

November 27, 2007



An interview with:

THE U.S. DAVIS CUP TEAM

TIM CURRY: The U.S. team has practice at 12:00. Andy is going to be part of the first practice session. If we can, direct any questions to Andy first. He's available for the first 15 minutes so he can be prepped for practice.

Thank you for joining us for the pre-draw press conference. We'll start with questions from the floor.

Q. Andy, you've always been known to perform well on home soil on a higher level than abroad. Do you feel this could be the key in the match?

ANDY RODDICK: Well, I think you'd find that most teams and players perform better at home just because you can choose the court surface, which I think has more to do with it than anything.

That being said, we're excited to have a home final. We'd much rather play them here than on clay in Moscow, that's for sure.

Q. Andy, you've talked before about what this means to you, that you remember watching when you were 10 years old. Can you elaborate on that a little bit.

ANDY RODDICK: Sure. You know, I went to my first Davis Cup tie, it was the '92 final when I was nine or ten years old. Saw possibly the greatest Davis Cup team ever play and win there. And, you know, really struck a chord with me. I've always been excited about Davis Cup. It's always been a huge priority for me.

You know, it's been on my list of goals to accomplish. You know, the top couple of things since I started. You know, I'm glad to be here and I'm glad to be here with these guys, as well.

Q. You also have a perfect record against Davydenko. Are you looking at extending that streak?

ANDY RODDICK: To be honest, it's not even in my thought process. I could care less if I extend the streak. If I lose to him and I lose to everybody else and we win, I don't really care. It's about the culmination of a year.

Obviously it would be nice to get a win, but we're here to get three points as a team. That's the goal.

Q. Andy and James, do both of you feel match fit at this point? I know each of you has had sort of long breaks for different reasons.

JAMES BLAKE: Yeah, I feel fit. I had a great week last week with my coach, Brian Barker, in Connecticut. It's one time that fast indoor courts in Connecticut are good preparation for a match, so I'm happy about that. Gets a lot of drilling.

It's a different kind of fitness when you're drilling. This week is going to be perfect where I'm going to play a lot of sets with other best players in the world.

Getting to play with Andy, having Mardy and Robby here is huge, because those are two guys that can really push me. Donald and John the same thing.

I'm excited about it. I definitely feel like the little bit of rest I had, I would have liked to have been in Shanghai, but not getting there, I can look at the positives that I got a little bit of a rest and now I feel completely refreshed.

I know my legs are going to feel good for possibly two five-set matches. I definitely feel ready to go.

ANDY RODDICK: I was more concerned about it before Shanghai. You know, I went into Shanghai knowing I was short on matches. If you would have told me before that I'd get four matches against the top players and qualify for the semis, that would have been ideal preparation in my mind, on an indoor surface kind of similar, a little bit slower.

But that was key, to go over there and get those kind of matches against those kind of players.

Q. Andy, have you had a chance to play on the court here in Portland yet, to work out? What are you expecting from the Portland backing? Talk about the home court advantage. Have you heard anything about Portland's reputation or anything like that?

ANDY RODDICK: As far as the fans?

Q. Yes.

ANDY RODDICK: Well, we got a sneak peek at the Rose Garden last night, at the game there.

I think we're expecting a rowdy crowd just based solely on the fact that it sold out in about 17 minutes. That shows us that the people here want to be here and they're excited about being here. And so are we. We're expecting a rowdy house, I think.

Q. Bob and Mike, what are you predicting or who are you predicting you're going to see? For any of you that know, do we know if Safin is going to be here physically?

MIKE BRYAN: I don't think so.

BOB BRYAN: About Safin, we have no clue. It's not going to surprise us, you know, if he shows up on Thursday and plays doubles or whatever. We're not going to be surprised.

ANDY RODDICK: You're not?

BOB BRYAN: I'm not (smiling).

ANDY RODDICK: I would be shocked (laughter).

BOB BRYAN: It might be just some trick they have up their sleeve. Who knows.

As far as the doubles, you know, we're going to be ready for everyone. There's four guys that can play really good doubles. Safin is a great doubles player, too. That's why we're kind of surprised he's not here.

But Tursunov/Youzhny is probably their best team they can put together out of those four guys. We'll be ready for them.

Q. Andy, back to the crowd issue. Last year in Moscow, how was the fans affecting the game? Were they as big a factor as the slow clay or a smaller factor?

ANDY RODDICK: Well, they were a smaller factor than the slow clay. I mean, the fans

aren't out there hitting balls and affecting the way you're moving and stuff.

