

**December 2, 2007**



**J. BLAKE/D.** Tursunov

1-6, 6-3, 7-5

USA - 4

Russia – 1

An interview with:

## **JAMES BLAKE and CAPTAIN PATRICK McENROE**

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Patrick or James.

**Q. I know you partied last night. You knew you were champions. Was there any moment where it seemed much more official today when you went through the whole ceremony?**

JAMES BLAKE: Yeah. I mean, we got the Cup. We got to touch the Cup. We were being a little superstitious about not touching it before it was actually ours. Yeah, get those medals and everything, it definitely feels more official. Like Patrick said in his speech, it's starting to sink in that we did it.

Last night it was pretty quick that we started the celebration, and exciting and just didn't really have time to think about it and let it sink in. And now after sleeping on it, maybe not sleeping enough, but sleeping a little bit on it and getting up today and then seeing that wonderful ceremony and actually having the trophies in our possession and everything, it's definitely more real.

**Q. The city of Portland, Oregon, has never been known as a tennis city, per se. The crowd was huge. It sold out in minutes. Can you talk about the fans, the crowd, the city of Portland hosting this event?**

CAPTAIN McENROE: I mean, fans were amazing. I think the people came out. Obviously even today, being two dead rubbers, it was a phenomenal crowd. They were really into it.

So I think they're a very tennis-knowledgeable crowd. You know, I've been saying it all week, really all year, I think it speaks to just the commitment of the team over the years and people see how much these guys care, their passion for playing.

So I think slowly but surely over the last few years that's sort of built. You know, it's happened in other cities, as well. But obviously Portland, the people came out and really supported it.

JAMES BLAKE: It was definitely a great feeling to have the fan support today in a dead rubber. Once I got that first break in the second set, to have them going so crazy, I had to wait a minute or two just to hit my first serve. Just give me goosebumps out there again. I've had plenty this whole weekend.

That was another time, a dead rubber, makes no official difference at the end of the day. But to have them caring that much, wanting to see more tennis, they see me smile up on the big screen, makes them go even crazier. Just a feeling I wish so many other people could really appreciate.

Really no way to describe it or make someone else feel it without that kind of -- I don't know, just appreciation from the fans is something that I never would have expected and is just an honor and a privilege to have been a part of.

**Q. James, could you talk about being a Harvard guy and winning a title started by Harvard guys.**

JAMES BLAKE: It's a great feeling. I know when I was first a practice partner, it was the Centennial anniversary in Boston. The Davis Cup team was Pete Sampras, Alex O'Brien, Todd Martin and Jim Courier. For me to be a practice partner and see how much went into it, it really helped me to appreciate the history of it, how much it meant to those guys.

Also the Harvard connection there was evident. I think I was one of the only -- Gullikson made fun of me. I was the only practice partner having to do a few interviews because they were talking about the Harvard connection there just as a practice partner.

I think given the landscape of the sports scene today, you don't see that many people from Harvard coming in and becoming pro athletes. So to have just the practice partner on the team from Harvard was something that was a bit of a story.

Now to have someone that is -- I guess now I can actually say it -- a Davis Cup champion, is something that hopefully is a story as well and something that I never would have expected and definitely didn't plan for when I went to Harvard, that I would be part of this kind of a team.

**Q. Patrick, could you talk about all the names on that Cup going back to the beginning, Tilden, Arthur Ashe, Jack Kramer, what that means to have your name on that?**

CAPTAIN McENROE: I think it's history. One of the great things with this sport is its history, its traditions, the longevity of the great events like the Slams and like Davis Cup. You see all the old pictures of old players, and you realize how much there is there. I think that's one of the great things about tennis and the sport.

You know, these guys will always have this. We'll always have it. I'll always have it as a captain. That's something that we take a lot of pride in. I mean, it's pretty awesome. We've been through a lot. To get your name on that Cup, I think it's pretty darn special. It's cool.

