

# Rolex Paris Masters

Sunday, 30 October 2022

Paris, France

## Cedric Pioline

Press Conference



CEDRIC PIOLINE: Hello. Welcome to everyone. It's the 37th edition of our event, so welcome to everyone. I'm at your disposal to answer any question you might have. We start in English?

Questions in French.

**Q. Cedric, the last tournament you had as a co-director was in 2009?**

CEDRIC PIOLINE: Yes, 2008, 2009, more or less.

**Q. Do you feel that the position you're holding this year is very different of the one that you had at the time, or was it similar?**

CEDRIC PIOLINE: It's very different. During that period, I was younger, first of all. I did not have the same position, as well. This time I'm the director of the tournament. I have this position, which I did not have at the time. However, the way I went through for five, six years was full of events and very beneficial for me to be able to have the time to mature and to hold that position this year.

This event has changed, as well, and it has gained momentum in many aspects. Even though it's in the same venue, it has evolved since then.

**Q. Last time that you held a similar position, there were three French seeded players. This year there is none, without wildcard. What is your opinion of the male French tennis today?**

CEDRIC PIOLINE: Of course we can't be satisfied with that situation. We are a great nation of tennis in France. I don't know how far back we have to go, maybe 40 years, when we had players ranked among the top 20 or the top 10. We have a Masters 1000, we have a Grand Slam, and we have 250s. We are fully involved in the training of tennis players, so we can't be satisfied with the current situation. As tournament director, I have to say that I'm pretty much sad about the situation.

Every nation needs strivers, and the better ranked, the

better it is. I'm quite sad, and I think that the fans are sad, as well.

When we get into this arena to watch the tournament, we want to see French players, as well. I have to say that I'm just sad about the situation, this current situation in terms of participation.

**Q. To follow up on this, it is a pity not to have a lot of French players, but are we reaching solutions? Is it a normal cycle? You have been a player, so you know how much it costs to be at that level. Are there reasons that can repeat themselves that make it so that today we can't make it anymore?**

CEDRIC PIOLINE: I have no answer to give you on this subject. I'm the director of a tournament. I just see things as they are. We would all like to have more French players participating, but if I were to have a more global outlook, I would say that the Four Musketeers are reaching the end of their careers.

That was the case during Roland Garros with Jo. That will be the case with Gilles Simon this time. That will be the case also for Richard Gasquet, and Gael, as well, because it's more difficult for him. Physically speaking it started out well and then he couldn't follow up.

So what will happen behind this, well, Humbert was well ranked, he went down again, he's back on again. He's among the first 100 again.

Pouille, what a pity he's not here. He's had a lot of injuries. He's had an elbow surgery. We have a lot of young players. Van Assche, well, he's still young, even though he's ranked around 200. Arthur Fils, he's playing right now. He's playing Fognini, and they have one set all.

We know that the path ahead of us is difficult. It's complicated. The level we have in junior is far from what we have in the normal tour.

I hope that we will have among them the future best French players that will integrate RPM directly, the main draw directly, and we hope not to have that type of

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discussion again.

I understand it fully, though. It's totally in line with the current situation.

**Q. Was it difficult to have French players this year?**

CEDRIC PIOLINE: Well, difficult. Let's say allocating wild cards is always complex because often we have players that are close in ranking. We need to make decisions.

Some were natural to give away, and so we had to make some decisions that were tough. I'd like to think that my choice, that our choices were good, that they were not actually challenged by the players that were concerned.

Even though I'm not the only one making decision, I tried to make sure that it would be fair and equitable.

But then, our outlook as directors and the opinion of the players may not be in line sometimes. Sometimes there might be some glitches.

It was not the time this time. It was a bit hard, but it was not a riddle, a difficult riddle that was insolvable, as well.

