

Miami Open presented by Itaú

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John Isner

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon. We have our 2018 Miami Open champion, John Isner.

We'll take questions.

Q. Can you talk a little bit about what it feels like to be back in Miami. Obviously you've won that tournament, but it must have a much different feel.

JOHN ISNER: Yeah, well, for sure, I mean, of course good memories at this tournament. 2018 in Crandon Park, then very good memories in 2019 as well, here the first year at the Hard Rock Stadium.

I've always liked playing here. It's good to be back. It's been a two-year break, which has been unfortunate for us players. It's also unfortunate that we don't have the great Miami fans back in full force. But next year we will have that.

Everything has been different in tennis, in all sports really. At least we do have some fans in the stands this year to provide a pretty neat little atmosphere. The players are going to be looking forward to playing in front of them.

Q. Do you find you miss the fans or sometimes maybe it's even easier without them, almost like a practice situation?

JOHN ISNER: Yeah, I guess it does make things easier, maybe a little more seamless. You're not kind of walking through them to get to your practice court or whatnot.

But we all would trade that in a heartbeat to have them back, be able to provide the great atmospheres we're used to playing in front of.

Q. Some of the players have talked a little bit about some of the things they've done to try to make it enjoyable for you guys, even though obviously the fan energy isn't there. We're not allowed inside the stadium, I am here, but what have they done with the field? I heard you guys have a lot more space to work out there, they have some soccer fields, outdoor workout things. Can you define what the player

experience is now compared to normal?

JOHN ISNER: Yeah, that's a good question.

In 2019 the player experience just being at the Hard Rock for the first time ever, the amount of room the players had to warm up and to stretch and to do what they wanted to do, to be on the field to warm up, it was incredible. Even more so this year because, as we all know, the big center court is not built into the stadium right now.

The whole football field is ours, so it's pretty cool to go out there and throw the football around, run some routes, pretend like you're playing in the NFL (smiling).

No, the player experience here has been excellent. They've done a very good job. James Blake has done an amazing job of providing an awesome experience for the players. We have lots of room and lots of fun things to do. The players are happy to be here. It's just good to be back at one of the mainstays of the ATP and WTA Tour: Miami. We all missed it last year.

Q. Who are you running routes with? Are you the quarterback or receiver?

JOHN ISNER: I'm a quarterback because I'm slow. But, no, Sam Querrey, Stevie Johnson, people like that. Mostly the American guys. We're not the ones kicking the soccer ball around, that's for sure.

Q. What do you think about the prize money for this tournament? I've heard some say to me they feel like maybe the tournament could have made more of an effort on that front. What is your view?

JOHN ISNER: They could have made more of an effort to make it better, you're saying?

Q. Yes, that they're disappointed with it.

JOHN ISNER: Look, yeah, it's not what we've been accustomed to. At the same time we know that tournaments in the past year don't have the ticketing revenue that they're used to having. Of course, our prize money is going to take a hit because of that, too. To dig



into why it's lower, I don't really have all those details.

I think for some of the players, it's not so much about the prize money. We don't really want to make it about that. Maybe it's about tour structure that the players would like to have a little bit more, I guess, better knowledge of as to why decisions are made, what went into making each decision.

Again, it's really not about the money. Of course, we would prefer to be playing for a bigger purse. There's just a little bit of uncertainty about how those numbers came into play, why the prize money is what it is.

Again, look, we're all here to play and to compete, and we're happy to be here.

Q. Your answer has a little bit different tone than I sort of expected from the tweets you put out before the tournament, kind of ripping the tournament for not having more prize money, thinking they had more money on offer than they were giving you guys. Has your opinion changed? Have you found out more information recently? And then you talk about guys being happy to be there. 31 of the top 100 ATP guys are not at this event. What do you make of that situation?

JOHN ISNER: I'll get to answering the previous question.

It's really not the about the prize money. It's about the system. I think my tweet that you're referring to, that's what I was referring to, not so much about the prize money. It's about the system of the ATP and why the decisions are made and what goes into the prize money being so low. It's not about the actual prize money itself.

As I mentioned earlier, of course, we would like to be playing for more, but we understand with the loss of ticketing revenue, our purses are going to go down. But there are some players that have questions about why it was down so much. The tour has implemented a strategy that is keeping the lower rounds pretty similar. The prize money in the quarters, semis and finals, has been chopped quite a bit. The top players in our game have taken a big hit as far as the prize money is concerned recently.

Look, there's always going to be some things that players are unhappy about. I do think recently the players have felt like the tour has been more transparent with them. We're trying to understand the process a bit more.

Again, as I said, we're here. Of course, we'd like to be playing for more prize money. There's a lot worse things going on out there in the world. Again, my tweet is about

the system, not about the prize money at all.

Q. Why do you think the men's players have objected so much compared to the women? The women, it's pretty much all hands on deck. Why do you think the men have been so much crabbier about this?

JOHN ISNER: It's an unfortunate situation the tour is in right now with no Indian Wells. You don't have these back-to-back events. It's gone to kind of one standalone Masters event in America. So for the top players in Europe, I guess it's understandable. Maybe in the current climate we're in, it doesn't fit their schedule too well with Rafa and Roger and Novak and Thiem, all the guys that are out. You said 31 of the top 100.

I guess it's a big commitment to come over here for just one tournament, then immediately to go back over to Europe. For the older guys, the three I mentioned, the three greatest players we've ever seen, probably doesn't make sense for them. That's probably because there's no Indian Wells before this event.

The calendar has taken a big hit has well. We know that. I think the main reason why players aren't here is because this is just a standalone event. It's not necessarily about the prize money. It's just more of a scheduling conflict.

Q. Since we last had a chance to speak to you, Wimbledon have announced that they're going to be putting all players compulsorily in a hotel probably in the center of London. I imagine someone like yourself, I know you have a family now, you've probably enjoyed staying close to the courts in private accommodation for your career there. Just wondering what your feelings are about that? As a guy with a family, has it been a topic of conversation?

JOHN ISNER: Yeah, that's a good question. That's something that I guess was announced pretty recently. I guess, very unfortunate. I think a lot of players, myself included, would much prefer to stay closer to the courts and rent a house, especially with my family also. This year at Wimbledon doesn't look like that's going to be the case.

That's their decision. They want to keep everyone safe that way, keep the tournament running smoothly. So you can't fault them for that.

There are a lot of players that, of course, would much prefer to stay in private housing. That's one of the unique things about Wimbledon, is you can rent a house and walk to the courts, play your match, walk back. It's very, very cool. It won't have that same feel this year.

But hopefully, of course, that's just going to be the case in 2021. If I'm still going in 2022, I'll be back at Wimbledon with my family having a good time in a house.

Q. There's been a lot of discussions generally this week around the whole sort of bubble in Miami as well. Has it been a topic of conversation?

JOHN ISNER: Yeah, it has. The bubble environment I think for all professional tennis players, men and women alike, has been very difficult. I'm one that's I guess been shielded from it because I haven't played as much. I wasn't in Australia to be a part of that bubble, which was very, very taxing on the players from what I hear. Mentally more so than physically.

It's tough traveling the world. I guess in one sense, we are pretty spoiled. We get to travel the world, go to these amazing cities, leave the hotel, eat at amazing restaurants, see all the sights. We haven't been able to do that. We understand why.

As the situation seems to be getting better around the world, there are some questions about can the bubble environment be lessened a little bit, can the players have a little bit more freedom. I would like to have the responsibility, in my opinion, fall on the players to be careful and take care of themselves.

From what I know right now, the PGA TOUR doesn't have a bubble environment. Maybe it's not something you completely get rid of the bubble whatsoever, but I guess you could lessen some of the restrictions we're under right now. I think that would go a long way in helping the psyche of the players.

Q. Could I clarify there. Are you saying some players you feel might choose not to play Wimbledon this year because of the accommodation arrangement?

JOHN ISNER: No, no. I didn't say that. If I did, I apologize. I don't believe I said that. I think maybe you misinterpreted me. That's not what I said.

I just think players would prefer, a lot of players, to be at private housing closer to the courts. Myself, I've probably played Wimbledon 12 times. I've never stayed at a hotel before. It's kind of what a lot of players are used to.

Q. It seems that the talk about the tour setup in general is ramping up. I've been hearing there's chat behind the scenes about it. Do you think we might reach a point soon where something happens? How long can talking go on for?

JOHN ISNER: I don't know what you're referring to as far as 'something'.

Q. Something more concrete rather than just discussions.

JOHN ISNER: Well, look, we all know that the PTPA is trying to get underway. Maybe it's a bit of a slow rollout. I think the purpose behind it is still good. A lot of players, maybe a lot of people at the ATP (indiscernible) agree with me.

That's something that is still in the process for sure. It's something that I'm a part of, as well. I think ultimately it could be healthy for the tour. Some people would definitely disagree with me.

Look, nothing drastic or anything like that is going to happen. Players aren't all of a sudden going to stop playing. We've certainly had a lot of questions. I think the pandemic has maybe highlighted some of the issues that for a long time players have had issue with.

Q. Back in January 2020 you said that you were leaning towards not playing in the 2020 Olympics. Obviously a lot has happened since then. What are your thoughts on the 2021 Olympics? Have you made a final decision on that?

JOHN ISNER: Yeah, I was in 2020 going to not play the Olympics. Given everything that's gone on, that option was, again, presented to me. But I'm not going to play the Olympics in 2021 this year. I'm going to stay closer to home and be with my family and focus on the events that will be back stateside.

Q. We spoke in Delray when you made your announcement you weren't going to Australia. With all the stories of the quarantine, some players having to be 14 days in a hotel without leaving, how happy are you with that decision to stay in a free country in the US? If you had been 14 days in a room, how do you think your body would have held up after that?

JOHN ISNER: Good question.

I do think I ultimately made a good decision because everything that had gone on the first two weeks for even the players that weren't in the hard quarantine, there were still some issues, a bunch of guys and girls that couldn't get out of the rooms for a couple days. I certainly did not miss any of that. That's for sure.

But, of course, once the Australian Open started, I wished I was over there. The decision I made I think was a good

one, one that I thought long and hard about. Hopefully I'll be back next year under normal circumstances.

