



July 6, 2006

An interview with:

PETE SAMPRAS

JOSH WEISSMAN: This is **Josh Weissman** with **World TeamTennis**. I appreciate everyone coming on the call today. We have **Pete Sampras** on the line. He will be debuting on Monday night in **Newport Beach** with the **Newport Beach Breakers**. He'll be playing one home match this year in **Newport Beach**, and he'll be on the road throughout July for six more matches.

I want to say thank you to **Pete** for joining us on the call today.

We'll take some questions for **Pete**.

Q. A question about Andre Agassi, who two weeks ago retired. I was wondering your comments on the retirement of Andre.

PETE SAMPRAS: Like I said, when he announced it, it was the end of an era. He was a great player that brought a lot to the sport, brought a lot to my legacy, just in our matches. He's going to be missed, but at the same time I think he knew it was time to move on and make a decision. I think physically it's taken its toll over the last few years. When that happens, mentally, I think it wears you down to a point where you pretty much make it known that it's time to move on. He'll be missed, and life goes on.

Q. Speaking of Andre, how did he affect your legacy?

PETE SAMPRAS: I didn't get the beginning. What was that?

Q. In what way did he affect your legacy?

PETE SAMPRAS: Well, I think through the years that I was dominating, there wasn't maybe a lot to write about. I think when he had his moments of really playing well, when he and I played in the final of **Wimbledon** and the **US**

Open, I played some of my best tennis. I think we as a rivalry hit mainstream sportsfans that might not be tennis fans, but maybe tuned into the match.

I think our games were really different, our personalities were different. Whenever I walked out there against **Andre**, I felt different than playing **Becker**, **Stich** or **Edberg**. There was a little more on it, both being an **American**, 1, 2 in the world. It was as close to a great rivalry as I think we've had in the sport the past 10, 15 years.

I think the tennis we played was some of the best tennis ever. We both respected one another. There wasn't any ill will towards one another. As competitive as it was, I think we handled it really well.

I've always said he's made me a better player, made me add some things to my game that against other guys I could get away with.

You know, he's always going to be the one guy, when people ask me who my rival was, he's the one.

Q. A question of your fitness right now, where would you put it as far as playing days?

PETE SAMPRAS: It's okay. I'm not killing myself out there, but at the same time I probably hit three, four days a week for about an hour and a half, getting to the gym for a little bit, just to get my body used to hitting some serves, moving around. Pretty good. Nothing like I used to be, but enough to get through some matches.

Q. How would you describe your reasoning for wanting to come back and play in World TeamTennis?

PETE SAMPRAS: Well, I think end of last year, you know, I was getting a little bit restless, maybe a little bored trying to figure out what was next for me. I kind of opened myself up to playing this year, just to give me a little bit of a structure in my day, a little bit of a focus.

Ilana (Kloss, WTT CEO/Commissioner) and **Billie (Jean King, WTT co-founder)** have been asking me to play **TeamTennis** for quite a few years. She approached me about playing a few days. I was at a place in my life where I was ready to play a little bit, and have some fun out there. I decided to play a few more dates than I originally thought. That was kind of how it all happened.

I'm actually going to play some more after

ASAP sports

...when all is said, we're done.®

visit our archives at asapsports.com

P. Sampras – 07.06.06

World TeamTennis, a few exhibitions here and there just to give me a little bit of a focus. After my third year of retirement, I felt myself getting a little bit unfulfilled with what I was doing. I think playing tennis is something that I'm good at. I love to still play. This is something I can control with how much I can play and how much I need to practice and train, nothing to kill myself, but something just to keep my week structured and do something I used to be pretty good at.

Q. Do you expect the competitive juices to be flowing at any level like it used to be for you?

PETE SAMPRAS: I don't know. I have no idea. I mean, I'm just going to see how it goes. What I want to do is play well and not hurt myself. I think that's my main concern.

You know, you get in the right situation, I'm a competitive person, especially on the tennis court. I'll want to do well and win. But it's not the cut-throat tennis that I used to be a part of.

We'll see what happens.

JOSH WEISSMAN: **Pete** is also going to be playing in **Sacramento** on July 12th.

Q. You said before you have no intention of playing another ATP Tour event, do you?

PETE SAMPRAS: No.

Q. You said you were getting a little bit bored. What had you been doing before you started playing tennis again? Was it golf that filled your time?

PETE SAMPRAS: I was playing a ton of golf. I mean, I must have played five, six days a week. Got to be pretty good at it. There was moments where I got a little burnt out and didn't really find myself really filling my day with what I wanted to do. I was kind of at home with my kids. I love being a part of that, seeing them grow up, but at the same time I've always worked, I've always had a structured day. When I first retired, I really enjoyed the non-structure, really enjoyed the relaxation, no work, just kind of more play. After three years of that, I found myself waking up in the morning a little bit restless. I tell my wife a lot, I need to find something, I need to start doing something.

Then I just kind of opened myself to seeing what was out there from the tennis standpoint playing-wise. I think it's been one of the best

things for me. Like I said, three, four days a week, I can practice, hit a few balls, go into the gym, do some stretching. It gives me a little bit of what I used to have. Once you take that away, when I had that life of structure, initially it's fun, then you kind of miss it in some weird way.

Q. Who have you been playing with down there? Do you have a practice partner?

PETE SAMPRAS: Two, three guys from **UCLA** that I've been hitting with. There's plenty of practice around here.

Q. I assume your family is going to be able to come out and watch Monday night.

PETE SAMPRAS: Yeah. I know my wife and older son will come up. The younger one is probably going to stay home.