**Q. One of the wild cards went to Gilles Simon. You played doubles. It was the last match for you here. How was it to say good-bye in this arena? You had had a wonderful tournament, but how do you feel and what is your opinion? What's your take on Gilles Simon's departure?**

CEDRIC PIOLINE: Well, first of all, this is very personal. When I played, can't remember the name of the tournament at the time. It has changed. The Paris Open, that was one of the names that was used at the time. I didn't know that I would make this decision.

It came up throughout the week. We had a Davis final behind that, and it was a bit the carrot that held me up, that was my vital energy.

Then I understood that I would not be concerned. I was ranked 120 in singles. I thought, well, to come back, I was 32, 33 years old. I thought, okay, that's the end of me.

I was full of emotion, of course. I was happy to have this on French arena with a French public. It was a doubles, but it was still a final match. There were French people in front of me. My partner was Guga Kuerten, who was a famous player. So there was a lot of elements that made it so that it was an important good-bye match.

That's not what is important today. Today what is

important is Gilles. I think it's wonderful for him to be able to choose the time and venue of his last match where he will announce officially that he will retire.

Even if we know, I would like to remind you that that's actually owned by the French Tennis Federation. The Federation, just like the direction of the tournament are in agreement on the fact that honoring our great champions is important. He's been in the tour for 15 years. I can't remember when he went pro for the first year, but it's important for him to give him a good opportunity.

The draw made it so that he will actually play a very famous player if he wins all the best, but if he loses, then it will be wonderful, as well.

There will be a ceremony. There will be something that will pay tribute to his career. He will take the floor. I guess there will be a lot of his relatives and close ones that will be in attendance.

So it's a good thing. It's a good thing that it happens in Paris. It was his wish. We will fulfill his desire without any problem.

**Q. We were talking about the French players leaving but also the big four, we lost Roger Federer, and the others are also growing old now. We are talking about a change of generation. Maybe we won't have Djokovic and others in the main draw. Will it be the same thing? Will there be less dependence or is it a relief when you know that they are actually on the plane to come here?**

CEDRIC PIOLINE: That's a great question, because there are lots of elements around that situation. The first thing, of course, we are talking about the champions among the champions, right. We don't need to talk about their past achievements. Everybody knows them. When they confirmed that they will come, that they will play, it gives an added value to the tournament. There is no doubt about this.

As to the last part of your question, what is very interesting is that since July, we have sold a lot of tickets. Up to this morning, because I had the figures this close to me, we sold 154,000 tickets.

That's 2,000 more than in 2019. That was a record year for the tournament. That means that when we compare the figures, we actually realized that people have not waited to know who would participate.

Even if we know it, because we have known for many weeks, that the French players were in difficulty and it was

not an obstacle. That means that people are really willing to come and attend. It means that it is a popular event. And that this new generation fulfills its role.

We have seen also the great career bump of Carlos Alcaraz. We can see that he will be challenged. We can also draw a list of all the others, you have seen Auger-Aliassime, even if he's a bit further in the ranking. Rune as well, who is in the finals in Basel, if I'm not mistaken.

Shapovalov, as well. Ruud maybe has less media coverage, but he's having a wonderful career, as well. And as always, we have a few seeds. We are not allocating them, but the points that we give will allow the last players to attend Nitto ATP Finals.

And something that has not happened also, something that does not concern Djokovic, because we know what happened, but for four players, we can actually allocate points to allow someone to be ranked No. 1, and that is wonderful.

**Q. I would like to follow up on the question, because you did not really answer it. When will Gilles play concretely? We want to know, will it be tomorrow, tomorrow night? You have certainly set your schedule.**

CEDRIC PIOLINE: Well, right before I came here, I was actually talking with the umpire. We are working on it. It's highly unlikely he will play tomorrow but it's not set in stone yet. We are waiting on it.

I haven't really answered your question (smiling).

**Q. A follow-up question. What does it mean to have the quallies on the central court this year? What is the objective? Because there is not a lot of audience. Then we have three matches that are played in the ancillary courts. Why do we have the quallies on the central court?**

CEDRIC PIOLINE: Well, there are several reasons. First, we want to give access to some players to the central court. Bearing in mind the attendance of the public during the quallies, 14, 15,000 people when we normally have hundreds of thousands.

