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An interview with:

ANNA KOURNIKOVA

ROSIE CREWS: Good afternoon, everyone, this is Rosie Crews with World TeamTennis. Thank you for joining us today on our conference call with Anna Kournikova.

I'll welcome Anna Kournikova, back for her sixth year with World TeamTennis. We're thrilled to have her back. This will be her first season with the St. Louis Aces. She's going to be playing four matches for the Aces. She'll be playing July 16th in Newport Beach, July 18th at home for the Aces, July 22nd against the New York Buzz, who are now in Albany. Then on July 23rd, playing in Washington, D.C., the home of our newest team right in downtown D.C.

We'll take questions for Anna.

Q. I read recently in, I believe the Washington Post, Justin Gimelstob with the Washington Kastles, recently said some kind of nasty things about you on a talk show. He called you a few unmentionables, and later said some things that made you cry during the match and served into your body. What are your thoughts on this tirade?

ANNA KOURNIKOVA: Well, I have no clue. I'm kind of sorry about this, but I really don't want to get into any of the off-court stuff. I'm just gonna kind of take the high road and not get into this discussion.

You know, WTT is not about those sorts of things, it's about keeping it fun and positive, and really the game of tennis, playing for the fans. So I really don't want to get into any of those discussions. I really am not paying attention to that, and I don't want to give it any more significance than it has already received.

Q. Why do you play World TeamTennis?

ANNA KOURNIKOVA: Well, for me, oh, my God, there's a million reasons. It's my sixth season playing. Obviously I'm not on the professional tour, so for me this is the best opportunity I can get to be on the tennis court, to be in the match environment, to be in front of my fans, to be just part of such a great league.

WTT is awesome. It's a perfect environment for the fans to see singles, doubles, and women's, mixed, everything. I mean, it couldn't be better. I wouldn't miss it for the world.

Actually I started practicing a little while ago and my knee started hurting. I was freaking out completely. I was like, Oh, my God, you have to be kidding me. But I'm glad that I'm feeling good. I'm practicing all the time here. I'm really looking forward to be back on the court. I love those moments obviously. I miss playing.

But I love just now playing for fun and really enjoying myself out there on the court.

Q. Do you follow the NHL hockey?

ANNA KOURNIKOVA: Yes, I do. I mean, kind of the playoffs, whatever is on TV obviously. I'm not like reading religiously every single day about it. But, yeah, I mean, I'm up to date pretty much.

Q. What did you think about the Red Wings winning it all?

ANNA KOURNIKOVA: I was excited. I'm still rooting for them always, having the history with the Red Wings that I had. I was really happy to see them win again. They're a great organization. They were always really nice to me, and I had a great time there in Detroit.

Q. I wanted to find out what you thought, what does it say about the women's game when a player like Justine, at 25, at the top of her game, top of the rankings, can walk away from the sport kind of burnt out?

ANNA KOURNIKOVA: That just says that

I wasn't the only crazy one to kind of stop in the middle of it all, too (laughter).

But, you know, I mean, yeah, I guess, you know, Justine, and Kim Clijsters also stopped when she was right there. She was like, you know, No. 2 or something in the world. So I guess we start young, and girls want to have a life, I guess.

You know, they have achieved everything that they want to achieve. It's, you know, a 24/7 life. There's no way around it. It's your life and it's physically exhausting, especially on tiny girls like us. I mean, Justine wasn't very tall. Kimmy wasn't very tall. Women's bodies, it is fragile, and you really have to be strong and physically be able to pull it off.

And then professional people at that level, if you can't give a hundred percent you feel like you're failing, so there's really no reason to play unless you feel a hundred percent.

And it also takes guts to stop and to walk away, especially, you know, when you're on top and you're still doing good and you feel it's a lot of pressure on your body.

So, it's very individual. It depends what mindset the player's in, what physical condition and state they're in, what they want to do with their life afterwards, what they have achieved before. It's really individual. I don't think you can kind of generalize any of those things, you know, where, Oh, the girls start too young or the girls burn out.

I don't think that's the case, 'cause some people don't start playing well until they're 25, into their late 20s, and it's okay for them, so it's a very individual thing.

Q. Oftentimes players walk away from the game and they find that they've been doing this for so much of their life that they don't find anything quite as fulfilling as that on-court competition. How has life been away from the court for you? Have you been as fulfilled as you were when you were in your competitive days on a daily basis?