**Q. Was there any reason Andy didn't play?**

CAPTAIN McENROE: You know, first of all, I feel really strongly that there should be some sort of rule that allows me as a captain to put somebody else in other than the four players.

I spoke to Francesco just briefly about it, you know, right before the ceremony. I feel strongly that when you have players of the caliber of a Mardy Fish, Robby Ginepri, even a Donald Young, that that would be great for people to see. And Bob has been a good soldier in sort of going out there because, based on the rule, I have no other choice.

You know, Andy, there's no reason for him to have to go out there every single dead rubber. I mean, he's done it before. James has done it many times. So I hope that there's some

rule that will allow us to have a little flexibility without taking away from the fact that 12,000 people are there and they paid good money and you want to put on a good show.

So I think I would like to see some middle ground that you could put in a legitimate player that would really take away from the experience and give the fans something to go home with and be happy that they saw.

**Q. Not wanting to do that, do you feel playing a dead day is antiquated?**

CAPTAIN McENROE: I'm not sure it's antiquated. But obviously if they came up with some other system, I think you can make that argument.

I'm just looking at it based on how it is. How it is now, I feel there should be some flexibility for captains from countries that have multiple players. I understand you don't want to put out me to play a dead rubber. Nobody wants to see that.

But we've got basically four players on the bench that are top hundred players, that could go out there. And particularly if it's a young player like Donald Young, I think the crowd would love to see him go out there and play, get him the experience of being out there.

So I'm not really addressing that question. I'm just addressing the stringency of it has to be one of the four players.

**Q. Patrick, is it an impossible dream in this day and age to repeat, especially given that the draw next year for you guys?**

CAPTAIN McENROE: Certainly not impossible to repeat. Look at the Russians. They made the final this year and won it last year. It's hard. It's definitely hard, but it's not impossible.

We just had our first minor conversation about the match in Austria. I was trying not to bring it up at any point this week. You know, it's difficult.

I think obviously when you have countries, you know, like we've seen in the last few years like Croatia, Slovakia, Chile, that can have two really good players, particularly in a home match can be very dangerous.

The difference between being No. 5 and No. 20 is pretty small. I mean, I looked down the list over there. You have Serbia, you have Czech Republic; they're not even in the top 15.

You go to one of those places, no matter who you are, it's going to be a difficult match. Whereas I think in the past, maybe there were

four or five really strong countries. Now you've got a couple of really strong countries that are always in there, but then you've got a lot of other nations that can field a great team, particularly at home.

So I think it's harder now than it's ever been.

**Q. James, was this year a steppingstone, given you beat the Czechs away on clay? If you go to Spain next year in the semifinals, you can say you have a fighting chance this time?**

JAMES BLAKE: Yeah, I think we've always felt that. It's just a matter of this time we executed in Ostrava. I think it helps our confidence to know that we can do that, but I don't think we've ever completely lacked confidence. I think we all believed in Andy. We all believed in the Bryans. Hope they had the same confidence in me.

I definitely didn't play as well as I could have, I didn't think, against Berdych. He played well; beat me. Luckily the other guys were playing well enough and we got the win.

I think going in against the Spaniards, if we were to play them on clay away, I'd have the same feeling I've had before, except now I'd have the memory to look back on as we've already gone through this and we've had a win away on clay and we've held the trophy now, so we feel like we can do that hopefully again.

**Q. James, Bob said earlier that him and Mike are Davis Cup lifers at this point. They could be on the team for another 10 years, who knows. What do you see your commitment like next year, you and Andy? Maybe you have different goals, the Olympics perhaps.**

JAMES BLAKE: The Olympics for me is something I've definitely dreamed of. I missed it in 2004. That's when I was injured. It was a little disheartening to miss it. This time that would be a huge opportunity for me to go to the Olympics in Beijing. I'd be thrilled to be a part of that team.

I'm always thrilled to be a part of the Davis Cup team. I know I got to keep improving to stay on this team, because those guys we have on our bench in terms of Mardy Fish, Robby Ginepri, Donald Young, John Isner, are all more than competent players that can take that spot from me at any time if they keep improving as well.