Obviously it's a great thing, you know, about Davis Cup, is the fan support either way. But they were respectful. I think the fans were fine. Given the choice between playing a match in a hostile environment because of the fans and a rough environment because of court surface, I'd probably choose to deal with the fans.

CAPTAIN McENROE: Thank you, Andy, you can leave and get ready with practice.

Q. Patrick, given Safin's presumed absence and given Davydenko's situation, how much do you think sort of disarray/dysfunction might be affecting the Russian team at this point? Is that an advantage you can exploit?

CAPTAIN McENROE: No. I think, first of all, obviously Safin is a tremendous player. But he hasn't had a great year. So, you know, they've got other players, at least this year, who have played a lot better than he has, and they're all here.

You know, whatever's going on within their team, I think these guys are pros and they've played well, very well, in Davis Cup, obviously winning it last year. They all can play on different surfaces.

No, we don't really expect that to be a big factor. We're going to have to play well. Really, that's what we're focusing on, just if our guys play well, with the conditions that we have here with the court and the fans, we like our chances.

But we certainly understand that this is going to be a very tough match to win.

Q. What, if anything, will a win here do for the popularity of U.S. men's tennis in this country? Do you think there's a need to make U.S. men's tennis more noticeable on the sports landscape here?

BOB BRYAN: That's for Harvard grads. No, you didn't graduate.

JAMES BLAKE: No grads here (laughter).

BOB BRYAN: Two years at Harvard.

JAMES BLAKE: I think men's tennis right now is in a great position given the fact we're in the Davis Cup final. We have an opportunity to do something great, bring the Cup back here for the first time since '95.

I think we're doing our best to bring the landscape back to the positive atmosphere it had in the years of Sampras, Agassi, Courier. But it is

a difficult situation when we're dealing with following the greatest generation probably in the history of American tennis. It can at times possibly spoil the American public and the fans and the media. We're dealing with that.

But I think there's a lot of positives we have to look for. We have Andy Roddick, who finished the year No. 1 in the world before the dominance of Roger Federer, and was probably considered the best player in the world at that time. We have had him.

We have the best doubles team in the world. By the time they're done, there's a chance they'll be the best doubles team ever, as well. I think we've got a lot of positives to look forward to.

We've got young guys in terms of Donald Young and John Isner coming up. I think we're doing everything we can positively. I think just the landscape of tennis in general has changed with the fact that there's more countries involved, there's more players from developing countries.

When you see the likes of Serbia having two females in the top 10 and one male in the top 10 in the world, you know the landscape has changed. I think it's going to be difficult for any one country to dominate the way the U.S. has in the past.

For the changing landscape, I think we're doing as well as one can possibly expect.

BOB BRYAN: Wow. That's awesome (smiling). I don't even want to follow that.

MIKE BRYAN: That's a wrap (smiling).

Q. Patrick, your team, everybody knows who is No. 1 and No. 2. With the Russians, it's all a shroud of secrecy. Safin could show up tomorrow. How much is that a factor? Did you choose the specific kind of hard surface, or did you just specify hard, whatever was available?

CAPTAIN McENROE: Absolutely not, no. No, I specified exactly the surface.

But obviously that's after speaking to the guys. I mean, it's the input I get from them. Then I test the surface and I choose the surface. We certainly wouldn't leave something like that to chance.

As far as the lineups go, you know, everything is different. When you have a lot of options, that can be a positive. I think we look at it as a positive what we have because the guys know who is going to play.

Bob and Mike obviously focus on getting ready for the doubles and do everything they can to be ready for that one particular match.

I think it makes James and Andy feel pretty good that they know these guys are going out there on Saturday. Certainly the best possible team we could field. I think everybody knows their roles on our team. That's not to say it can't be a positive to have different guys, as well.

I think the Russians have done a great job of that over the years. But, you know, in these conditions, with these guys playing well, the surface that we like, I mean, we certainly feel good about our chances. You know, it's up to them to sort of figure out what they want to do. But I like the position that I have, which is I know exactly who's going to play.

I've had situations before where it wasn't as clear-cut as it is now. So I think we've been through that, as well. That can work sometimes. But these guys are all veterans after many years of being on this team together. I think having defined roles is good for us. Either way can work.

Q. You have all gotten to know each other pretty well over the years. James, can you talk about how you and Andy are most alike and then most different from each other? For the Bryans, can you talk about that for each other.

