

July 17, 2009



An interview with:

KIM CLIJSTERS

THE MODERATOR: Thank for joining us today for a call with Kim Clijsters to discuss her participation in the Advanta World TeamTennis Pro League.

This will be our first season for Kim to play World TeamTennis. She'll be playing two matches for the St. Louis Aces, July 21 in St. Louis, and July 22 in Philadelphia. This will be the first professional tennis competition for Kim since retiring in 2007. Following WTT, Kim will be playing in the Olympus US Open Series events in Cincinnati and Canada, followed by her return to the US Open in August.

We'll open it up now for questions.

Q. I wanted to find out what you've heard about World TeamTennis and if there is anything about the league that stands out to you?

KIM CLIJSTERS: Well, obviously over the last few years when I was traveling on tour, I heard a lot about it. I actually saw and followed quite a few matches of it. What attracts me the most about it is the way it's played. It's the motivation, the crowd, the input of the crowd and everything, the team atmosphere and everything. That's something that I really enjoy. That's something that playing on tour, you know, the WTA events, that's what you miss sometimes.

Yeah, I'm very excited to go out there and to be a part of that atmosphere and to experience a different type of tennis I think than what we're used to on tour. It's something that I really look forward to. It's always been something that I would like to see more in tennis, is the crowd interaction, the team, more players involved and everything. So I'm excited that I'm going to be a part of it.

Q. Could you discuss why it is you're returning at all to tennis with these upcoming

events. Is this a test to see whether you might return full-time next year?

KIM CLIJSTERS: Obviously I've been training like a professional with my mindset to coming back as a full professional. I'm going to see after the US Open how that whole trip went and just see which things I have to adjust. It's a new experience for me, as well. I'm travelling with a family. Just being back on tour and everything, it's going to be completely different than it has been when I was on tour for about 10 or 12 years in the past. So it's going to be an adjustment for me as well.

I think after the US Open, we're going to -- with my husband, Brian, with Jada, see how things went with my coach, my physio. I think that's going to be the biggest goal. I think that's why I chose to start playing, to start my summer off playing these World TeamTennis matches because it's always been something I've been interested in, but never really felt like -- you know, being over in Europe, at the French, Wimbledon, the tough summer, I never really felt like it fit into my schedule.

Now being here in the summer, in New Jersey with my husband and everything, I really felt like it was a perfect opportunity for me to be a part of such, you know, a nice event, an event that has been going on since, what, mid 1970s or something. I think it's something that I really look forward to be a part of, the history of World TeamTennis.

Q. You've been away from the game for two years. What part of your game have you really struggled with the most?

KIM CLIJSTERS: Well, probably the biggest struggle was starting back all over, you know, because I hardly played for two years. I had the baby. I was breast-feeding for about nine months. You know, then with my father's illness and everything, tennis wasn't even in my life for a couple of years.

You know, I would hit once in a while with a friend of mine who plays on tour and everything, but not much. Like that's about it. So for me just



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to start playing tennis again overall, my strokes were there very quickly. Just physically it was harder because in my mind I know how I wanted to move and I know when I had to run forward or when I had to take a step backwards to hit that shot. My mind and my body weren't really connecting the same way. I think that was the toughest, was like switching that button in your head and saying, Look, after a week of training, you're not going to be the same tennis player as when you ended your first career.

I really had to tell myself that I had to, yeah, start from zero and take it one step at a time and try not to look too far ahead, try not to look at the negative things that are bothering you, things that you couldn't do like I did them before. So that was probably the biggest change that I felt.

But luckily now it feels like it never happened. Now I feel like I'm back in good shape. But I had good people around me who really would push me but also make sure that I wasn't overdoing it.

Q. When Andre was in Philadelphia last week he talked about his service game. Is that an issue for you?

KIM CLIJSTERS: The serve is always a struggle, even if I don't train for two or three weeks. The serve I think is a stroke in tennis that is one of the most accurate shots to have. The timing has to be perfect. Again, yeah, the timing with your legs bending, rotation in your hips, rotation in your shoulders, you know, the moment where you hit the ball, everything has to be so like correct and precise that, yeah, when you're a little bit off, a serve is definitely a tough shot to feel good at pretty quickly.

I think it's first the groundstrokes that will feel better. Once you start playing down the middle, the groundstrokes will feel pretty good. Then the movement I think comes along. Then I think it's the accuracy of your shots that I think needs a lot of work when you want to create that little bit extra in your game again.

Q. I was wondering how excited you are to return to the US Open this year, the site of your Grand Slam victory in 2005? How big a motivating factor was that in your return?

