

# US OPEN

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New York, New York, USA

## Tommy Paul

### Press Conference

T. PAUL/A. Davidovich Fokina

6-1, 6-0, 3-6, 6-3

**THE MODERATOR:** Four sets. Two hours and 19 minutes. Can you talk about the fast start that you had? That got you out of the gate quick with those two first sets.

**TOMMY PAUL:** Yeah. You know, to start the match, I was pretty nervous. This is my first time on Ashe. You could probably see it a little bit in the beginning of the first service game.

Then it was, like, a pretty big hold there. So it felt nice to get out of that game and everything started rolling.

I think he was feeling the nerves a little bit. I think it was his first time on Ashe also. It's definitely not a normal place to play tennis. It's really cool. Walking out there, it wasn't even like a packed stadium or anything when we first started, but you definitely feel it. I mean, I started getting things rolling, and I don't know, everything was going really well. It was going really fast.

Then after the second, you kind of knew that he was going to come back out and play some really good tennis, pick up his level, and he did. Gave him a couple looks there in the third and he took it. I had to stick with him there in the fourth and played a pretty good set.

**THE MODERATOR:** Questions.

**Q. I hate to ask you to look ahead past the US Open, but I have to. You're playing Laver Cup for the first time. Could you talk about what you think that will be like, what you've heard. Is this a generational shift now that we do not have, you know, Roger, Rafa, Novak, and Andy playing?**

**TOMMY PAUL:** Yeah. Well, so I went last year. I didn't play. So I got a pretty good Laver Cup experience. I didn't play one match and we won. That was pretty cool (smiling).



But it will be cool to really contribute to the team this year and play. I don't think I would go back if I was just riding the bench again. It wasn't the most fun for me, honestly. I was sitting there wanting to play and watching just a ton of tennis.

It was a good experience, and I'm really looking forward to playing that. I mean, it's cool playing team events in a sport that you really don't have too many team events.

So I mean, it's cool to play with those guys. I mean, especially, so many of them are American this year, which is awesome.

But, yeah, I mean, I'm looking forward to it.

**Q. And that generational shift now that those four guys are all gone.**

**TOMMY PAUL:** Yeah, I mean, it's definitely a big loss for tennis in general, not just Laver Cup. I don't know. I mean, obviously gives us a pretty good opportunity, so I think we're all looking forward to it.

**Q. You talked about kind of going out on Ashe for the first time. Wonder if you had a reaction when you found out you would be on Ashe when you learned, and why you kind of feel that atmosphere? Is it just how big it is and the size, looking around at all those seats?**

**TOMMY PAUL:** Yeah. Well, I thought I was going to be later in the afternoon on, like, Armstrong. So when I got first up on Ashe I was kind of, like, Really, they're putting me on Ashe? I knew there was a pretty strong schedule of people. Novak is in my half, Fritz, 'Foe. And we all know 'Foe likes prime time. Prime time tennis on Ashe.

I was kind of surprised that they put me. I wasn't at all mad about it. I was pretty excited, so it's an honor to play on that court. Hopefully I'll be back many more times.

**Q. When you look at videos of yourself from last year, two years ago, or videos of yourself now, what do you see now that's different in you as a player that you didn't used to see?**

**TOMMY PAUL:** Damn, that's a good question. I don't



know. I honestly couldn't give you an answer.

I mean, obviously I'm playing a lot better players right now than I probably was three years ago, and playing on bigger courts. Probably more excited to play right now than four years ago, for example.

**Q. Like you said on the court after the match, what a strange match that was. You raced through the first two sets and then looked like, was it your backhand that fell off in the third set? He obviously raised his level but what sort of dropped or you were not doing as well there in the third set, you think?**

**TOMMY PAUL:** Well, this is going to sound funny. We have, like, a thing between most of the Americans where we think when people win a set 6-0 it's, like, a curse that you always lose the next set. To be honest, like, I was thinking about it there in the third. (Laughter.)

I was looking up at my team, I was, like, Oh, God, like I'm going to win this set 6-0. I was serving 5-0. I was like, Oh, no. Yeah. But I was thinking about that, and he obviously picked up his level a ton.

Yeah, I mean, I think he earned the third set from me. I didn't, like, gift it to him by any means. And then I knew the fourth set was going to be a battle. I just tried to, like, reset it and get back into the groove of things.

**Q. Last year, do you remember if you had any thoughts, I guess, seeing Frances go on that run? You guys have kind of come up together and part of this group of American men, about the same age, all of you kind of moving up now together. Was there any thought, well, you know, I have played him, I have practiced with him, I know if he can do it, I can do it, kind of thing?**

**TOMMY PAUL:** Yeah. I mean, I think all the Americans kind of feel that way. I remember after losing last year, I had never won a match at the Open before last year, so I won two five-set matches that I was, like, proud of. Then I lost the match to Casper. I thought the match, like, was overall super high quality until the last set. Then I was pretty bummed, but normally when I'm done with tournaments I don't watch any more.

But, like, 'Foe is pretty much my favorite player to turn on and watch so I couldn't not tune in and watch it. It was super exciting to watch 'Foe play here last year. It was awesome. Going into every similar match that he played, I was, like, 'Foe's gonna win this match, 'Foe's gonna win this match.

It not only brings confidence to him but also to us, because we all know that we can play at that level, too.

**Q. Is it silly to think that that helped you in Australia at the next Grand Slam tournament when you had your breakthrough to that round?**

**TOMMY PAUL:** I don't really know. I think maybe a little bit, but, like, when I'm in Australia I'm not thinking, like, 'Foe made semis, I can make semis.

It's just maybe it's there in the back of your mind, but I'm not thinking about it now.

**Q. How would you describe for people who don't really have an understanding of the majors being the culmination of a lot of effort, not just a couple of matches in a row, the grind from a mental and physical standpoint that it is to advance at the majors?**

**TOMMY PAUL:** Yeah, it's like a battle with your body every day. If we didn't have the days in between our matches, I mean, the level would drop a ton just because our bodies, like, we need the time to recover. Especially when we play five-set matches, it's tough on the body.

Luckily I've been playing four- and five-set matches that aren't much over two hours, which is pretty nice. But, yeah, when you play four hours, it's brutal on the body. I don't know too many sports that go that long. I don't know off the top of my head right now any.

Like, your days off are not days off. Like, you're grinding all day to get your body back to where you can compete again.

**Q. This is twofold. I know you said you're not actively thinking about whatever, something that 'Foe did or some win that he had while you were out there because you're concentrating on the job at hand. Is there a certain sense amongst the American guys that are of a certain age that you guys all came up together where one win might, I don't know, either give you an impetus to follow that or to top that or trump that, certain competition amongst yourselves?**

**TOMMY PAUL:** Absolutely. I think there is very healthy competition amongst all of us.

I mean, in no way would I say jealousy between us, but, like, we push each other with results or in practice. Like, we'll practice with each other a ton and we'll push each other through practice.

I mean, 'Foe is down in Florida a bunch in preseason, and



we get after it. It's like inspiring to see people that we practice with every day, people that we feel like we all know that we can beat each other. And then when one of us does super well in a tournament it's inspiring to us to go do it ourselves.

I would say, yeah, we all push each other with results.

**Q. As a Jersey guy, obviously south Jersey, I mean, as a Jersey guy, do you remember as a kid the first time that you had an opportunity to come here? Not playing, but did you ever get opportunities to come here? Do you remember when the first one was?**

**TOMMY PAUL:** Yeah, it's kind of funny. I have a couple stories of when I came here. We always came to the qualifying rounds. I grew up in North Carolina, so we would always drive up from North Carolina to qualifying rounds because it was free. Every year we always had something terrible happen. Like one year my sister got like bit by a poisonous spider and got sliced open, went to the emergency room here.

Then the next year my mom, somebody, like, saw or somebody dislocated their shoulder or something while playing and my mom is bad with pain. She passed out and hit her head. We went to the same place in Ashe. We were like, this is like so cool. We're inside Arthur Ashe Stadium. But we went to the same doctor. They remembered us from the year before. They were like, You guys can't stay out of here. (Laughter.)

Yeah, we never really made it to the main draw but we would always watch the qualifying. During qualifying, most of the pros are here practicing, or most of the main-draw pros are here practicing so we got to see them. That was kind of my only experience coming here.

**Q. I'm curious about your racquet spin and how you got to do it and if it keeps you calm.**

**TOMMY PAUL:** Yeah, it's basically a big fidget spinner. I don't know if it's to keep my calm or not, but I don't know, I don't really think about it. I'm just kind of like spinning the racquet. Everyone is like, Oh, are you doing it for any purpose? Really no purpose at all. I'm kind of just back there spinning my racquet around.

**Q. Did you see somebody do it or copied it and did you just start doing it yourself?**

**TOMMY PAUL:** Yeah, definitely when you're a junior you're like, That's really cool, someone is spinning their racquet. You learn how to do it. I guess it's just kind of like a thing that I can't get rid of.