JAMES BLAKE: Okay, well, Andy and I, I think on the surface from a tennis fan's perspective probably look extremely different. Obviously he's much more emotional on the court. He wears his emotions on his sleeve. I think that's when he plays his best, is when he's that excited. I think I play my best when I'm a little more calm, a little more relaxed and just focused. He finds a way to focus when he's that excited and when he's just more emotional on the court. So I think that's probably our biggest difference, is our attitudes and how we succeed on the court.

In terms of similarities, I think off the court we're actually pretty similar. We have a lot of the same interests. We both love playing cards. He probably wouldn't want me to admit it, but he reads a lot. He's actually a lot smarter than he pretends to be. I'm actually a lot dumber than I pretend to be, so we're pretty close in that regard (laughter).

We just have a lot of fun off the court. We're pretty similar in our maturity levels, which isn't exactly high (smiling). We're much more

similar than it appears on the surface.

MIKE BRYAN: You want our similarities? Those are a given. We're twins (laughter).

Our differences, I mean, we're different. You're more right brain, I'm more left brain. I'm a little more organized and mathematical. He used to copy my math homework, I used to copy his English homework. He's a little more artistic. He likes to do music recording and painting and stuff.

BOB BRYAN: Not anymore.

MIKE BRYAN: Not anymore. On the court, he's got the bigger serve. We complement our games pretty well. He's got the big serve. I've got the better return. You know, that makes for a good doubles team. He's obviously a lefty, I'm a righty. That's about it.

Q. Bob and Mike, you've had the best season of your careers. Is there any one particular factor that's contributed to that? As you build this streak in Davis Cup, is it getting heavy at all on your shoulders?

BOB BRYAN: No. The streak, well, the streak's not getting heavy at all. We take one at a time. You know, we don't think about, you know, 12-1, we've won this many in a row, history. We're just thinking about taking it one team at a time, taking it one return at a time, one serve at a time.

After our career we'll sit back and we'll look at what we've done. But right now we're just trying to win for the team, we're trying to play every point as hard as we can.

As far as the year, we got a great situation going. We know what it takes to win, and that's comforting. We have a great coach who scouts every match. We're very comfortable with him. We're getting smarter. We're still getting better.

Doubles is a game that you develop into your early, mid 30s. See guys in their mid 30s getting better. I think we'll still improve. That's probably the reason why we're getting more consistent.

Q. Patrick, how hard to forget was the Roddick/Tursunov game from last year? Have you forgotten it, gotten over it?

CAPTAIN McENROE: It was a great match. I don't think there's a lot to get over. It was disappointing to lose, obviously, for Andy. But, you know, I couldn't have been prouder of his effort.

Tursunov came out hot and Andy got down a couple sets, but he fought back and got himself

back in the match. Obviously had a good chance to win it - a great chance to win it.

That's all part of the journey that we've been on, you know, those experiences. I know Andy was very disappointed. I remember him sitting in the hallway there. But I just went over to him and said, You gave us absolutely everything you had, and that's all you can ask.

So, no, it was a great win for Dmitry. But I thought it was a great effort by Andy. He's had a lot of those, particularly away. He's won some big matches on clay away for us in the last couple years. He's lost some tough matches, too. But, you know, every time he goes out there he gives it everything. I just thought it was a great match from both players.

Q. How much of a pall has been cast on the sport by the recent gambling allegations?

CAPTAIN McENROE: I think it still remains to be seen. I think there are a lot of questions that need to be asked and are being asked. I'm confident when we find out the answers we'll move on. I think there's nothing that's been proved yet. So if there is, obviously I think there will be harsh implications, which there should be.

But, you know, I never heard of any of this happening when I was playing. I think it's pretty mild if it's actually happened. I don't think it's certainly happened at the highest level. And tennis has always been a very clean sport from a drug standpoint and from a gambling standpoint.

But it is obviously a huge issue that we need to sort of figure out what's happened, if anything, and then move forward. But I think everybody in the tennis world is coming together to realize, you know, it's a really important issue.

The players that have sort of been approached over the years, over the last couple years, have come forward, which I think is good. We just need to sort of root it out and move forward.

I think at this point it's more of a threat than an actual problem. Whatever has happened, I'm sure that we'll move forward in a positive direction. So I don't think it's casting a pall, to be honest. It's kind of sad in the world we live in that tennis gets more attention because of this. It's on the front page of the New York Times, et cetera. But, you know, that's the reality.

TIM CURRY: Let your readers and

viewers know that there are tickets that have become available for the Davis Cup finals in all price categories. Once the court was laid out, we were able to find some seats with unobstructed views. There are tickets available through Comcast Tickets, the regular outlets.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports