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An Interview With:

ANDRE AGASSI

THE MODERATOR: We are joined today by Andre Agassi, who we are thrilled to have back in the league. Andre first played for World TeamTennis in 2002 through 2004 with the Sacramento Capitals, and this year he will be playing for the Philadelphia Freedoms owned by Billie Jean King. He will be playing two matches this season, one on July 10 in Philadelphia against the Boston Lobsters and again on July 17 on the road in Newport Beach.

So Andre, welcome back, we are thrilled to have you back in the league.

ANDRE AGASSI: Great to be back.

THE MODERATOR: Good way to start off our 34th season. Let's get started and turn it over to questions.

Q. This is really great news that you'll be playing World TeamTennis, and I'm just wondering if you can sort of put this in perspective to sort of your whole life, because it sounds like you get to participate in tennis, but you also get to carry out things that you care about like your school and stuff. So can you talk about how the World TeamTennis matches, what it means in your lifestyle today?

ANDRE AGASSI: Sure. First of all, it's been a few years since I've sort of been connected with the game in any direct kind of way, and that's been a little unsettling for me. I took time away when I retired to try to figure out how I can best engage with the game and do it in a way that made the most sense or where I could possibly have some more impact. And that has not been so easy with all of my responsibilities to sort of figure out.

So before I got too far away, I wanted to sort of re engage in certain respects and show an appreciation for the life and the platform that tennis has given me, and I thought no better way to sort of inject myself back into World TeamTennis. I love what Billie (Jean King, WTT co-founder) and Ilana (Kloss, WTT CEO/Commissioner) have built.

I think it's a great asset to the game and I think an even greater asset to the tennis fans, taking this sport to the people is a great feeling. The environment is unlike any other, and it's just a lot of fun.

So I thought it would be maybe an easy way to sort of introduce my body again to it. It's not like I have to be out there for so many hours. A couple goes and have some fun doing it.

Q. Could you reflect on your return to Paris, a pretty special moment given what you achieved on that court, and also being there next to Roger after he got that magic number 14.

ANDRE AGASSI: Yeah, well, he got the magic number French Open. The quantity has less relevance with where he found himself that day than getting over the line in Paris and winning in a tournament that's eluded him for his career, and a career that he could have won I think five or six times. I mean, pretty amazing to watch him get over that line there.

And I had even a more interesting perspective, seeing that while I was there one year doing that, watching it sort of over his shoulder really drives home just how rare these moments are and how special they are, and to share in it meant the world.

I just really think the guy deserved it. He's earned it. He's been playing clay for the last five years, if it wasn't for Nadal, he probably would have won five of those things and arguably won two Grand Slams back-to-back, the stats sort of speak for themselves.

For him not to have won there in his career would have been a real crime.

Q. Where do you feel when you see people starting to compare the greatest of all times from the different eras? Do you think that's possible or do you think it's hard to take a Laver and compare them to a Sampras and Federer and yourself and Connors, etc.?

ANDRE AGASSI: Yeah, I suppose it's hard to do. Obviously it's hard to do, but you know, you can look inside generations and sort of

the best of their generations, but I guess stats are one thing that people are pointing towards. I sort of caution everybody (not) to get hung up on the number of slams. That seems to be a 90s phenomena, how many slams you win.

I mean, when you look back over the history of our game and you look over the history of our peers, champions from generations past, that was never a benchmark. Borg won 11 Grand Slams and played one Australian Open when it was played on grass and he dominated grass for so many years.

So I mean, Borg was sort of breaking Emerson's record and doesn't seem like that would have been that far of a reach to go pull that off. Nobody sort of considered Laver better than Emerson, even though Emerson had more Slams.

So I'm not sure what the criteria should be of how you measure the greatest of all time, but we should at least acknowledge that using a quantity of Slams is not -- has never been the benchmark.

So with Roger winning in Paris, I think the greatest thing that he accomplished was obviously rising to the top of just how many he's won, which is pretty amazing, but beyond that, you know, being a dominant player every part of the year is a testament to his overall achievements and so it's hard to argue against somebody that's accomplished what he has.

What's your take on that?

Q. Well, it's funny, it's almost like baseball. Baseball has always been a game where people love numbers and are infatuated with numbers, and you love to think that you can compare a Babe Ruth with a Barry Bonds or something like that, and I think people want to do that in tennis, too, but as you say, so many things have changed. The services have changed over the years, and it is hard to do. But it makes for some good conversations. Are you still in good tennis shape? How do you take these kind of matches?

ANDRE AGASSI: I take pride generally speaking, so I'll get ready for them and sort of am in good shape. My shape off the court is a lot better probably than on the court. You never quite know what you're going to put your body through. So the injury will be out how I respond to it.

Because yeah, I've been working out quite a bit, keeping myself together and active. So hitting the ball was always relatively comfortable for me, so I won't have a problem with my ball-striking. But I might have a problem getting to

the ball in order to hit it; that, we'll have to wait and see.

Q. Do you take these matches fairly competitive, or is it more just to go out and fun?

ANDRE AGASSI: Well, typically in years past, you want to go out there and have fun and all that, and then you start to realize that you have a team that really is caring about this and you have a league that really takes pride in the competitiveness of it. So you always find yourself being more competitive than you anticipated.

I step up there to have a good time and to engage with the people, but sometimes the best way to do that is to focus more on your job. So I will take it seriously.

Q. You played in the WTT before. I'm just wondering what your thoughts are about the blaring music, cheering during points and the whole atmosphere that surrounds it, and how you've enjoyed it and what you anticipate with that.

ANDRE AGASSI: Those are the sights and sounds I always hear in my head, anyhow, so may as well let everyone else see and hear what's going on.

I think it's a great format for both the players and the crowd. I mean, certainly it's a grinding season, so to take current, active players and stick them in another environment where they have to be out there for a number of hours and they can sort of pass the ball, if you will, or sub or take their breaks.

So it's a great environment for the players to engage, get aggressive and then be able to sort of unplug and allow somebody else to kick in. And I think that versatility allows for a great experience for the crowd. You get to see single, men's, women's, doubles, mixed; it's hard to get bored watching, that's for sure.

And I think just the bits and pieces that allow for some excitement, whether it's playing the lets or whether it's being able to substitute or whether it's not having to be quiet and getting interaction, interactiveness that it provides with the crowd; it's a great day out. I mean, we are playing in Philadelphia, if I am not mistaken, in a shopping center parking lot. So that sort of speaks to how raw it all is, and tennis should be embraced on that level.

Q. And can you talk about, you're playing with the Philadelphia Freedoms, so your relationship with Billie Jean King and did that motivate you to come back for her, or just what it's been with her.

ANDRE AGASSI: Yeah, it did. She came out to Vegas and took the time, along with Ilana, to figure out ways to stay engaged. She asked if I would ever be interested in helping what they have given so much of their lives to this year.

I mean, how do you say no to Billie? I mean, it's almost impossible. The respect I have for what she's meant to not just tennis, not just sports, but what she has meant to the entire civilization of people. She's changed the face of sports. She's given anybody that has a daughter a chance at a life in sports. So I have so much appreciation for what her visions are, and so I just couldn't say no, and I said, well, consider me available to help and just let me know how you think I can do it most effectively.

She wanted me to come play there, and I said yes.

Q. You've played at the Spectrum, and this is outside of Philadelphia, but what are your recollections, if any, about the Spectrum and the Philadelphia fans who are known for their kind of tough demeanor, attitude; have you had any reflections on Philadelphia?

ANDRE AGASSI: You know, they were definitely a supportive crowd, and "supportive" meaning whatever they are supporting, you are going to hear it.

But the environment that was played at the Spectrum sort of spoke to that kind of intensity. It was like there were gladiators out there or something, you had two courts, side-by-side action going on; you felt like if somebody hit a wide serve on one court, and another person hit a wide serve on another court, you could actually run into each other. It was pretty distracting. There was a depth perception issue and sound issue and the crowd was pretty into it.

I remember it being one of those environments where you had to grow up fast and learn what makes you be a good tennis player. It's not your ability to hit a tennis ball, but it's your ability to focus and concentrate. It's a lot of lessons learned out there.

Q. Any chance of getting Steffi out there or what's the state of her game?



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ANDRE AGASSI: Yeah, you know, she's in better shape than I'm in. I don't know if you saw her play at the Wimbledon thing, the Wimbledon celebration for the roof that we did. She still moves great and does her thing, but I have to say, it comes with a lot of stress for her getting ready. She takes a lot of pride in being ready, and she's always on the verge of feeling like her body is not going to hold up.

So I'm glad that I can live without her getting ready to do this because she's a great mother, and I sort of enjoy the way our family is a well-oiled machine when she's not thinking about tennis. But she loves hitting the ball and every now and then, she would take advantage out of getting out there if the opportunity presented.

Q. The last time you were together was in the French or an exhibition there?

ANDRE AGASSI: No, we did on May 17, they did the celebration to the roof at the Centre Court at Wimbledon. So they sold 15,000 seats in a few minutes and I went out there and I played Henman and she played Clijsters, and there was a mixed (doubles) and some music and it was a celebration day.