If I had to endure the 14-day quarantine, I know so many people around the world have done it, any citizen that wants to come back to Australia has done it, but for an athlete, especially a bigger athlete like myself, we need a lot more space. I think that would have been pretty difficult for me. It would have taken its toll on my body for sure. Naturally being so big, I feel like I need a lot of space to go around and breathe the air or whatnot. If I was in that situation, that would have been a tough pill for me to swallow, would have been pretty difficult.

Look, a lot of the players endured it. Some handled it very well. I know Jennifer Brady made the finals after a two-week hard lockdown. Some didn't, and that's understandable for sure.

Q. I'll actually ask you a tennis question. How are you feeling physically and mentally going into the tournament?

JOHN ISNER: Yeah, I actually feel all right. I was able to play Acapulco last week and play a couple matches. One was good, one was not so good. To be able to get a couple matches before this tournament under my belt was pretty crucial because I haven't played that much in the last year. It's been a year since the tour shut down. It's good also to be back in Miami, a place where I've had very good experiences before.

I wouldn't say probably this is the best I've ever played, but hopefully I can get this tournament started and try to create some momentum for myself and see what I can do.

Physically I'm healthy. Mentally I feel pretty fresh. I'll just need to try to get off to a good start and see what I can do from there.

Q. What is going to be your schedule after Miami? Heading over to Europe?

JOHN ISNER: Yeah, I mean, I plan on playing the clay court stuff. I missed the clay court season in 2019. Yeah, I want to go over there and be a part of that. I entered Monte-Carlo and Madrid and Rome. Of course, I'll play the French Open. I'll probably be doing the thing if I go to Monte-Carlo, I'll come back home, Madrid and Rome, maybe come back home again. I don't want to spend too much time over there away from the family.

I do plan on playing a pretty full clay court season. I'll take my shot at the big events and see how I do.

Q. With the women showing up more to Miami than the men, you said like there's only one event in the States, the women have Charleston and the second Charleston event. Do you think the tour could have done more stuff, consolidating events geographically, events in the same venue or close by, to be more pandemic friendly? There has been not a lot of that on the calendar except for the Melbourne warmup events.

JOHN ISNER: No, I do feel like they could have made that easier on the players. But again, I don't know the ins-and-outs of all that. I don't know the financial repercussions of keeping all the players in one area.

It seems like players would have appreciated it a little bit as well, had we had a cluster of events in one specific area instead of traveling all over the world.

One of the big issues is we're always at risk of contracting the virus, being in a two-week lockdown in a city far away from home. That's a risk that a lot of players have been willing to take. To do that in an environment where the money is much less I guess is very risky on our part. Players have had to endure that before. That's certainly unfortunate.

But again, I just can't speak as to why it wasn't done because I don't know about all those discussions behind closed doors. I just don't. So I think it's not that our leadership is trying to sabotage our sport by any means. They're trying to do the best they can for our sport. Some players just naturally have questions about that.

But, look, I guess the most important thing is that we still do believe in our product on the ATP Tour. I know the WTA believes in their product as well. This all will eventually pass and things will become normal again, and things in our sport will be in a lot better shape.

Q. Have you gotten vaccinated? Are you planning on doing that?

JOHN ISNER: No, I haven't gotten vaccinated. I haven't thought about it. I think maybe I should be last in line to get vaccinated. Most important is that of course anyone at risk and older gets vaccinated before I do. I'm not in any hurry to get that done, that's for sure.

Q. What is it like being at a tournament without Roger and Novak and Rafa?

JOHN ISNER: Yeah, probably it's never happened much at all in the last 12 years, 13 years or something. It's definitely got a different feel to it.

But if you look at the draw itself, our tour on the men's side is so deep. There's so many good players, so many good unseeded players, so many good matches out on these courts. In a sense, it's a good litmus test as to how people perceive this event without those three guys, because of course they won't be playing forever.

I think it's a unique opportunity for a lot of players to try to do well in this event without them in the field. It's also a unique opportunity to be able to showcase all the players that aren't Roger, Rafa and Novak.

We're looking forward to a great event here. Hopefully fans at home will tune in as much as they possibly can and hopefully they enjoy.

Q. You mentioned having the players sort of be more responsible for themselves. Do you have the full trust of your fellow players that they would act responsibly? You're older, have a family. You have 21-year-olds, 22-year-olds on this tour. They may have different interests than you do.

JOHN ISNER: I don't think it's a situation where we can just completely release the bubble, but just kind of make it easier on players. I think we would appreciate that.

To a certain extent, you do have to have some faith in your colleagues that they're going to be smart about what they're doing to keep everyone safe, to try to prevent the spread of this virus. As it seems to be arresting more and more in the States, I think that's something that definitely needs to be discussed. The players certainly would appreciate that.

When you look at it in our country as a whole, a state like Florida hasn't been under the most harsh lockdown, that's for sure, compared to other states, and Florida is still in pretty good shape as far as the virus goes.

I think if you kind of have faith in your, for my case, colleagues, I think that will help our mental state better, help a lot of the guys' mental state better, and we'll be able to put forth a better product as well.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

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