own story.

Danielle has got her other issues that have nothing to do with tennis, and the arthritis.

Thiem tried, and he's just not the same player he was for whatever reason. Things just happen. Most of it -- they've had a great run. All of these people had a great run. They're not retiring because they were in a car accident or because the back gave out. So there is that.

But I think it's just a coincidence that all these great players are retiring at the same time.

For me, I wanted to finish at the end of the year because I always did the whole year, but for some it's a particular tournament. They want to just be done. I think Andy was aiming for Wimbledon. We'll see.

Is he scheduled to play? Does anybody know the update on his leg? Is he in the draw? I don't even know.

Q. I believe the latest is he is trying to play, maybe even playing doubles in Paris.

MARTINA NAVRATILOVA: Oh, I see. Well, at least he'll get to play on Centre Court a couple more times hopefully, so that's good.

Q. I wanted to ask you about the unusual thing this year where after the French Open, the circuit moves to grass briefly and then back to clay with the Olympics being at Roland Garros. I just want to ask you what sort of challenge you think it might or might not be or should or shouldn't be, players moving to the grass, back to the clay?

MARTINA NAVRATILOVA: It's difficult, and it's going to be hard physically and emotionally. They'll be coming to the US Open on one leg and with their arms trailing behind. It's going to be tough. That's a tough summer.

Great opportunity to win for some that never have won it. I know Novak is gunning for the Olympic gold, but it's hard to imagine that they'll all be fresh as a daisy come the US Open. So I'm just keeping my fingers crossed that people get through it.

In my time, when somebody returned to a tournament, you might have one retirement every three weeks in the whole tournament. Now you get three a day at an event. Literally I would ask -- if you saw a retirement on the draw board, you would say, what happened? Is she in the hospital? Now it's just much too common.

I know the game is more physical, and the Olympics don't make it easier, that's for sure. It's a great opportunity, but at the same time, it really beats you up. I just hope everybody comes out on the other side.

Q. How would you describe what might be difficult in terms of the actual surface adaptation and taking one's game from clay to grass and back to clay?

MARTINA NAVRATILOVA: Yeah, I think it's easy because it comes right back. You literally got off the clay, you got used to the grass, now you're on clay again. I think it's easier coming clay, grass, clay, than clay, grass, hard court.

Because number one, the clay is easier on your body and you were just playing on it; whereas hard courts would have been in March.

So in a way it's easier, but then the hard courts will come I guess a month later.

When it comes that quickly you adapt quicker, also. I know when I was practicing on clay maybe three times a week and twice a week we were on wood, which was lightning fast. So maybe Monday, Tuesday I hit on clay; then Wednesday I hit on wood; then Thursday I am back on clay and then Friday on wood.

You adapt because you're so used to it. I think this adaptation is not going to be as difficult as we think it is, at least not playing-wise. It's just going to be hard mentally and physically with the volume of emotional stress and physical stress in such a short period of time.

You basically have four majors in like two months or three months. Not much breathing space there.

Q. Just as we've seen on the men's side today with Rafa's French Open dominance now coming to an end, how do you feel Iga's run on the women's side going for her fourth RG title compares, or is it not yet comparable?

MARTINA NAVRATILOVA: It's not comparable because Rafa did 14 altogether, like 14 out of 16 or something ridiculous. So Iga has got a long way to go.

But she might catch up to Chris the way she's going. She's still really young. She got started earlier than either Rafa or Chris winning at the French. We'll see what happens.

But right now she looks pretty unbeatable. She is beatable, but it's going to take a monumental effort. Maybe not as hard as Rafa has been, but pretty close to it right now. And she's pretty confident. It's amazing. She owns the court now when she's on it.

Q. Looking at the women's draw, is there any dark

horse you believe will go farther than expected?

MARTINA NAVRATILOVA: Oh, gosh, I don't know. That's a hard one. I think Danielle Collins got a shot at it, but I've not seen the draw. I have not seen the draw. I haven't had a chance to look at it. Again, I've been flying, and I'm just getting to the airport right now in Dallas Fort Worth.

So I can't comment on the draw, so I don't know who Danielle has, but she would be the dark -- sounds like expected dark horse because she's played such great tennis and seems fearless with her retirement announcement.

She's playing better than ever before. She would be my pick for maybe a sneaky semifinal or a final, or who knows.

I think she's one to really watch out for, and I know I wouldn't want her in my draw because she's seeded lower so you may meet her in the round of 16 as the top player. So I would not be thrilled to see her on the other side the way she's been feeling it.

Q. What are you most excited for over the next two weeks in terms of the clay season buildup that we've seen this year?

MARTINA NAVRATILOVA: What I'm most excited about the clay buildup this year?

Q. As we've seen the players competing the past few months on the clay season, now getting to RG, with all the injuries, what are you most excited to see --

MARTINA NAVRATILOVA: The fact that they're not injured. The guys are much more questionable than the women right now. It's still -- it's Iga against the field, but I think there is a lot more possibilities of players that could win the whole thing if Iga doesn't win versus the men's side.

And just happy that they're healthy. Just want to see some really great tennis.

Q. Curious, since you and Chrissie came out against doing business with Saudi Arabia, has anyone at WTA tried to explain their side, their perspective? What are their arguments?

MARTINA NAVRATILOVA: No. I mean, they have explained it, and they had an Arab woman speaking on behalf of Saudi Arabia, why the women should go there. But I still felt that we didn't hear enough about the other side.

Look, women are still being jailed for just speaking their mind or not wearing a veil properly.

Like I said, they still have a long way to go. Yes, things have gotten better apparently in some ways, but they still have a long way to go. And male surrogacy has been codified into law just a couple of years ago. It's actually made it worse.

As women, we just don't have the same rights as men. It's that simple. We do not have the same rights in Saudi, whether you're a Saudi woman or a tourist. You don't have the same rights as males. I just find it scary, actually.

And as a gay woman, right? Enough said.

Q. You talked a little bit about it, but if you want to elaborate a little more on Rafa Nadal's legacy as it relates to Roland Garros.

MARTINA NAVRATILOVA: Oh, my God. I mean, he's already got a statue and he's still playing, which is pretty amazing. Pretty cool.

But my statue at Wimbledon -- speaking of statues, Chrissie needs to have one in Paris and I need to have one in London, right? Anyhow, just kidding. Well, not really.

Rafa, what can you say? You just hope that he could go out on his own terms playing his best tennis. Doesn't look like it right now, but it's three out of five, so that might give him some breathing room.

But no matter what happens this year, nobody will do what he's done. That will not -- I wish I could come back like 500 years from now and see that Rafa still has that record. That's not going to be broken ever, no matter what happens. He doesn't have to play at all, but he wants to and I wish him the best, but his legacy is unmatched for that one particular tournament.

I have a parting word on T2. How amazing. I didn't know it's free and that we were to be showing so much tennis on that during the French Open. I think it's a phenomenal thing, so I'm looking forward to that.

What Ken Solomon has done with Tennis Channel is just ridiculous. Well done.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you so much for joining. Looking forward to seeing you in a few days --

Q. You spoke about the 1984 Roland Garros final, and I wonder if you could take me back to tell me why that was so significant for you and if you could really just

relate what it meant to you to have that sort of run, to be so dominant like really no other woman had been since Margaret Court and no other woman has been since, six major titles from there.

MARTINA NAVRATILOVA: Yeah, I made history for myself and for tennis because the four in a row, whether it's calendar year or not, has not been done that many times. You just know that you're not going to have that many chances if ever again. That brings more pressure into it.

I guess the pressure I felt there was very akin to what Olympic athletes feel because they only have a chance every four years. That's where just everything was magnified, and on top of that, I had to beat Chris on her best surface.

Then there was the money involved, which was a nice bonus, amazing bonus.

But it was not about the money for me. It was about winning the four in a row. I just was happy that I overcame the pressure and played my best tennis against the best player that the clay has ever seen on the women's side.

Q. There was a bonus for winning the fourth consecutive one?

MARTINA NAVRATILOVA: Yeah, there was a million dollar bonus. The ITF started it so that there would be like a running possibility of a Grand Slam rather than just the calendar one. Yeah, I got a million dollars to show that I won the Grand Slam.

I did not win it in the right order because the Australian Open used to be at the end of the year rather than at the beginning of the year, so the calendar messed me up on the calendar year.

If it had been in a normal calendar situation, I would have won it. But that's how it goes. But it was a nice check that I got.

Q. How invincible did you feel at that stage of your career --

MARTINA NAVRATILOVA: Very. I made bigger headlines when I lost a match than when I won Wimbledon or the US Open. It was a pretty cool feeling because you almost feel like you just forget how to lose in a way. There were some matches that I should have lost, but you just kind of played by memory, and you don't believe that you can lose and because of that you don't.

And then the other player knows they have to play something special, and most of them couldn't do it. It was a pretty cool feeling. It was fun.

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