

November 29, 2007



An interview with:

THE U.S. DAVIS CUP TEAM

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please, for the U.S. team.

Q. James, we've heard Andy talk about being in Fort Worth in 1992, how he was thrilled. What is your first connection with Davis Cup?

JAMES BLAKE: I actually really wasn't as big a tennis fan when I was a kid in terms of watching. I loved playing, but I didn't watch as many matches. I didn't watch too many tournaments. I watched the US Open. I would go and watch with my father. Other than that, I didn't really go to too many.

My first real big memories of the Davis Cup weren't till much later in my life. My best memory was being in college, my first year in college, and watching Jim Courier against Greg Rusedski, watching them defeat them in the fifth match. Jim Courier pulled his shirt up and pointed to his heart. Pretty inspirational stuff. Those guys were a great team.

I think it inspired Pete Sampras to play later that year when he saw how much effort Todd Martin and Jim Courier were putting in. I don't have the story from being eight, nine, ten years old and watching. I really was more a fan of watching basketball on TV or watching baseball. I learned to love watching tennis much later in life.

Q. Patrick, can you comment on the singles choices, whether you were surprised by them, and also whether you expect that doubles team to stay the same Saturday?

CAPTAIN McENROE: No, we were not surprised by the selections for the singles. No, I do not expect that to be the doubles team. To elaborate on the singles, you know, Davydenko

has obviously been struggling a little bit with some injuries. I mean, I saw him playing in Shanghai. Saw his foot bothered him a little bit. Not real surprised.

But the Russians, one of their strengths is they have a lot of versatile players. It certainly wouldn't surprise us to see him at some point in the weekend. You know, Tursunov has played pretty well on fast courts in his career. He's obviously a little bit streaky, but he's certainly capable of hitting the ball pretty big.

And Youzhny, you know, has proved that he can pretty much play on any surface. Played some big Davis Cup matches for them in his career.

No, we're not particularly surprised. I don't think they probably even know who their doubles team will be. That will probably depend somewhat on what happens on Friday.

Q. Andy, you had obviously a really memorable matchup last year that lasted a long time. Given that you're going to get another chance at it, does that add some hunger for you?

ANDY RODDICK: I don't need any added hunger, I promise you that. No, I mean, I don't see a lot of relevance between the two just because of how different the court surfaces are.

You know, we've played since that match. So I think people will be talking about it a lot more than I'm thinking about it. I'm just going out and looking to try to get us the lead.

Q. Andy, you won the US Open at 21 years old. Here at 25, if you are on this winning team, what do you think would be the difference or similarity between winning a Grand Slam and a Davis Cup competition?

ANDY RODDICK: I don't know. There's no way to predict. You know, the two are on par in my mind as far as accomplishments. You know, it might be just that much more special because we've kind of shared this journey, you know, for the

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last seven years.

I mean, my first tie was Patrick's first tie, also. Just with James and the boys, even Mardy and Robby have stepped in, and they're here this week also.

You know, might mean even more because you shared the process with these guys. You know, it's something that I think we all want together. You know, hopefully I'll be able to give you a definitive answer sometime next week. I'd love for that opportunity.

Q. Andy, how would you say you're most alike from James on and off the court?

ANDY RODDICK: Did you already answer that question?

JAMES BLAKE: Yeah, I did.

ANDY RODDICK: I think kind of similar to what James said. On first glance we probably don't seem much alike, you know. But I think when you get deeper, you know, we both enjoy sports, we both enjoy cards. You know, he likes to rehash soliloquies he read at Harvard. I like to brief him on The Little Engine that Could.

JAMES BLAKE: He's lying (smiling).

ANDY RODDICK: I'm not lying. I wouldn't do that to all of you. That's it (smiling).

Q. James, could you talk about your mental toughness coming into this final.

JAMES BLAKE: Yeah, I think it takes a great deal of mental toughness to be in any situation that we're in. I credit the other team as well to be in a Davis Cup final. It takes a lot of mental toughness for anyone to be on those teams.

To be a top 15, top 20 player, top 10 player for a while, it takes mental toughness. It takes a lot more than just strength or speed or talent to get there.

So anyone that's been in that position I think can be credited with having a great deal of mental toughness. I think it's tough to relate to people that haven't been in those situations and dealt with that kind of pressure.

I'm happy with the way I've dealt with it so far. I hope it will show tomorrow, as well, and if needed on Sunday. But I know the guys I'm facing right now aren't lacking in mental toughness either so it's not going to be easy, but I'm proud of the effort I've put into this point and I'm happy with my preparation.

Q. James, I think you played Youzhny once in your career on clay. What do you remember about that match? What sort of challenges does he present to you?

JAMES BLAKE: Yeah, I lost to him last year in Moscow on clay. I remember he played an excellent match. I was a little streaky at that time on clay, which happens to me since it's not my favorite surface. He just played a little more solid than me throughout the match.

This time I feel like I won't need to leave my comfort zone as much as I do on clay and I'll be able to hopefully go after my shots, be aggressive and still play the way I want to play on a surface that suits me much better.

But that being said, I know he's an excellent player and he's not going to make that very easy for me. He's going to try to do everything he can to get me out of my comfort zone. He has unbelievable timing, great returns, is a great competitor, so I know it won't be easy.

But I feel like I've prepared as well as I can and I feel good on this surface and ready to play my game.

Q. What will you do during Andy's match? If Andy wins, what does it do for going out and playing?

JAMES BLAKE: I was going to read soliloquies (laughter). No, I might steal Green Eggs and Ham out of his bag.

It's a situation where most times you know you're waiting for matches in normal tournaments, but you're not as emotionally invested in those. But in this situation, you're very invested in the match. It's your teammate, your friend, someone you want to do well. So I'm going to be watching. Most likely from the locker room.

It's tougher to be out on the court sitting there getting involved in every single point, getting up and cheering every time. I'll be still hanging on almost every point in the locker room and just making sure I'm doing everything I can to prepare, whether it's warming up, stretching out a little, making sure I'm eating everything I need to be properly prepared for the match. But I'll definitely have my eye on the match the whole time.

Q. Andy, everyone up there with you has had a brother who helped them be involved in tennis, including your captain. Can you talk about what that means having older brothers

as a motivator.

ANDY RODDICK: Well, I mean, I don't know how much relevance it has as far as our Davis Cup team goes. But, you know, it was great 'cause when my brother was young, in Nebraska, my parents had never really seen tennis before, but they liked individual sports, so they put him in a clinic.

By the time I came around seven years later they had a little bit of an idea. I was lucky that they had kind of gained knowledge through him.

You know, it's nice to have someone to relate to and share kind of a common bond. Our common bond is tennis. To kind of have someone around who you know will call you on your stuff sometimes, not let you get away with much. It's nice having that support system in place.

Q. Andy and James, do you have any memories of when the Russians were the bad guys in this world, when we perceived them as that? Patrick, how in your mind has the sporting relationship changed between you and the Russians between then and now?

ANDY RODDICK: Yeah, the only bad Russian I remember growing up was Drago against Rocky. Beyond that, I wasn't up on my, you know, social politics at three years old. Most likely I was still reading the same books that I'm still reading today. I don't even know what the other part of the question was. I was busy planning that answer during the second part of your question (smiling).

Q. Patrick, who probably does have more memories, how has the sporting relationship changed between the countries?

CAPTAIN McENROE: Well, I think it's obviously changed a lot. I mean, I remember studying in college, studying the Soviet Union, you know, when it was together as the Soviet Union.

I think tennis has obviously been a big sport for the Russians. They've excelled in the men's and the women's game. They've become a real power in tennis. I wouldn't say it's a love fest that we have with them, but all these guys know their team pretty well and they're all good guys, good competitors.

But, you know, I think this match is bigger than just the U.S. against Russia. It's really, you know, sort of a quest that this team has been on for a long time. I think it's nice to play a team like Russia in the final, you know, another big final.

They're a country that's gone through a lot of changes, but they're doing very well.

For the U.S., for the Russians, still two of the biggest countries in the world, tennis powers, I think the bigger goal for us is to try to win the whole thing. I think as an event it's nice to have a big country like Russia in the final and a big country like the U.S.

Q. Bob and Mike, you had to campaign at one point to get your spot on this team and convince Patrick that he should forego having four singles players. In consideration of that, how big a moment is this for the both of you to be here and competing for the title?

BOB BRYAN: Yeah, I mean, it's everything to be competing for this Davis Cup title. We've wanted to win this since we were 10 years old. You know, I'd trade any Grand Slam for this title right here, to win it for these guys.

As far as, you know, Pat taking us five years ago, we obviously feel that was a good decision for the team (smiling). You know, that first tie in Slovakia, we were pretty nervous because he just changed his philosophy on picking a doubles team.

But he was great. We thought we had one chance. We thought we had to prove it to him then. He called us the night before and said, You're the team for the next five or 10 years. Doesn't matter how you do today. Just go out there and play your heart out.

That gave us a lot of confidence to be here today.

MIKE BRYAN: Yeah, I mean, I want to add that, you know, it's really helped our career playing Davis Cup. I think once Pat picked us, that's when we really took off. I mean, knowing that he had confidence in us to step up in a big match really helped us go out there and play a Grand Slam final and continue to work hard, because we wanted to, you know, excel in these big moments.

So he's the reason why. He's one of the reasons why.

Q. Patrick, there has been so much anticipation for this. First time in the United States in 15 years. They've been talking about it for a while now. What kind of emotions are going through your mind right now?

CAPTAIN McENROE: I'm just excited. I

mean, I'm excited for these guys because, you know, we've been to a lot of different places around the world to play Davis Cup ties. We've been in the final. We've had to go to Spain, play a great team there on clay, which was obviously a tough task.

So to play at home, you know, this has been a goal of the team for a long time, so I'm excited. We'll all be a little bit nervous I'm sure tomorrow. That's a good thing. We'll just try to keep an even keel while at the same time sort of using the energy of the crowd and the energy of the moment. You know, it's here in front of us.

I'm just hoping that these guys go out and go for it because, you know, we've had an unbelievable week in practice. They're all playing great. All feel really confident. We're just going to go out there and try to make it happen. We're not going to wait for it to happen; we're going to go try to make it happen.

Q. Andy and James, this moment, how do you compare it to when you were little kids playing tennis, to be here on this stage?

ANDY RODDICK: I didn't have to answer so many questions when I was a little kid playing tennis. I don't really -- I mean, what are you looking for there?

Q. How much fun is this?

ANDY RODDICK: Oh, it's a lot of fun. But at the same time the stress levels are a little bit higher than, you know, the 10 and Under Texas Closed Championships.

Q. Obviously you loved tennis as a kid.

ANDY RODDICK: Sure.

Q. How much do you love it now and to be on this stage playing?

ANDY RODDICK: I mean, I never really thought I'd be part of a Davis Cup team growing up, so I think weekends like this will never cease to be a little bit surreal, you know. But you try to kind of keep that in check at least until it's done because, you know, we haven't accomplished anything yet.

You know, we still have to get a job done. I think more so than looking at it as a fun weekend, we're looking at it as, you know, it's we've got a job to do.

Q. Bob and Mike, I know you always think you have an advantage over so-called cut-and-paste doubles teams. Sometimes they give you trouble, like the Spanish did in the quarters. Are you going to expend any energy at all on trying to prepare for the named team, or are you going to just kind of try to prepare yourselves for anybody? What is your approach going into that match?

BOB BRYAN: I mean, I think this team right here would be a team that would stay back a little more. I could see them serving, maybe on a first serve and second serve staying in, just ripping forehands, playing more of a singles type of game against us.

Yeah, we're going to prepare a little bit different. We're going to go out there today and work on some stuff. We have formulas figured out for that. We've played teams that play that style all through the last three years, especially with all the singles players entering doubles.

Yeah, I mean, we know all four of these guys. We're going to be prepared for each one individually also.

Q. Last five, seven years Russia becomes a significant Davis Cup team. Are you ever sitting back saying, We're just as good as them; it's going to be our turn soon? We have depth, talent, we should be able to do this.

MIKE BRYAN: I mean, I think we are. I mean, we have a great bunch of guys here. I mean, I think it's a little bit luck of the draw. I mean, if we played that final in '04 at home we'd probably have a Cup by now.

But, you know, every year is different. It's just how it stacks up in the draw. We want to seize this opportunity. This is our best shot. We never know if we're going to get in the luck of the draw again and get back to a home tie in the final.

So this is the one. Could be the only chance we'll see.

Q. Andy, Patrick spoke about the seven-year effort in Davis Cup as a quest. You referred to it as a journey. Can you step back and look at the big picture? What has it meant to you, the frustrations, how central to your career?

ANDY RODDICK: I'm not sure how to relate it to my career, but it's been amazing. I

mean, it's been so much fun. You know, you really kind of get to know someone when you're in Ostrava or Bratislava and you don't really know what's going on. You're there to play some tennis matches.

There's definitely been ups and downs. The highs in Davis Cup are amazing, and the lows are probably lower than regular tournaments, you know. You know, it feels like a million years ago, I was 18 and just starting. There's a ton of memories, good and bad. Even with our relationships and everything, it's just been a great journey.

But, you know, we're here and we have this opportunity. I have a feeling if we get a win here, you know, it will all be upside.

Q. Bob and Mike, how is it to know that on Saturday you're going to have a day where the whole world is paying attention to a doubles match?

BOB BRYAN: Yeah, I mean, doubles is always in the spotlight in Davis Cup. It's the swing point. It's really pivotal. You know the stats. That's why we enjoy playing so much. Doubles is huge. This is the biggest stage for doubles, Davis Cup.

We want to win that match for these guys up here. On Saturday it's going to be the biggest match of our career, I think.

Q. Patrick, you mentioned you had a great week of practice. This being an individual sport, combining individuals in a team, versus a football coach who might be working on drills, what is your outlook on the week as far as practice goes? How much do you coach? What is your role during the week of practice, per se, versus match day?

CAPTAIN McENROE: Look, they all have their own coaches. Part of what we've done, it's really a team effort. So their coaches oftentimes are here with them. You know, my job is to open the balls, the cans of balls, let them practice. That's my job (smiling).

You know, it's to get them ready, to get them confident. My job has always been over the years to communicate with the coaches as much, sometimes more than even with the players. Obviously come match time it's different since you're actually on the court. It's, you know, sometimes less is more. It really depends on the match situation.

But the most important decision I make comes before we even get here, which is choosing the surface. The surface is, you know, suiting these guys really well. James is hitting the ball great. Andy's very comfortable on the court. These guys can play on just about anything. So, you know, that's really my biggest job, is to do that. Look, we feel good. We feel confident. Now we have to go out and play a very tough team that can also play well on this court.

I think the way the guys have been practicing, I couldn't be happier with the way they look going into tomorrow.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

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