**Q. Obviously Eddy was back today. Were you able to hear him through all the noise at Ashe? If so, how helpful and motivating was it to have a familiar voice in your ear?**

**TOMMY PAUL:** I definitely heard him. I think we got him tickets to our box or something, but he ended up getting better tickets right on the side of the court. I was definitely hearing him. It was fun.

He definitely got louder after I lost the third, which was cool. I went and talked to him a little bit after, but it's really cool to have him here. I'm hoping he becomes famous or something.

**Q. Do you know when school starts for him? Is he going to be able to keep coming?**

**TOMMY PAUL:** That's a great question. I have no idea. I haven't thought about it at all.

**Q. Your next opponent, Ben Shelton, just won his last set 6-0. (Laughter.)**

**TOMMY PAUL:** Nice. So I'm coming out hot and winning that first set basically (smiling).

**Q. Have you hit with him, practiced with him?**

**TOMMY PAUL:** Oh, yeah.

**Q. Since Australia? I imagine you have since you played him in Australia. What do you see? How do you size him up?**

**TOMMY PAUL:** I'm trying to think if we actually had any practice sessions. We played doubles together in Miami. So we were, like, warming up together a bunch there. I'm sure he's seen me play a bunch and I've seen him play a bunch. We know each other's game pretty well. I'm happy to see him doing well this week.

Should be a fun match, you know. I think everyone is excited about both of us right now. I'm exciting for that matchup.

**Q. Fitting you're wearing an Eagles hat because Devon Allen signed an autograph on someone's forehead. Right when you were walking out, that kid asked you to sign the initials on his forehead. Was that the strangest autograph signing you ever had? Are the Eagles going to get the Super Bowl revenge and take it this year?**

**TOMMY PAUL:** I hope so. I definitely hope so. That would be really nice.

The autograph question, he came up to me and had a picture that I signed his forehead last year. He's like, Do you remember this? I told him yes. I didn't remember it. But he was like, can we do it again? I was like, Sure, man. Signed his forehead again. Definitely a strange request. I'll sign his forehead. Why not.

**Q. As you know, there hasn't been a ton of great tennis players from North Carolina that have gotten this far. You and Patrick Kypson, who is doing well now, coming from a place like Greenville, where there's not a ton of great players come from, what it means for you to be from there and making it this far at the Open?**

**TOMMY PAUL:** Well, I mean, we have Isner, or had Isner, which is pretty sad.

**Q. He's Georgia now.**

**TOMMY PAUL:** Yeah, he's an absolute legend of the sport. Crazy to see him go. He's been, like, a role model for us.

Coming from Greenville, it's like a crazy road. I grew up basically just playing with my sister. She ended up playing tennis at Louisville, and I moved to Florida and that's where, like, my game really started evolving and getting a lot better.

Yeah, I mean, there is not too much tennis in Eastern North Carolina, so it's cool to have Patrick Kypson still reppin'. I'm not sure if he was here -- he was here? Okay. He's getting healthy, and I think he's gonna start playing a lot better tennis here pretty soon.

It's crazy. Basically all over the world there's nowhere that is really home for me right now, but I always, like, North Carolina is always, like, home in my heart, even though I got the Eagles hat on.

**Q. I know you don't like to look too far ahead, but just talk about the momentum that you have going. Are you feeling at all like this is a little bit of a special story you are creating here?**

**TOMMY PAUL:** If you were to ask me two days ago, down two sets, I would have told you the story might be coming to an end. I'm happy to still be here. This is, like, the best tournament for Americans to play in. Obviously around the grounds everyone is really stoked and excited about the Americans.

Every time I pass one of the TVs here, it's, like, Is an American gonna win, like, a slam for the first time, 20 years?

You see a lot of it. I'm just really excited to play every match. Like, I'm doing things I have never done. Never been to the fourth round of the Open, never played on Ashe, never won on Ashe.

**Q. A lot of firsts.**

**TOMMY PAUL:** So it's exciting for me right now. I'm really looking forward to the next match, and hopefully we can keep it going.

**Q. You mentioned that you think it will be a fun match, your next one. How would you describe the similarities and differences between the two of you and what the key to the match is?**

**TOMMY PAUL:** I think our games are, like, pretty different. Like, overall we have very different games. He's a serve-and-first-ball guy. He does it really well. He volleys pretty well. I'd say that's probably our similarity that we like to find the net.

But for me, I'm gonna try and make it a little bit longer than serve and first ball. That's my whole goal in the match.

You know, he brings a lot of energy. I kind of like to keep it mellow. We're not, like, too similar on the court. Should be a pretty fun matchup.

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