

US OPEN

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Jessica Pegula

Press Conference



JESSICA PEGULA: Hi, everyone.

THE MODERATOR: Welcome, Jess. Your thoughts on this year's tournament?

JESSICA PEGULA: Yeah, definitely really excited to be here. Yeah, I don't know what else to say. It's kind of the same every time.

Really fun to be here, though, at the US Open, being an American. I feel like there's been a lot of hype around American tennis, so it's really exciting.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. I imagine this has been a pretty busy week for you, not as familiar as it might have been. Any cool stuff you've got to do?

JESSICA PEGULA: It's been super busy. I've done a lot. I played the exhibition Wednesday night. That was really fun. Got to walk out with Ace. Got to raise money for Elina's foundation as well. That's always fun to be a part of. A lot of fans show up, you get to feel the atmosphere before the tournament really starts.

I did some stuff, charity stuff, with the WTA charities, with the Come Play event in Harlem. That was really nice.

Yeah, then now I'm here. I think I did something yesterday. I don't know. It's kind of all blurring together the last few days. But it's been busy, yes.

Q. Super surreal to be coming to a slam in this position?

JESSICA PEGULA: I feel like last year I was also in a similar position. I mean, that's kind of what I felt. This year feels a little bit busier. At the same time I feel like there's a lot of hype around a lot of players. It's not just me. I feel in general like it's American tennis. Just a lot of people.

Seems like, yeah, very energetic this year.

Q. You mentioned a lot of hype. Coco Gauff, you're very close to. How would you describe what you've seen from her this summer and her general development?

JESSICA PEGULA: No, Coco has been -- I think definitely that Wimbledon loss seemed to really drive her to want to improve and get better. I think she came out of that really hungry, which is great to see from somebody that already has a lot of success at such a young age. Already has a long journey ahead of her. To see her bounce back from that was really promising.

Obviously going to D.C., I played her in Montreal. I think she said it kind of helped her, she thinks, beat Iga because I beat her, then I beat Iga. That's how it works sometimes on tour, when you see your friends or your coworkers, whatever you want to call them, having success, you've maybe beaten them, whatever it is, it can give you a lot of confidence going into another week where you're in that situation.

I'm glad that it seemed like she got confidence from that week, as well, and was able to take it into Cincinnati. I think she's really confident. When any player is confident, that's when they're toughest to beat.

I know she loves playing with a crowd. Yeah, I think she's definitely a favorite for this. I think there's a lot of favorites, but yeah, especially her, her and the crowd, coming off a lot of momentum, it's big.

Yeah, it's been really nice to see. I'm glad she's been improving and learning. She's the future of the sport, so... It's nice to see.

Q. As a member of the players council, I wanted to ask you about Saudi Arabia, the prospect of the WTA entering into some kind of arrangement with them. There's talk of holding the WTA Finals there this year. How do you feel about that? How would you feel about playing there, given the human rights groups talk about as a repressive state for women?

JESSICA PEGULA: Well, yeah, I mean, first of all, yeah, that's a rumor. I don't know if it's going to happen or not. I know that's been up in the air.



I think that if you look at a pros and cons list, we'd obviously have to see there be a lot of pros outweighing the cons to feel comfortable going there, whether that's seeing them as a group maybe have to donate money to women's sports or women's rights in Saudi Arabia, to see some sort of change or action going towards helping those causes in their country. I think that would be something really important that, if we did end up going there, we would want to see.

At the same time, yeah, there's obviously a lot of hot topics on that and issues, but at the same time if we can go there and create change, that's also a great thing.

I think it's just going to have to be the right arrangement and we're going to have to know if we go there, okay, well, we want to be making a change, and you need to help us do that.

If that was the case, I think unfortunately a lot of places don't pay women a lot of money, and it's unfortunate that a lot of women's sports, like we don't have the luxury to say no to some things.

