

US OPEN

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Bryan Shelton

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. Arthur Ashe, Frances Tiafoe, and now Ben Shelton are the only Black American semifinalists ever in the Open era of the US Open. Can you talk about just that moment for your son and the buildup from how he had to deal with Jerry Shang in those matches early in the summer to what he has become now as a player?

BRYAN SHELTON: I mean, I think Ben's mom and I, super proud, you know, that he's just handling himself so well. You know, first off the court and then on the court.

Our hope for him is that he would just continue to grow as a person and as a player out here on the tour over the last year, and I think he's done that.

You learn a lot about yourself through the losses, probably more than the wins. So this season for him has been just a great learning experience. Traveling around the globe and going to places and playing on surfaces and just doing things he's never done before.

So for him, the education has been unbelievable. Along the way he's been taking classes. So we're proud of that too.

But, you know, those matches against Jerry and others that he's lost to along the way have certainly helped to kind of reveal where he needed to continue to improve, and it's pretty obvious, but still pressure does that, kind of reveals your weaknesses and the chinks you have in your armor. He's gotten to work, probably some of the things we are most proud about is just his resilience and just how many times he keeps coming back and answering the call even after a loss.

Q. How do you balance the bigness of this with the smallness of it? I mean, I would imagine you probably want him to feel the energy and the momentum and everything that's around him. You know, the great achievement of Arthur Ashe, Tiafoe, Ben now, and at the same time balance that out with, like Rafa always says, All I have to do is just hit the next ball?

BRYAN SHELTON: I think it's really important, he's sponsored by On Cloud, and we always talk about the switching it on and switching it off, and the ability to do those two things is really important. You think about Tiger Woods and he makes this amazing shot and then he kind of just glides down the fairway. He switches off until he has to get to the ball and assess the situation and then he switches back on and gets into his routine.

For Ben, it's like he's so playful and he has all this personality, that he's pretty good at switching on and switching off. It's getting better and better.

He's able to relax and just be himself, and then when it's time to really focus and turn it on, he's able to do that a lot better right now.

Q. What's been the difference between Ben in Australia in January to now, that period between the two majors he hadn't won back-to-back matches?

BRYAN SHELTON: Correct.

Q. What's changed? What's been the difference?

BRYAN SHELTON: Well, I think experience. You know, experience can be a wonderful thing, right?

So like I said earlier, he's gained a lot of great experience. You know, he's had to play on clay courts for a couple of months at a time, and so he's learned a little bit more patience. He's learned a little bit more about how to play defense. He's learned, like, his offense has to be really good on that type of surface in order to execute against the best players in the world.

So he's been able to work on those things. He's understood that his return of serve wasn't up to par. It's a part of his game that he's going to have to continue to improve and he's worked really hard on that aspect of his game.

He also understands he has a weapon in that serve but it can get a lot better, and he's put a lot of time in being able to hit the variety of serves and not just the 149s.

So I think with the experience that he's gotten, he's starting



to mature a little bit more as a player. You saw some of that throughout this week or last week and a half.

Q. I asked Taylor Fritz the same thing in Munich, and he told me American players start very late to play on the red clay.

BRYAN SHELTON: Yes.

Q. So did your son. Is it a problem? Because Americans still do very well in the world rankings, but should they start like Europeans with 12, 13, maybe even earlier?

BRYAN SHELTON: Well, I think every country probably has its advantages, but sometimes there are disadvantages. I think here in the United States, our college system is based on hard courts, which I think is the greatest system in the world. You know, college tennis here in the United States.

I think now you're getting to see kind of the players, you know, over the last probably 20, 30 years that have been coming out of college systems, especially on the men's side, that have had success.

So, yes, we are not playing on clay as much, but I think we have the ability to do well on clay. I think it's more of a mentality and a mindset and just embracing the opportunities to play on that surface.

I know for Ben, he didn't have the most outstanding winning percentage on the clay this year, but he wouldn't trade that for anything. He'll be back again doing it again next year with excitement and enthusiasm and the feeling that he can do really, really well on that surface as well.

Q. When you were deciding to leave Florida and come out full time with Ben, what was your plan to approach the on-court coaching and how would you describe sort of the dynamics? Because, you know, we're picking up a lot of the talk on television and stuff.

BRYAN SHELTON: Uh-oh, I'm in trouble (smiling).