It's true that it feels empty, but also, one of the objectives, it's a matter of respect for the players. It's to have twice six matches on the Court 1 and Court 2. With this, we could actually end up late. And that's not ideal.

When we have French players playing on the Court 1 and

Court 2 is rather for this reason actually: It's to make sure that everyone has some comfort. It allows them to play in the best conditions, as you said.

Well, you know, central court, always the same thing. When you have 14,000 arena and you have only 2,000, well, it's a matter of proportions.

This is why we do that.

**Q. I would like to follow up on the ticket sales. For the under 18 they are actually very low prices. Is that an answer that was found because tennis fans tend to be older than before, and it seems that you have a positioning whereby you're very turned towards entertainment and you want to attract young fans?**

CEDRIC PIOLINE: No, not really. Since I have been here, I have read a lot of documents, of studies on the subject, and we know that the fan profile is actually young; 37 years old, generally males. So the public experience is very important, and we need to show experience. This is why we have actually fleshed out this experience this year.

But as for prices, this price policy is accessible in terms of basic price. We have talked about the quallies but also for the main draw it's 10 Euros, so it's quite accessible to a lot of people. I take, for instance, I don't know what it's worth, but if you go to the bakery, and you take the package with the sandwich and the drink, it's 10 Euros. Well, for the same price, you can actually enjoy a wonderful match with the best worldwide players.

So what we want is to have tennis for all basically. That's one of the slogans. That's one of the motives of the French Tennis Federation. It needs to be accessible to everyone.

We want to make sure that all the social groups can attend. Even those that have less money. We want to make sure that we can cover everyone.

**Q. To go back to the presence of Nadal and Djokovic, they have not met since Roland Garros. I don't know, if I'm not mistaken, the last time they met was in 2009 and Djokovic won. But they will actually play the same tournament. We don't know if they will play one another. On the one hand, we have Djokovic who usually has the upper hand. As for Nadal, usually he doesn't win. What do you think about this?**

CEDRIC PIOLINE: Well, first of all, it's a wonderful thing that they are both in attendance. On the one hand, we have Djokovic. It's quite paradoxical, but without getting into the details, with everything that happened during this

season, he's now in a position where he needs to grasp points.

He's automatically qualified, but he needed to end up among the first, to be ranked in the top 20, and because he won some tournaments he managed to qualify automatically for Rolex Paris Masters. But for a player like him, it is important for him to end up in the first eight players, and there is also this issue around Australia.

But it's important for him. It makes a huge difference for him to end up amidst the top 8. He's been six times champion of this tournament. He's the record man, actually. He's a top player, very popular. So we are happy. We are delighted to have him, because he's a strong player.

As for Rafa, we know that it's always a difficult period of the season for him. He's often in difficulty. We have seen it in the US Open. It was in the round of 16 that he actually lost, if I'm not mistaken. He's trying to be top one.

He's never hoisted the trophy here. Maybe it could be a first time for him. Why not?

We're accustomed to being surprised by his achievements. Like Roland Garros, we would think that he will not win, and he finds a great energy at the last moment.

So beyond whatever opinion I could have as a director, what is important for me is to have a great show for the fans. This is wonderful.

Will it last one year, two years or more, to have this mix of the prevailing generation with the two remaining players, Djoko and Rafa, and this new coming generation, there are actually two new generations actually. We have Medvedev, Tsitsipas, Zverev, even if unfortunately he's not here, but they are about 24, 25, 26 years old.

And we have the next next gen, the 20-year-olds, so we have three generations. Why not Thiem? He's a bit older but he could make a comeback, as well. We have a lot of possibilities. We have a huge mix. Each player has his own style. They try to push their way out, their way up.

There is Medvedev, Thiem, as I said, Alcaraz, who have won Grand Slams, and then we have the young ones. There is a great emulation, actually. What happened between Federer started to prevail. He managed to pull everyone up, and this is what's happening as well now.

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