Q. Of all of the titles that you have won in your career, which has been the most special to you, and why?

ANDRE AGASSI: That would be the French, and I would say that just because where it sort of fell in my life and in my accomplishments. It was, first of all, it was the last of the four Grand Slams for me to win. It was the one that had eluded me for about ten years. Add to that the fact that it was probably the first one that I could have won, arguably should have won; I was in the finals twice and favored in both matches and just never found a way to get over the line and then clay became sort of like my worst surface.

Plus I was coming off being ranked 140 in the world and making my way back to the top. So I had a whole different set of values and appreciations as it related to the sport that I almost threw away. And I was about 60 days removed off a divorce in my life, and so personally I was going through a pretty emotional place, emotional feelings and trying to reorganize my life, as well.

And so there's just a lot of reasons to just not believe that you can do something like that. And then when the opportunity presented itself, I

was down two sets to love and sort of that final match became a bit of a microcosm for the whole story, really and I found a way to just fight through it and to get over that line. I don't think my life or my career was the same after that.

Q. And what advice do you have for others who are interested in following your footsteps or career in sports?

ANDRE AGASSI: Don't. (Laughter) You know, my advice is just to try to make yourself a day better, every day, and build on that momentum and allow that to exist, and not just in sport, but allow that to exist in your life as a son, as a brother, as a student. Just whatever you do, just always ask yourself for that little bit extra, because that's where you really get to know who you are.

Q. How would you describe the game of tennis in America and are you pleased with it?

ANDRE AGASSI: Well, I think we are a pretty spoiled generation. You know, right now looking back over many decades of having the best players in the world, and we don't at the moment. But it's a huge -- it's a huge market for our sport. I mean, globally speaking, our sport is improving. It's getting better. It's getting bigger and going in the right direction. But until you can captivate sort of the imagination of the American people, it seems like there's always -- it just lags a little bit more than it should.

You know, I have such an appreciation for what's required to get the job done out there, and such an appreciation for the fact that there's so many across this planet that are focused on tennis and have pushed the sport to unspeakable heights as it relates to skills.

And so I don't -- it's easy to say we should have more players at the top, but it's another thing to figure out away to do it. Certainly it all starts with the grass roots and getting the players and the racquet in more players' hands is what you want to do, which is one reason why I love the WTT and what it is that they are doing. I think it gets young kids, more kids a chance to pick up a racquet and get involved in the game.

As of right now we are just looking at Roddick and James and Mardy is doing a little bit better, but it just feels like there's a hump that we can't quite get over at the moment. Who knows, we might see it at this tournament with Andy, but it's been a long time since he's won and it's a surface he's likes. Nadal is not in, and he has

what seems to be a clear path deep in the second week, so let's just hope for the best.

Q. Can you talk a little bit about fatherhood and if you're teaching your kids to play tennis or what's going on with them sports-wise?

ANDRE AGASSI: My daughter plays about three or four times a week with my dad and we'll take her out on the weekend and stuff and she'll get lessons a couple of times a week, as well.

You know, it's a great sport. There's no question it teaches you a lot about yourself and it's a healthy way to live. I can't honestly say I want either of them to make it a career but my son is way into baseball, so that's where his athletics focus is.

I guess overall, you know, I like my kids pushing themselves to be better. Like them getting out there and not letting the team down and not letting their own expectations down by pushing themselves. They see the way we live. Whatever we do we are pretty focused on. So when we have an hour tennis lesson, that's what we are doing, and I think you start to notice it in their behaviors, for sure.

Q. You talked a little bit about engaging yourself in tennis and how it wasn't really easy to figure out what to do. How about the rest of your life? I know that you were into some business ventures. Are you still testing the waters, or do you feel like you've found the right niche for you?

ANDRE AGASSI: Well, I don't know what you mean by "niche."

I have a luxury in life that tennis has provided to spend my time with the things that I want to be doing, starting with my family and then shortly behind that, my foundation and the challenges that I've had with my school and hopefully getting people's awareness on the importance of education and the crisis that it really is, and hopefully we'll figure out what to do about it. That's a huge focal point for me.

We have business ventures and we have different things that we sort of enjoy and dabble with that have grown out of organic relationships and those I enjoy, as well. You know, tennis was a bit of a missing piece. It's a sport that I've played my whole life and there are people that I've known

my whole life, and there's things that still can be done in it. So you know, to connect back to tennis wasn't sort of a reaction; it's more of a proactive desire.