It's a goal for me to just keep moving forward and keep getting better, and hopefully I'll be able to contribute to this team. I'm 27 now,

but I feel like I hopefully have many years left to be playing at this level. Never know. But I hope I continue to be a factor.

**Q. Patrick, how long can you savor this weekend before you realistically have to start looking at Austria?**

CAPTAIN McENROE: I'm going to start looking at Austria and I'm still going to savor this weekend. I'm going to savor this for the rest of my life. That doesn't change. It's a new year next year, a new challenge. With these guys, as I've said, the journey's been great. We've won this. It's in the books, you know. Our name's going to be on the Cup. That's not going to change.

But certainly the guys now have some time to take a little bit of a break and obviously gear up for Australia. James always plays really well down there. Hopefully he can continue that. The Bryans obviously. Andy's played well there, too. I think it's a good way for them to start. We'll come back and sort of regroup and get ready.

I think a lot of you will be interested, I just got a text message from the man who single-handedly won the Davis Cup for us in '95, Pete Sampras just sent me a text message congratulating the team.

**Q. It's been a great effort by your team over a period of years. Could you reflect on the massive boost given by James to the team on Friday with his singles win?**

CAPTAIN McENROE: Oh, it was huge. It was just huge. Couldn't have been happier with the way James handled the match. You know, he obviously played great, because Youzhny played phenomenal. It was just a great tennis match, a great match to watch.

But James handled the adversity when it came up really, really well. Continued to play his game and be positive out there and go for his shots, and I thought that was the key.

I tell you, the Bryan brothers were pretty pumped up when they were watching it in the hotel. Obviously going into the doubles being up 2-0, we felt pretty confident.

But Andy has lost the first match before I remember one year against Romania; James came through in the second match. It's just a team effort. I feel really good about the fact that when I look back on this year, they all played a huge part.

James, to get that win here, obviously Andy getting the win was huge, too. In

retrospect, to have each guy get one of those points right off the bat was a great accomplishment.

**Q. Will you support some changes to the format of the Davis Cup, more specifically playing it every other year?**

CAPTAIN McENROE: I would support that, yeah.

**Q. And on a level field surface like maybe a hard court slower to keep it level for everybody? Would you see it coming in our era?**

CAPTAIN McENROE: Let me take the last one first. No, I don't see it coming because our friends at the ITF are pretty stubborn about it.

Now, obviously, as we've seen, the Davis Cup is a tremendous event and we all love it. It's great as it is. I think it could be even better if it were, say, every other year or played over the course of maybe a few weeks, over a season-based thing.

I think the concept of switching a surface is a good concept if it can be organized. I don't think it has to be the same surface. I can see it being -- I still like the home and away aspect of Davis Cup. I think that's really part of its charm.

But if you had, say, a final four, like some people have talked about, where maybe it was one surface for that, maybe it rotated every couple years, maybe you had the four Grand Slam surfaces, something like that.

But I think the fact we're all speculating about it, which we've done for years, and none of us have been able to really come up with a definitive, Here is what we should do. I think that's why the ITF continues.

When you see the matches we've had here, when you see us going to Spain and having 27,000 people, when we played in France, it was Roland Garros, standing room only for three days. There's a lot that's right about it. There's a lot that's great about it. I think we should not lose focus of that.

**Q. Did you hear from John, and can you share a little bit of what he might have said to you?**

CAPTAIN McENROE: You know, I just got some text messages from him. He's thrilled, obviously, for us. He knows how much time and effort I've put into it, how much these guys have put into it, because, you know, no one put more of that than himself into playing Davis Cup. His passion as a player was really second to none.

I'm sure we'll sort of talk more when I get home. I think he's just trying to let me have our moment and my moment. That's nice of him. Obviously, people talk about the comparisons of me and him, whatever.

But I think he knows, you know, it's a great moment for us, for me and for these guys. He likes us to be able to have that.

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