Again, I think if the money was right and the arrangement was something that we could get behind where we could go and create change, then I would be okay playing there.

But, yeah, I mean, we'll see. Those are all factors that it depends on for me. We'll just have to see how it works out.

Q. We have Caroline Wozniacki coming back. What do you think seeing her back here? Quite a few women that have come back from time off, babies, family, and had success. Is there a reason why tennis allows you to do that? How long would you be out and come back and still play well?

JESSICA PEGULA: I don't know if I'm going to be having a child and coming back. I'll just say that (smiling). It's a lot of work. I don't know how they do it.

But, yeah, I mean, to see that being a possibility now for women I think is great. I mean, I'm not a mother, but I'm sure it's such a cool experience for them to come back and have their children watch them play, to be able to see what they've done their whole career, all the stuff they've built.

I think it's been really nice to see women come back. I'm sure it's not easy for them. At the same time, like Caro said, she said, If I come back, I'm going to really go for this.

It's not going to be some sort of like let's see what happens. That was one of the reasons she came back, because she wanted to, had the drive to do it. It's been

really cool.

With such a great player in our sport for so long, she's had a lot of success here as well at the US Open. It's interesting to see her back. I haven't gotten to practice with her yet. She practiced on Ashe after me. It's nice, I think having her back and feeling her presence a little bit. She's always super nice, really happy.

Yeah, a little bit nostalgic I guess her coming back. I feel like her and Svitolina were supposed to play in Cincinnati. It felt like it was like six, something years ago or so.

It was kind of cool seeing different generations being able to still compete. I think that's what makes the women's game so great right now, and tennis in general, that you're seeing girls from 17 to girls that are retiring, having kids, then coming back. I think that's a really cool element that other sports don't really get. It creates a lot of layers and stories.

It's definitely exciting to see her back.

Q. Is it safe to say with the wins you picked up in Montreal, having that title, that this is as confident as you've ever been going into the Open? How does that change preparation, focus, goals, ambition for the tournament?

JESSICA PEGULA: I don't know. I don't feel like any more confident than other times, to be honest. Again, tennis is so week to week. I won Montreal, then I got bageled and lost in Cincinnati. You're kind of like back to square one, here we go again, what did I do wrong, what do I need to fix, what do I need to work on.

I don't necessarily feel the most confident. Not least confident, but I just feel kind of typical, like I usually do. I go into it looking at it as a new week, new challenges, new things to try to improve on, new ways to try to problem solve. That's always how it's been for me.

I feel like I just still have that same type of mindset. At the same time I think that helps me because it keeps me kind of level, levelheaded. That can be hard around a slam when there's a lot of excitement. Hopefully I can use that to my advantage.

Q. Past six quarterfinals in your past eight majors, what are doing to get past that and reach the semis of a final? How are you feeling as you're trying to get as deep as you can in your home slam?

JESSICA PEGULA: Yeah, I just need to win a quarterfinal (smiling). That would help me get past the quarterfinal

stage, to a semifinal. I got pretty close at Wimbledon. I don't know what else to say. I'm always going to try to win every single match, no matter what round it is.

But, yeah, I think my focus coming in here, again, sound cliché, it's one match at a time. That's always kind of how I've had to take it. That's what I think works for me. That's what I think is the way to play with not as much pressure, is just take it one match at a time and try to problem solve.

The depth is too good now. If you try to get ahead of yourself, you can really get caught up. Taking it one match at a time tends to work for me. Doesn't mean it's always going to work. I think that's the best way to look at it, at least for me as a player and my perspective. Like I said, it's a long two weeks. Every day you're going to feel different.

There's probably going to be challenges mentally, physically in those two weeks, for sure, and you're not going to feel perfect. Yeah, I'm just kind of keeping an open mind and trying to problem solve day by day.

Q. You were at the Bills' practice earlier this week. Sean asked you to speak to the team. What is it about pro athletes that you're able to convey messages and speak a language to each other that the rest of us don't get?