Q. Since we are talking about a team sport, I thought would I ask you about the teams that the individual players on the tour are forming around them, or it's really become sort of an established thing, and you were one of the first players, I would say, who sort of visibly traveled with a team, a coach, a trainer. Especially the second part of your career you seemed to have a very strong supportive posse around you. What do you think the implications are for the modern player? It's a great boon on one hand, and also probably costs a lot. What are the pros and cons of having that team approach now to individual travel on the tour?

ANDRE AGASSI: Speaking generically, I should say speaking sort of across the board, I would say make an assumption that you have the right people around you, I think it's a great asset.

Tennis is all-consuming and it's a very lonely sport, and it's a sport where the more support that you have, the easier it is for you to focus on the one thing that you have to always be focused on, which is your game, your rest, your body, physically you're emotional. It's you out there. You can't pass the ball. You don't have a team, unless you organize it yourself.

And for me, it was vital because I just -- I needed it and I wanted somebody focused on my game so that I didn't feel alone; and the decisions I was making with my game, I needed somebody focused on my body and my physicality; and I needed somebody to take care of a lot of extracurricular stuff that I just would have considered a huge distraction as it related to businesses or people sort of pulling at you one way or another. You just have to cocoon yourself in some respects.

I think certain mind-sets, certain dispositions have the ability to do that in different ways. I'm not -- it's not so easy for me to multi-task. It's not so easy for me to not worry about things. I'm a worrier by nature and I want to tend to everything, but was pretty limited during my career on how to do that.

So my team was crucial for me. And as far as economics of it goes, sure, it's expensive. There's a lot of ways that you have to invest in yourself on the Tour, and sometimes that means

extra expenses and sometimes that means not playing tournaments and using the time to invest back in your body and your mind. There's a lot of decisions that you have to make that have real ramifications.

But ultimately, you have to prioritize your goals and make sure every decision you are making is leading you closer to that.

Q. One other question about another wonderful comment from a prominent player who also played World Team Tennis. Monica Seles is going to be inducted into the Hall of Fame this summer. Obviously she has a long history with your wife. I just wondered what your thoughts are on her career and how do you look at her career and how do you think tennis history should look at her career?

ANDRE AGASSI: Well, you know, I grew up with Monica. I've known her since she was probably ten years old at the academy. I always marvelled at her game. I marvelled more at her discipline and fighting spirit. Watching her grow up and becoming one of the best ever is a great journey to go on from my perspective.

It was sort of tragic what sort of interfered in the prime of her career. Really I think we would have seen much greater things had she not had to endure what she went through in Hamburg on the court. As a result of that, I think all players are left with that aftermath. We are all aware of the exposures out there. I think security across the world are tending to those possibilities more and in a sense she's made us better and she's added to all of us in our own little way.

I know the game pretty darned well, and I would argue that she would be one of the best of all time had she continued on the path she was. She was disciplined enough and she was focussed enough and she certainly hit the ball, had enough shots to leave that kind of mark.

But just never know. It's sad. It couldn't have happened to a nicer person, as well. I think she's one of the sweetest people I've known out there.

Q. When did you and Billie Jean meet in Vegas, do you remember how far back that was?

ANDRE AGASSI: Oh, my God, I feel like I'm in a deposition all of a sudden.

No, I don't remember. It was probably -- I

put it on January.

Q. Okay. Just trying to get a time line in my head as to how this all came good. And working with Gil again, what's that been like, getting yourself back in shape? Has it brought back good memories?

ANDRE AGASSI: That's part of my hidden agenda was to play tennis so I could spend more time with Gil. We are so close and we spend so much time together separate from that. But to sort of do it together and watch him help me make these small decisions now in my life physically is a joy. He's great at what he does. It brings back so many memories. We lived it. We feel like we have given our lives to each other.

Q. Your back is fine, just like you told me a few weeks ago?

ANDRE AGASSI: It's fine on my terms. I haven't actually gone out there and just ran around for three hours, so I can't say how it would be in that case but from my terms it's fine.

Q. Fortunately you won't have to do that in this format.

ANDRE AGASSI: That's right.

Q. Going back to World TeamTennis for a second, I was hoping you could talk about the interaction between the veteran players and the up-and-comers of World TeamTennis, yourself and Venus and an up-and-comer like Madison Keys on your team. How nice is it to see the combining of those, the future and the present?

ANDRE AGASSI: It's a great question. It's one of the points that was missed when I was celebrating all of the things I love about World TeamTennis. First of all, I think to have that interaction of the generations, whether it's from the legends to the current players to the up-and-comers, I think it's so, so good for the crowd. The crowd enjoys that spectrum of player and those contributions to the game.

