

US OPEN

Friday, September 8, 2023

New York, New York, USA

Ben Shelton

Press Conference

N. DJOKOVIC/B. Shelton

6-3, 6-2, 7-6

THE MODERATOR: Ben, obviously not the result you wanted tonight, but congratulations on just a tremendous week through the two weeks. If you could just reflect on the match and the experience.

BEN SHELTON: Yeah, I think the two weeks as a whole was a good run for me. A lot of positives to take away for the rest of the year and going into next year.

It was really fun playing my final slam of the year here and doing well in front of the American crowd. That's pretty special for me.

Yeah, not the outcome I wanted in the match today. Some things to be disappointed about in the outcome, but a lot of positives to take, too. Yeah, I'm just really looking forward to getting back to work and getting back out there.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. Talking about taking the positives, I just wonder if you can elaborate. What can you learn and how can you grow from the experience of reaching the semis and of course today's experience facing one of the greatest that ever played the game?

BEN SHELTON: Yeah, I think I learned a lot about myself these two weeks, knowing how, you know, deep I can go, how deep I can dig, you know, what I can do competitively out on the tennis court, because I think it's such a mental sport. I think that's such a big side of it.

I kind of found a place where I can operate and still be calm and still be clear-minded but be a fierce competitor and get after, you know, the guy I'm playing at the same time and really -- I say this a lot to the people on my team -- but be a dog out there, have a dog mentality.

I was pretty happy with the way I competed throughout the tournament.



Q. What was your sense of what was going on in the third set when you came on like that and made it such a battle? When it was over, if you saw what he did with your gesture and what you thought about it?

BEN SHELTON: Yeah, with the roof closed in there it was loud, I mean really loud, and to be playing the No. 2 player in the world and have as many people as I had screaming my name in there, it was a really cool atmosphere. You could see some of the momentum shifting in the third set when I got a couple of breaks.

Fun to be a part of that match and obviously tough to not get that set at the end of the set, but yeah, the American crowd really brought it.

To answer your second question, you know, yeah, I didn't see it until after the match. You know, I don't like when I'm on social media and I see people telling me how I can celebrate or can't celebrate. You know, I think if you win the match, you deserve to do whatever you want.

You know, as a kid growing up, I always learned that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, so that's all I have to say about that (smiling).

Q. You spoke about what you learned in general from this whole experience. What about today, what did you learn from Novak Djokovic and about Novak Djokovic?

BEN SHELTON: Yeah, you know, I learned that he's a guy who can compete at the highest level, has, you know, a similar mentality to me on the court with how he wants to come after you and be aggressive and show his emotion.

I think it was really cool to see that matchup for the first time. Looking forward to hopefully getting it again.

Q. You'd come onto the court with certain expectations of what it would be like to face Novak Djokovic who you have been seeing on TV for many, many years. Was it different?

BEN SHELTON: I don't know about different. I mean, I tried to go into the match with a really open mind.



You know, it's like when I always watched him on TV, it was, like, I was a little kid, you know, who maybe wasn't even playing tennis yet or played a little bit of tennis but was playing it for fun.

I think that I'm a completely different person now than I was then. So honestly, when I went onto the court, I wasn't expecting anything than the tape that I have watched from his last few matches here. I kind of just went into the match like I was playing any other player.

Q. You leave here and you go to Vancouver for Laver Cup. Can you talk about the fact that you have been chosen for this high-level team and what your expectations are.

BEN SHELTON: Yeah, I'm really excited for the opportunity to play Laver Cup. You know, when the announcement first came out, I see all these comments on Instagram, Oh, oh, why did you take him? Why? Why this guy? There's so many higher-ranked guys.

Coming into the US Open it was like, okay, I really have something to prove. I wanted to show people that maybe I deserved to be on the team or the people who said that I didn't, kind of prove them wrong.

I had a pretty good run here, and I'm happy that hopefully I was able to prove a few people wrong.

Q. And your expectations going in?

BEN SHELTON: I mean, I'm pretty pumped to be in the team atmosphere. You know, I love those type of competitions. First, you know, team tournament that I'll be a part of since I left college. All positive thoughts going to Laver Cup. I'm going to be just as amped and emotional as I was here in Vancouver.

Q. You had so many firsts this year. Obviously your first year on tour. I know your year is not done. Wondering in what ways you feel like you grew up this year at all? A couple of things that stood out in terms of being a tennis professional now.