Q. I'm curious, is the communication between you guys the same as it was at Florida, is it different, is it more father/son, coach/player? How do you make sense of all that?

BRYAN SHELTON: It's an interesting mix, for sure. Always has been. Especially as I've coached him in competition, which we didn't do obviously in junior tennis. Just sat there and sat on your hands and tried to act like you weren't nervous at all watching your kids play.

Now when he came to college I was able to coach him, but we also had two other coaches that were out there coaching him. A lot of times those other coaches were on the court with him and I wasn't on the court during matches as much, because it could become a distraction for the rest of the team.

So, you know, managing that I think is really important, but we have such a good relationship. I can take one hat on and take the other one off. For me, it's about when to say something. Sometimes it's more about just trying to get him positive and get him in the right frame of mind to help him stay in the moment, stay relaxed, or to fire up.

So sometimes it's things just like that that get him in a positive frame of mind so he can go out there and play confidently and play his best tennis. Sometimes there's a tactical suggestion or a technical thought, but it's things that I know that he can digest really, really well.

So I think that understanding and that trust that he has in me as a coach helps in that situation to, usually when I say something, he nods, and he gives affirmation that, I got it, let's go.

Q. Ben told us that the reason that he has never gone abroad during his junior career is you convinced him to not waste time or waste money to go abroad until you become No. 1 in this country. What is the philosophy behind that kind of decision or advice you made?

BRYAN SHELTON: I think my wife Lisa and I, our thoughts were, No. 1, we wanted our kids to grow up to be well-balanced children and later become well-balanced young adults and so forth.

So for us, having a normal life as far as going to regular school and having friends and socially being in a good place, getting a good, solid education, so we really tried to put the emphasis on those things before the sports stuff. We realized that sport were also a great thing to help teach valuable lessons.

It wasn't so much that we were thinking that Ben or Emma would go on and play professional sports. It was more that we wanted them to be well-adjusted kids that love life, love people, and wanted to get a good education. That was our motivation early on.

As far as playing inside Florida or out, yeah, I always have the inside-out approach. If you can dominate in your inner circle, then you can move out a little bit further one step at a time. We really tried to never skip steps.

For us I think that's really important, because a lot of people don't like to deal with the pressure of playing amongst your peers and playing amongst the people that are right in your own backyard. You would see that. Some people would be from the same city and they'd never practiced together. They'd say, I have no one to hit with. I'm like, There's a very good kid right across the street. Are you kidding me?

They didn't want to mix it up because they had this fear of someone getting ahead or someone being better than their kid or this or that. For us it's all about development; first their character and who they are as a person, and then the tennis part.

For us, it's always an inside-out approach.

Q. He really went for some big shots last night. I wonder, how do you teach that willingness, that self-belief to go for it, and how much do you encourage that?

BRYAN SHELTON: Well, I think, you know, with Ben and his personality and just the way that he attacks life and tennis and everything, it's always been about trying to rein him in, never about trying to get him to play outside. For me, it's kind of the opposite. You know, and I'd always prefer that it be this way, you know, because it's hard to get someone to want to step up when they're naturally timid or shy or just not aggressive.

For us, that's never been a problem, not with Ben. It's been good.

Q. I wanted to ask you, you know, you have been there before, and you know how tough it is to actually put it all together. He is going at another level. With this result, I think he really start to believe in himself in another way and start to have confidence in himself, but there is a long way to, like, make it steady during a career. Ben is a incredible player with a lot of skills, but then you know how tough it is to actually put all together and for long and in each match. So just to say what do you think it's more important? What is the priorities right now to actually try to go all the way and for long, what are your priorities?

BRYAN SHELTON: I think that's great. I think our approach and I think Ben's approach is a cliché. You know, it's let's just try to get a little bit better. These are the areas that we're working on right now. There are some specific things that we're trying to do with him and that he's trying to accomplish in his game to get better.

I think he's got amazing examples over this last 20-year stretch with Roger and Rafa and Novak, of guys that continually look to get better. I mean, so if those guys can look to get better every single day and they're the standard of excellence at the very top of the game for a long period of time, like you're talking about, that's a good example for him to follow.

The character that those guys exude, you know, Roger, I mean, it's just a great example. Ben's had the pleasure of being able to be around them a little bit over the last year. Just what great examples for the young guys that are coming up today like Ben.

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