But also, too, as it just relates to the youngster moving through, there's just something to be said for them to see how a profession is done up close and personal, and they are learning in ways that they don't even realize they are learning. And I think that's what so many of these other federations, whether it be the French Federation or Spanish Federation. I think what they do so well is they get these young kids out on the road with the

successful ones and they have become the hitting partners and they are out there understanding what the pace of the ball really looks like, what bar they have to clear to really succeed.

And so I think it's great for the youngsters to be a part of this for their own development, and I think it's great for somebody in my position, because I look at them and I think, my God, you have such a long road ahead of you. And that always helps me feel better about where I am at in life.

Q. I wanted to circle back quickly to an earlier question. People love to debate whether it's baseball or tennis who is the greatest ever, and of course the attention on Federer and Sampras. From your opinion from a player's perspective, who do you think has been the greatest ever and can you give me some specific reasons to support that.

ANDRE AGASSI: Well, sure. I tell you what I can speak to, is those I've competed against. I can't put Rod Laver into context what he did; in some respects is God-like. I don't know how you can win four in one year and then not play for four years and then do it again four years later.

But I'll make sort of a couple points here. I'll start with the answer, and it's what I said after I lost to Federer in the finals of the US Open. I said I've never played anybody better. This is the best player that I've ever competed against, and it might have seemed like a reach to say it at the time, because it's easy to get hung up on numbers.

But I was speaking specifically from just places on the court that you can't hide. I mean, there's no safe zone with him. He can hurt you from any part of the court. A great champion tends to have one or two strengths, about you one shot for sure that transcends everybody else, we saw that with Pete and his serve.

Federer at the peak of his career had maybe three or four departments of his game that you could argue individually and separately are the best in the world, whether it was his movement or whether it was his forehand or whether it was his court sense; his ability to bring three or four major weapons to the table, and not really have a weakness, I had never seen it before.

As it relates to just historically speaking, how you sort of try to understand this in context of accomplishment, we have never been a sport that has measured itself by quantity. It's never -- it's

not how we've done it. I mean, when you look historically in the game, you are looking at Roy Emerson was never really considered better than Rod Laver. The reasons were, Rod didn't play a number of years and whatever as risks were used, nobody ever considered Emerson better than Laver or quit the game at nearly 26 years old with 11 Grand Slams and had only played one Australian Open, which was played on grass, which was a surface he dominated. So the benchmark for all our peers historically had never been how many can I win.

Now that Federer won in Paris, we tend to say, well, he's tied Pete. That's great. That's an amazing accomplishment to accomplish what Pete did. It's an amazing accomplishment to tie the quantity. But what happened in Paris that made it so special was he found a way to get over the line in a tournament that had eluded him throughout his career, and he's been the best clay-courter, best clay-courter besides one player over the last five years.

So this is a guy that technically had dominated in every surface, and if it wasn't for Nadal would have won five French Opens. So any way you size it up, his career now speaks to what it is I believe he earned from me a long time ago, which was the right to say that this guy is certainly in the open era unmatched in accomplishments.

Q. Some athletes take retirement different ways. As your career developed, you had a lot of face time, endorsing a lot of things and so forth, and I'm sure there's still some of that out there, but I guess I was just kind of surprised by you being in retirement and really truly getting away from the spotlight quite a bit. Is that intentional on your part or something that you knew all along it was going to happen?

ANDRE AGASSI: Get away from the spotlight, can you help me understand --

Q. I guess with endorsements, with TV time, appearances and so forth.

ANDRE AGASSI: Yeah, sure. Well, listen, tennis gave me the platform to be able to basically have a life of my choosing. And when I retired from the game, that's exactly what I did. I started to choose my priorities. Certainly my family was right there. There was a liberation to me after retirement where I didn't have to worry about my body, I didn't have to worry about the diagram as. I used to consider myself a moody person, and I

realized tennis was moody. It felt great to be normal or to live a normal life, should I say.

However, it also gave me the platform to focus on my foundation and my school here in Vegas and awareness to the educational needs across our countries. So my sleeves have been rolled up in the things I care about. I never necessarily cared about how many people saw what I did. I just cared about what it is I did, and that's what I'm doing now. My foundation takes up most of my time. My family obviously is my first priority.

And I still do some work and I'm now trying to figure out ways to engage back with the game because I'm just at that stage. I just feel really motivated to be good to a game that has been good to me.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you very much for spending time with us.

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