JESSICA PEGULA: Yeah, I don't know. I think it's just, like, I mean, not every athlete is the same, but I think at a certain level you're trying to do something great, and it's really hard.

I think I've always got caught up with, like, trying to be the best player, but then also person, and also whatever it is, sister, brother, husband, wife, whatever, as you can be. It's so hard, especially in tennis because you're dedicating, like, you have to be so selfish and dedicate so much time. You get guilty. Then you still want to win, you're still trying to get better. You're kind of driving yourself literally insane with, like, how do I improve, how do I get to the next level.

I think we can all relate to that in the fact that every day, even though you guys see like, Oh, you're making a lot of money, you're playing on this big stage, all this stuff, it's still the little things, like just getting up, going to the gym, working out. I joke to my trainer all the time, I do a 30-minute warm-up before every practice. I've done 22 warm-ups, like I counted, the last two weeks every single day. You're going through it like, Okay, it's like "Groundhog Day," over and over. Those are the moments that are so hard.

I think the combination of that, I think athletes all get that.

That's the kind of battle we're always battling with ourselves. I think playing on the big stage and competing and winning is the reward, but there's so much effort that goes in behind. It's such a mental grind that we can't take off.

Yeah, we just kind of drive ourselves crazy a little bit, but you also kind of are addicted to that feeling. It's a weird space to be in. I think usually people, athletes at that high level, can always relate to that.

Q. What has been the most entertaining story that stands out with your coach Dave and the personality he is?

JESSICA PEGULA: There's a lot of entertaining stories. I will not share some of them because they're probably not appropriate (smiling).

He always keeps me entertained. I don't know if there's one that stands out. I would just say his general day-to-day commentary throughout my team, to me, just always keeps the mood very light and very funny.

I think, as I was saying before, when it feels like Groundhog Day, I think sometimes you need someone that kind of lightens the mood, gets you through the day, finds humor in simple, basic things. He's very good at that, kind of making it entertaining even though it's a very repetitive day of doing 25 warm-ups in two weeks, he'll find a way to make it funny. I think that's what he's really good at. It keeps things light. You definitely need that when you're on the road.

Q. Your thoughts on marking 50 years of pay equity here at the US Open, how far you think that movement has come, how far it has yet to go, and also whether you individually feel pressure or responsibility as a leader in this generation of players to continue that advocacy work?

JESSICA PEGULA: Yeah, well, first of all, 50 years is an amazing achievement for us, especially just what we're fighting for. We have equal pay at the slams, but it's not everywhere. I think that's a little bit of a misconception that maybe the more casual fan didn't realize. That's something that hopefully we can get to.

I mean, we're always working towards it. We're working towards getting women's sports to get paid more, getting paid what they should be. Especially tennis, I feel like we're a leading example almost because we're the highest-paid female sport, which is a big deal. For us, we already think there's so much more that needs to be done, and we're at the top.

I think we do feel, as I think an organization, probably some pressure to kind of lead the way. And we saw what happened with the women's soccer, which I think was inspiring for us to see them fighting for that.

Yeah, just doing what we think is right. I mean, I don't feel pressure myself, but I feel somewhat of a responsibility. I think as you get older, you start realizing that the next generation is what matters, and you start feeling less important.

I think when you're younger, you're just playing and you don't really care. Oh, this is fun, this is my dream, all this stuff. Then you start realizing how important it is to make an impact on your sport and leave with some sort of legacy.

I think that's what really inspires younger players to come up and carry your sport and hopefully drive that sport to become even better. That's really important. That's something that I've definitely learned more as I've gotten older.

I wouldn't say it's a pressure, it's more of a responsibility and something I want to give back to a sport that's already given me so much. It's a very exciting time in women's tennis. I think that we are improving and we're moving forward. Hopefully we keep seeing that.

Yeah, keep pushing for what we believe in.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

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