ANNA KOURNIKOVA: That's a great question actually. It is very, very difficult and very, very different to move on because this is your career. And, like I said, this is your life that you've known your whole life. I mean, I started playing tennis when I was five. And most of the professional tennis players start at age 10 already playing serious. I mean, that's what it becomes about.

So it is hard. But the smart players try to start establishing things while they're still playing, so that will make a transition much easier.

And then a lot of times the people just go straight from being on tour and creating families. And that obviously takes most of your time, I guess.

But, I personally have been fulfilled in terms of with my work with Boys and Girls Club. That's my career now, kind of working with the children and really bringing awareness with that and dedicating my time to children and giving back to communities and helping with charities and stuff.

Of course, occasionally here and there I do some modeling stuff and everything to still make a living. But in general what I'm really fulfilled with and my passion is working with children and charities. That's what brings me satisfaction and enjoyment. And then besides that, I take jobs just to make a living.

Q. I was wondering why you made the change from the Sacramento Capitals to the St. Louis Aces?

ANNA KOURNIKOVA: Well, I guess I was drafted. I think how it goes is that the teams pick you, right, Rosie?

ROSIE CREWS: Yes. There actually was a trade. She was picked up by the St. Louis Aces. She played there I believe two years ago. I know they're really excited to have her.

ANNA KOURNIKOVA: Yeah, so I'm just ready to play, you know. It's really interesting because it's gonna be a new team for me in terms of I don't know any of the players on the team. So it's always great to meet new players and to have a new experience. You know, WTT is a great, fun atmosphere. So I love playing team sports. It's like Davis Cup, Fed Cup. Everybody's rooting for each other. I love that.

Q. You'll have a new coach. You had the high-energy Wayne Bryan. Do you know much about your new coach and what his style is like?

ANNA KOURNIKOVA: No, I actually don't know his style, but I do know him. I'm sure we'll get along. It's all about the team. It's all about the players. I'll do whatever the coach needs to do for the team in order for us to win. You know, the team competitions, this is the place where it's all about working together and it has nothing to do

with your personal ego. Or like when you play on tour, for example, you play for yourself, you're alone unless you're playing doubles, right? But this competition, you know, you just do what's best for the team and you listen to the coach.

Q. I was wondering, too, who you like in Wimbledon on the women's side? Sharapova just got beat.

ANNA KOURNIKOVA: She lost? Oh, my God, because I had it on TV, but I had it on mute. Wow, that's crazy.

Q. I was wondering who you think is the favorite on the women's side?

ANNA KOURNIKOVA: Uhm, it's really hard to say. I was so happy for my friend Dinara Safina to be in the final of the French. I'm so excited that she was in the final. So obviously I'm rooting for her 'cause she's a very good friend of mine. Obviously, Ana Ivanovic is great for tennis. It's great that she won.

I'm not sure yet about who is going to win. I think I'm gonna kind of wait and see what happens in the second week, so...

Q. This is kind of a chance to answer some of your critics.

ANNA KOURNIKOVA: Great, I've been doing that my whole life. Actually, I try to ignore them.

Q. Yesterday the (Los Angeles) Times ran an article about seven women on the LPGA Tour who have been recruited by the Wilhelmina Agency. One of the players, Kim Hall, talks about trying to balance her career and modeling. She said, In the end it's about golf. Nobody in the group wants to be Anna Kournikova. How do you respond to something like that?

ANNA KOURNIKOVA: Really by taking the high road. I mean, I know what I've achieved. But tennis fans that really know tennis, but that have followed and actually can read by bio and read my results, they know -- people that throw in a name or a phrase, I don't pay attention to that.

It's not something that I worry about. Really everybody's got their own lives, and too bad, you know. Too bad. Especially -- whoever says that, and especially if a woman says that, that's even sadder. But I really don't worry about --

yeah, I've had so many things said about me it's really not something that you can worry about.

Q. Danica Patrick is someone that you've been drawn parallels to. How did it make you feel when she won a race back in April? It was her first win.

ANNA KOURNIKOVA: I'm always supporting women. I hope they do amazing. And women in sports, just good luck and congratulations. You know, I'm sure she deserves it. I'm sure she works hard.