BEN SHELTON: Yeah, I definitely learned a lot of things. The list could go on and on. Going to so many different countries and playing on different surfaces, and just being exposed to different things.

I'd say the biggest thing that I kind of learned that kind of is shaping me as a person as we speak is the influence that professional athletes have on this stage. You know, tennis is a huge sport, a worldwide sport.

It was kind of crazy for me the first time I touched down in Portugal for my first tournament in Europe, you know, that there were people at the match screaming my name or knew who I was. That was kind of hard for me to believe.

But I think it's definitely made me think a little bit more about how I act on the court, what message, you know, I'm giving in my interviews, the things I say, because I think it goes a long way. I think that a lot of people are really listening to the things that you say and watching what you do.

Q. The strength of your game is your serve. Today you faced the greatest returner probably in history. You were throwing in some bombs and he just kept getting them back, getting them back. Wondering how that feels. Probably kind of a little bit different than other returners. Also, if you learned anything about maybe your returns by facing him.

BEN SHELTON: Yeah. I don't know if I felt hugely different with how the ball was coming back in terms of, you know, pace or location, but he definitely did a great job of percentage of balls that he got back in the court.

Yeah, going into it you know that he's a great returner and a great defender. Honestly, the thing that I was most pleased about this week is for the most part I didn't have my highest-end serving. Against Karatsev I had a really, really good serving day in the third round, but apart from that, I had another gear or I have another gear that I can go to in terms of serving and I just wasn't really able to find it the last three matches.

But the thing that stuck out to me the most was how I was able to go toe to toe with these guys from the ground. Everyone is, like, Oh, Ben is a server. But in the neutral rallies I felt pretty comfortable playing against the last four guys I played are very high-level baseliners, great groundstrokes. I felt comfortable staying in a rally with them, playing points, not checking out but going deep in points from the ground and all court up at the net, too.

I was pleased with the way that I was able to play fairly complete tennis this week. I didn't feel like I was just, you know, being a serve-bot and getting free points on my serve, but I was backing it up.

Q. How would you describe the difference in what you saw on the other side of the net from maybe other top players you've played?

BEN SHELTON: Yeah, I think Novak has a little more fire to him than other guys that I have played.

You can just see the competitive spirit, you know, kind of just oozing out of him (smiling). He's like that for pretty much the whole match, he's pretty locked in.

It's funny, because a lot of the things that I saw in myself this week with how I was trying to be on the court competitively and just firing at all times, it was something I was kind of seeing from him as well. I think that that's maybe something that's a little bit different than some of the other top players I faced. I wouldn't say everybody, but some.

Q. What's the biggest issue for you tonight: Disappointment or this is a step in your career?

BEN SHELTON: Yeah, I think everything is a step in your career, win or loss. I'm at a point where, you know, the losses don't break me because I have very long-term goals. As a team we are very process-oriented and we just know that this is part of the process.

So there's a small piece of it is disappointment obviously. I'm a competitor. I think I show that, for the most part, out on the court. Every loss hurts. It cuts you a little bit.

But if anything, this week has just motivated me more. I feel like last time I had a big run in Australia, I got fairly complacent after it happened, and I thought that I'd really done something or got to some place, and, you know, had a couple tough months after that.

Yeah, a lot of new experiences on different continents and different surfaces, but I think that after this run I totally have a different feeling moving forward to the rest of this year and the start of 2024 where I'm really going to be pushing forward now. It's kind of gotten me to a place where I'm going to work that much harder.

Q. This is kind of a tough question in a press conference, but Taylor and Tommy and Frances, Chris, yourself, all have had these spectacular runs. I know you guys emphasize the importance of process, but still, to fans, the sport is ultimately about summitting and getting to the mountain. What do you think the obvious question, what do you think it will take to get to the very top for one of us Americans and yourself?

BEN SHELTON: This is a question that I have answered often over the last few months, you know, since I have been out on tour. I'm not really sure what it's going to take. I don't know if it's going to be me. I don't know if it's going to be someone else who breaks through.

I always say that American tennis seems to be moving in a great direction, the right direction. We have guys making it

deep in slams. A lot of us here, three in the quarterfinals, are pushing through not just on the men's side but the women's side too. Coco Gauff in the final, Madison Keys a semifinalist. So it's a pretty cool time to be an American in tennis.

I wish I could have a ball that says when and who is going to be the American who is the first guy since Andy Roddick to win a Grand Slam, but unfortunately I don't have that.

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