KIM CLIJSTERS: I'm really excited to go back to the US Open 'cause I never got to defend my title either. So in a way, you know, I feel like I'm going back there, yeah, it's completely different now. But I'm really happy that I'm able to go back.

After I won, I got injured and I wasn't able to go back there any more. So I'm really excited to go back there and to bring back all the really good memories.

On the other hand, you know, that still for me is far away because my main focus right now is World TeamTennis. That's something that I really look forward to, trying the new changes, you know, the format, the scoring, no-ad scoring. Those are things that I'm really focusing on right now each week, and then gradually that will help me hopefully to, yeah, get that match rhythm back and become a better match player when I get to the US Open.

I really try to take it one step at a time. My main focus now is World TeamTennis, those two games, for now.

Q. Have you spoken at all to Lindsay Davenport about the challenges of playing with a family?

KIM CLIJSTERS: Not really in that way. Lindsay and I have always kept in touch. Even when she was pregnant, I was pregnant, she was still playing. Yeah, I mean, a lot was just about how the kids were doing, sending pictures back and forth of the babies and stuff. Not really that much about life as a mother on tour and as a wife, I don't think.

Yeah, I'm sure we all have different upbringing type of ways. I love hearing other people's stories and ideas and try to just take out of those what I think is important for my family.

Obviously Lindsay came back a lot faster than I did after she had her baby. She just had her second one. So, you know, she's obviously going to be a lot more busy right now than I think I'm going to be.

Q. What did you miss the most when you were away from the tennis tour? What were you least upset about leaving behind these last couple years?

KIM CLIJSTERS: Well, I have to be honest. I didn't have time to miss tennis. We got married. We had Jada. I was pregnant. Yeah, then my dad got sick. Tennis wasn't even a priority until I got the invitation from Wimbledon to play under the roof this summer. I started training for that.

A couple, three weeks into that, that feeling came up. I really wanted to be -- yeah, that

feeling came. For a while, like I tried to push it aside because, yeah, I didn't even tell my coach. I was just hitting, trying to get in good shape for Wimbledon. Then I started telling them, maybe I can play some exhibitions, just see how it goes.

As I started playing more, that feeling to compete and to play matches came back. You know, I think the competition mostly I think is something that I didn't miss at the time. But when I started playing again and practicing again, that came up. You know, I like practicing, but I like playing matches better.

So I think, you know, the first step came by just practicing. I think wanting to play the official matches and compete against top players and against the other girls, new players, is something that was caused, yeah, by being able to practice again and by seeing the progress I made very quickly in my game.

Q. You have experience playing Fed Cup. Can you talk about how the dynamic of playing on a World TeamTennis team will be different than playing in a single tournament?

KIM CLIJSTERS: Yeah, Fed Cup has always been one of the highlights in my tennis career. To be a part of a group is so much fun. And to be able to yell on the sidelines, to motivate your doubles partners, your team members, is something that I really enjoy and I really get into. Just seeing Billie Jean doing that, like when she's involved, that's what I love. That's that passion that comes out.

She treats the World TeamTennis like it's her baby, and everything she's done for it, you know, it kind of rubs off. I think when you see somebody who has so much passion for it, I think it also rubs off. For me it's going to be, like, a challenge I think even in a way, trying that new format. I've never played with the scoring and the no-ad, no service lets and everything. It's going to be interesting for me as well because there's a lot of things in your mind where you just have to switch that button and forget about the routines that we always have had in tennis.

The interaction with the crowd is something I've really enjoyed in Fed Cup. When I watched and heard other players talk about World TeamTennis, it's very much like that.

Yeah, I mean, that's something that I really look forward to. It couldn't come at a more perfect time for me than in a few days. I've been practicing for a long time, and really excited to start

playing some matches, to see some familiar faces again.

I know a lot of great players have played World TeamTennis over the last few years. I know Martina Navratilova played it, John McEnroe played it. Even some current players, like Serena and Venus, they've played all that.

I'm just excited to be a part of that generation, I think. It's something that I really look forward to, something that I've always been curious about over the last few years, but never really got to. So now I'm excited that I can for the first time be a part of World TeamTennis.

Q. Was there a single motivator or was it you that really made you want to join World TeamTennis?

KIM CLIJSTERS: I mean, I got a message on my BlackBerry from Billie Jean King and everybody. When someone like that asks you to do that, it was a very quick decision just because I'm in the States, I'm looking to play matches. I can play practice matches here, at the club where I practice with my coach, but it's not the same. You want to have that tension again and the official type of matches, although I know it's not the same as a normal tournament. But the atmosphere I think is there and the tension and the pressure, the nerves and everything. That's something that I'm really excited about.

What I'm probably more excited about is to be, yeah, just a part of it. Even sitting on the sideline, see my partners playing, yeah, just to be back into the tennis world I guess is something that I look forward to as well because, you know, it's a place I haven't been to for a couple of years now. I just look forward to being there again.

Q. You talked about training. Where are you training right now? Do you have a coach?

KIM CLIJSTERS: Yes, I have a coach. My coach is Wim Fissette. He's from Belgium. He's a guy I grew up with, training with even. He was my hitting partner for a while, and now he's my coach. We get along really well. We see eye-to-eye on a lot of things. But he also pushes me in a lot of ways now. That's what I really like.

Yeah, I'm excited to start the whole process again of having a new team around me. I'm going to be traveling with my cousin, Tim, who is a physio. I'm going to take Sam, who is an

osteopath to some tournaments, as well.

I really feel like I have a good group of people around me who individually are very good at their profession, but also then who are friends and who can really motivate me, as well. That's something that I really like. So I'm excited to just start off because we've been practicing for a few months now and I'm just excited to see if the hard work has paid off, just try to get all those matches under my belt.

Q. Have you been practicing in Belgium?

KIM CLIJSTERS: No. I'm in New Jersey with my husband's family. They live on the shore in New Jersey. I've been practicing at the Atlanta Club. It's a local club. It's a very nice facility. Courts are very similar to the US Open. They have a great gym, pool. Yeah, very spoiled. I feel very lucky that I'm capable to be home here in the States, but also really close to all my workout facilities and everything. It's very handy.

Q. Heading into your first pro match, is the feeling excitement or nerves? You were practicing for so long. Is it like, it's finally here, I can't wait?

KIM CLIJSTERS: I think both. The excitement is something I look forward to and that I feel already now. I really can't wait for Monday when we start traveling to St. Louis. To be back in that whole atmosphere I think is something that I look forward to.

Obviously I'm sure I'm going to be nervous, but I'm also very excited about playing under the World Team Tennis rules. It's something that I've never done. It's obviously going to be a little bit of a challenge I think because I've been playing tennis for, I don't know, almost 20 years. The rules have never really changed. Maybe a couple here and there, but the scoring has always been the same. That's something that I look forward to, as well. It's fun I think to mix it up like that. It's something I look forward to.

It's probably also going to be my first, yeah, interaction I think with fans again here in the States. I've played at Wimbledon. I played in Rosmalen, in Holland, where there were a lot of Belgian fans. But over here in the States, this is going to be the first time.

Yeah, it's going to be interesting. I look forward to it, just seeing a lot of the people again that were following me when I was still playing a few years ago.

Q. I wanted to clarify that your husband and daughter are going to be going with you to both St. Louis and Philadelphia?

KIM CLIJSTERS: Yes, they will. We're pretty close to Philadelphia. We don't need to fly there. Brian actually has some of his best friends that live in Philadelphia, because he went to school at Villanova. We're going to maybe stay there a day or so afterwards and spend some time with them.

No, but they'll be there. I don't know how much Jada, our daughter, will be able to sit in the stands. But, yeah, they'll definitely come with me.

Q. The struggle your dad had with cancer and dying, how much did that impact you? Has it been tough getting back to competitive tennis? Is it still on your mind or something you've kind of resolved now?

KIM CLIJSTERS: I mean, it has a place. He'll always be a part of me. My dad, his goal in life was probably to also make us independent and to make us grow up as independent girls. We really feel like that.

Obviously my sister and I, we miss him. We wish he was still here with us but we really feel he is with us. Although we can't see him physically, we really feel like he's a part of everything that we do.

I think when you have that feeling, I think it already fills in a lot of gaps. So, yeah, you know, it's something that I feel very lucky that I have a family, that I have Brian, Jada, and that he was capable -- he knew Brian really well, they were really close. The same with my sister. My sister got married and he knew her husband.

So, yeah, that was good that he saw us, that we were settled, that we had good husbands. My sister is pregnant now, as well. It's good. I mean, it's not that we've moved on, but we've adjusted our lives to not having our dad with us physically, but we really feel like he's still there.

THE MODERATOR: I would like to thank Kim Clijsters for taking time out of her busy schedule to talk with everyone today. Thank you, Kim.

KIM CLIJSTERS: No problem. Thank you.

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