I just take off my hat to any woman who is successful in sports, and that's it, 'cause I know how hard it is. I know that it takes a lot of work and effort and compromises. So I'm just happy for women in general to be successful in sports and to show their talents.

Q. You said you were preparing for World TeamTennis. If you could, compare preparation for World TeamTennis to preparing for life on the pro circuit, compare the amount of hours or the amount of days or the intensity that you train one versus the other.

ANNA KOURNIKOVA: Well, it's obviously different. I mean, if I was going to try on the tour again, it would be months of preparation, you know, anywhere between three to six months of literally just going to a tennis camp, you know, to like Bollettieri's, for example, and just live and breathe and really get ready and prepare in terms of physically first and then tennis-wise and then mentally, because I'm a perfectionist.

So like really if I set myself a goal, like for me it gives me confidence putting in the hours and really giving a hundred percent.

For World TeamTennis I kind of get ready in a shorter period of time. It's definitely, you know, not as -- because it's really short, that's why I love World TeamTennis, but it gives me the opportunity to play. You know, it's a very short time that I get to play, so I know that I will hold up well.

Q. You mentioned Dinara Safina. How tough is it for her to have played all these years in the shadow of her brother? Do you think that's been something that's held her back?

ANNA KOURNIKOVA: You know, it's very hard for me to relate to that question 'cause I never really had a brother or sister until, you know, four

years ago. I just have a little one right now and I'm more like the completely big sister, with 24-year or 23-year difference.

I am sure it must have been hard, but I'm sure it's also good, because she saw what he went through and hopefully learned what not to do. I'm sure that it's helped her also. And especially when it's a brother and sister, it's not like competition, boy on boy, girl on girl.

I'd like to think that it helped her.

Q. World TeamTennis is one of the most public things that you do now. You're still performing in front of big crowds, getting a lot of attention for that. When it attracts both good and bad attention, let's face it, has that ever given you pause and have you ever thought, This isn't worth stirring up those old pots again?

ANNA KOURNIKOVA: No, not at all. For me just to be back on the court playing in front of the fans, for me to feel in a match situation, match environment, I love it. There's always going to be pressure or attention, you know, so it's really something that goes with it.

But for me it's very much definitely worth it just to be back on the court and enjoy being a tennis player for that short period of time again.

Q. You said anybody that reads my bio knows what I've achieved. Would you mind briefly, hearing it from you in this form, how you would like to be regarded as a tennis player, contributions or legacy.

ANNA KOURNIKOVA: Well, I don't really, first of all, ever thought about a legacy or whatever. I'm just a person. For me, as long as my family and friends know how I am, it's all about interaction. That's the most important. I never really thought about what kind of legacy I'm going to leave or what people are going to think of me afterwards, when I die or whatever. I don't really care.

For me, I know that I come from Soviet Union. That we had nothing, I mean literally nothing. I grew up in a one-room apartment with five people. I started playing tennis.

I can't believe now I'm living in America. You know, my amazing house, living in Florida, having all these opportunities. Tennis gave me a life. Tennis gave me opportunities.

You know, I played on Wimbledon Centre Court. I've gotten there to the semifinals. I beat

five No. 1 tennis players in the world at the height of their careers. Steffi Graf, Monica Seles, Lindsay Davenport, Arantxa Sanchez, Conchita Martinez.

I beat Martina Hingis when she was at the top. For me, those wins are the most memorable and the most important. That's how I view my career, you know. I've achieved a lot of things that I never thought, like you would never even imagine a little girl from God knows where could achieve.

I'm really happy with the way things turned out, you know. It was very hard. We didn't have a model back then or we didn't have any idea what to expect. My mom was 26 years old when she came to America with this little child. I was nine years old. My mom was, what, 28 I think, or 27. She spoke no English. Nobody spoke any English. We just kind of had to learn as we go.

You know, we've come very far, and I'm really happy. As long as I'm healthy, happy, with good people around me, that's the most important thing for me right now.

ROSIE CREWS: Thank you very much, Anna. I want to say thanks to you so much. I know we have to wrap up and go. Thank you for taking the time, and we'll look forward to seeing you starting July 16th in Newport Beach.

ANNA KOURNIKOVA: Thank you. Bye everyone. Thank you.

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