

US OPEN

Wednesday, September 6, 2023

New York, New York, USA

Ben Shelton

Press Conference

B. SHELTON/F. Tiafoe

6-2, 3-6, 7-6, 6-2

THE MODERATOR: A tremendous victory. Questions, please.

Q. Just describe that whole emotion, in particular, go through that third set the way you did in that tiebreak and be able to bounce back the way you did and have the momentum in the fourth set for your biggest win ever.

BEN SHELTON: Yeah, I think tonight was a real physical battle. That was the true test. You know, you have Frances Tiafoe on the other side of the court and you have the weather that you had in there. You know, it was pretty muggy, pretty hot. 75% of the match I think both of us were finishing points fairly tired, trying to catch our breath.

You know, end of that third set is when I really had to dig deep. You know, I had a set point at 6-5, went up to the line with heavy legs and ended up double faulting two times in a row. Got a little bit lucky with the slap shot to get back in control of the breaker. And then, you know, I was just tough the last two points.

I think that was the key for me tonight. Just being tough and being relentless, and knowing that I could go the distance physically no matter how bad it hurt. That was just kind of what I was sticking with.

Q. You play with so much joy and outwardly that's what we see. What's going on inside of you? Are you feeling joy? Stress? What's happening inside?

BEN SHELTON: Yeah, I'm definitely feeling joy at times during the match. I'd say a lot.

When I look over at my box and see my friends and family over there, I get some smiles out of them or funny signals, you know, I enjoy that. I really enjoy the interaction with people when I'm on the court.



I also enjoy the tennis. You know, it's tough. I'm thinking to myself as I'm walking to get my towel in the fourth set, and it's, like, this is the greatest moment on the tennis court of my life, and I'm in a lot of pain, you know, physically (smiling). But I'm loving it. I think that was just kind of the story of today.

Q. In Australia obviously you hadn't gone deep in a best-of-five yet. Ran out of gas at quarterfinal stage. You said you knew you could go the distance tonight. How do you feel physically after a week-plus of best-of-five? Where is your fitness now compared to where it was then?

BEN SHELTON: Yeah, I think the fitness has definitely improved a lot but I think the mental has improved more than the physical. There's plenty of times where I could have gone over to my box today and said, Guys, I'm cooked. Like, I'm tired. I don't know if I can go anymore.

Instead I told myself, I'm fine and he's feeling it too. I think being able to flip it in your head is more than half the battle.

I think I've definitely made some strides physically being out on tour a full year and playing a lot of matches and just being on the court more, working hard in the gym. My fitness levels have surely improved, and I think all that together is kind of what happened today.

Q. How would you describe your thoughts on where you are right now and the opportunity that you have coming up in facing Novak Djokovic?

BEN SHELTON: Yeah, I'm pretty glad I have two days off from singles (smiling). I didn't know until a couple minutes ago. They're like, You know you don't play till Friday, right? That was nice to hear. Usually at the beginning of a tournament, you don't want to play, you know, Sunday, Wednesday, and have two days off. But at this stage when players are as grooved as they are, it's nice to have a couple days off.

Going into the semifinals, I'm pretty pumped about the opportunity to go back out there and have the same feeling that I had today against, you know, another really tough opponent.

I have been enjoying every minute on court, interactions



with the crowds and just the tennis that's being played. So I hope that I can bring a high level again on Friday.

Q. But specifically the challenge that Novak presents, given his history, unlike any of the others.

BEN SHELTON: Yeah, definitely a tough challenge. I think that whenever you play somebody for the first time and someone who has been in this situation so many times and come out victorious so many times, that's in the back of your head. You just know how, you know, rock solid the guy is and how mentally tough, how physically tough. So that's definitely something that I have to game-plan for.

I also think that, you know, it's an advantage with my game style playing someone who's never played me before. I think that I can bring some things to the table that maybe you don't see in your normal match that you play on the ATP Tour. So I'm definitely going to try to bring some things to the table that are different and hopefully disruptive on Friday.

Q. Can you take us a little bit through your emotions there in that third-set tiebreaker from going ahead to then suddenly facing that set point. When it was a second serve, did you think, okay, I'm just going to take a crack at this one?

BEN SHELTON: Yeah, kind of a roller coaster for me, serving for the set, you know, it's one of my biggest weapons, my serve. So to lose two points the way I did was unfortunate and frustrated me.

Honestly, at down set point I needed to let a little bit of that frustration out and kind of just let it go. I had been all set so uptight about things. Trying hard to hold serve. I had gotten broken a couple of times. I broke back a couple of times. There was just so much stress. I kind of needed a release and it ended up working out for me.

Q. Looking ahead facing Novak, can you remember the first time you might have seen him on TV? I'd imagine you figure you have a better grasp of what he plays like than maybe he does what you play like from having seen him many times over the years.

BEN SHELTON: I couldn't remember the first time I saw him on the TV or saw him play. When I was younger I wasn't really a big tennis watcher or watch full matches.

The final with Roger at Wimbledon, maybe that was 2019, that was probably not the first time I watched one of his full matches, but the one that comes to mind that I remember watching one of his full matches.

You know, the way things are on tour with technology and everything these days, you can watch so much film on the people that you're playing. I think that it's a pretty even playing field.

Q. You're kind of at the intersection of a lot of different things going on at this US Open. You have the rising Americans. Obviously you and Frances playing that very significant match tonight. Wondering how you're taking it all in. There are record crowds here. It feels like kind of almost a resurgence in tennis's popularity. How is that for you? Was the atmosphere how you imagined it would be tonight?

BEN SHELTON: Yeah, it's pretty cool for me to be a part of it. I love to see American tennis going in a great direction, and tennis in general going in a great direction.

You know, it's weird, but I feel like I've done a pretty good job of blocking out everything that's going on around me when I need to, and I've stayed in the moment and focused on the tennis. It's like when that point is playing, I don't hear anything, I don't see anything. I'm just practicing in a park.

So that's kind of been surprising to me how calm I've been able to stay. You know, just stay in the moment. I think that when the tournament is finally over and everything is said and done, I'll have to take a step back and look at everything that happened.

I know that when Chris Eubanks had his big run earlier this summer he kind of said the same, that when he was in the moment he didn't really have time to think about everything that was going on or process it, but in the days after, he definitely did.

So I think it will probably be similar for me.

Q. You mentioned the joy that you have when playing along with the pain, at least for tonight. At the end of the match you have joy and you have the phone gesture and the hanging up the phone. Take me through the origin of that. And when growing up, had you ever held an actual receiver, phone?

BEN SHELTON: Yeah, so our home phone, when I was growing up in Atlanta, was one like that. If I wanted to talk to my friends or call their home phone, see if they wanted to go outside and throw a football, that was what I did.

But for me it's kind of like I'm saying I'm dialed in. That's what it is for me. You know, the first time that I really saw it is I'm really close friends with a lot of track and field athletes who train at the University of Florida where I live in

Gainesville. One in particular, Grant Holloway, who's won the World Championships I think three times in a row now, that's kind of his signature thing. He loves doing this when he wins, and a lot of other athletes on the team kind of started doing it after too.

He just won the World Championships, so congrats to him. Give him a little shout-out when I do this. Something that connects me to my friends back home.

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