Q. Were they able to see you play Ginepri?

PETE SAMPRAS: You know, it didn't come across I guess on the computer. It was a little fuzzy. They didn't see much. But obviously they'll see it live.

Q. How aware is your little guy about who dad was...

PETE SAMPRAS: He's somewhat aware. I tell him, we talk about it, but I don't think he really grasps it. I think once he sees me out there playing in front of people, I think he'll better understand.

Right now, he's more concerned about his construction toys, watching *Dora the Explorer*, *Thomas the Train*, any of those things.

Q. Changing subjects a little bit, how do you sort of view Nadal's progress at Wimbledon, considering he only won a couple matches on grass the year before this?

PETE SAMPRAS: You know, I must admit, I'm a little surprised. Just after winning **Paris**, his game not suited for grass. On the other hand, you know, he's a great player. I mean, I think he's mentally really positive on grass. Where I think a lot of the clay-courtiers kind of come into **Wimbledon** with a negative attitude, I think his attitude is great. He seems like he respects **Wimbledon** and he wants to do well there.

I was going to say, since there aren't really any true grass court players, guys that can really

serve and volley, pick a baseliner apart, it's almost like you watch *Wimbledon* and you're watching the *French* but it's green because everyone is staying back. He's able to kind -- no one is going to come in, he's just as good as anyone staying back.

So I'm not that surprised. 10 years ago, with a lot more serve-and-volleyers, I think he'd have a harder time really doing what he's doing today.

Q. Can you talk a little bit about Roger. Obviously this tremendous run that he's having on grass, is he likely -- they are really on a crash-course right now with a couple of guys standing in their way. What do you think about the likelihood of a Roger/Nadal final? Is Roger going to roll through this?

PETE SAMPRAS: Yes and yes.

Q. Can you tell us a little more?

PETE SAMPRAS: Well, I think *Roger* is pretty much unbeatable on grass, pretty much unbeatable anywhere but maybe a little bit on clay against *Nadal*. I think *Nadal* has a good chance to get to the final. I think *Federer* will have his way with him on grass if they both make the final. I just think, you know, too much power, the fast surface will help him. I think *Nadal* will compete hard against him, but I don't see him winning.

Q. Lastly, you were talking about your kids. Anybody playing tennis in your house other than you these days?

PETE SAMPRAS: Yeah, *Christian*, not every day, but I got a court here. We go down there, he hits the ball. I toss him a few here and there. He loves it. He loves hitting that ball. He's got a little hand-eye coordination on his side.

Q. Who knows what is going to happen at the Open, whether Andre can reach another final. Regardless of what happens there, where do you put him with the great players of all time once he walks away from the game? Where does he rank?

PETE SAMPRAS: It's hard to put a number on it, where I see him. I see him somewhere in the top 10 of the greats of all time, being able to win on all surfaces, being No. 1 in the world. He got to the finals of like five or six majors.

You know, he's up there. It's hard to -- was he better than *Connors*, *McEnroe*? Just the

generations. I just think it's hard to mention who was the best ever or the list. I think you just have -- each generation has their best players. I think in the '90s, he was one of the best players, with me included. It's hard to compare the eras and all that stuff. Just, you know, one of the best.

Q. You put him in there with the mix, maybe the top 10?

PETE SAMPRAS: Yeah, the way I look at the top five, *Laver*, *Federer*, myself, *Borg* and *Lendl*. I think those five guys dominated their generations better than anyone. Maybe *Roger* will dominate better than any one of the other four. Maybe I put *Andre* as kind of 6 through 10 with, you know, *McEnroe* and *Connors*, kind of those guys. That's kind of how I see it.

JOSH WEISSMAN: Back to a little *Team Tennis*, do you know much about your teammates on the *Breakers*? How about the coach, *Dick Leach*?

PETE SAMPRAS: You know, I don't think anyone on the call really cares (laughter).

JOSH WEISSMAN: Can you talk about *Dick Leach*, the coach?

PETE SAMPRAS: I'm just kidding. I know *Rick Leach* pretty well. I don't know the girls. *Delgado*, I know him a little bit, I played him one time in *Paris*. *Rick* is a good guy. His dad. I think it will just be a fun time. I think when you have good teammates, fun teammates, I think, you know, it will be fun.

Q. When you watch Wimbledon, you see Federer getting close to winning four titles there, your own records, what kind of goes through your head when you see someone making a legacy for himself in some of the same ways you did?

PETE SAMPRAS: Well, I think when I look at *Roger*, I mean, I'm a fan. I mean, I'm a fan of how he plays, what he's about, just the fact that I think he's a class -- I don't know him personally, but seems like he's a class guy on and off the court. He's fun to watch. Just his athletic ability, what he's able to do on the run. I think he can and will break every tennis record out there.

I just think he's the only really great player I see playing. I think *Nadal* is really good, shows -- and he's a great player, but I just think there's less of him. Today I think *Roger* is two, three levels above the rest. The fact that he seems like he's

even getting better. You combine all that, I don't really see anyone threatening the No. 1 ranking. I think he's just too consistent and too good and has a fear factor in everyone else that I had at times, but I think he has it even more.

Q. Do you have any mixed feelings when you see him getting close to the record books?

PETE SAMPRAS: I don't believe in that. I don't believe in rooting against someone. You know, records are made to be broken. I'm pretty confident that he's well on his way to not only breaking the No. 1 ranking, but this **Grand Slam** record. I mean, I just think he's got all the tools, he's got the demeanor. He really has the whole package to do it.

Q. Do you worry at all about American tennis right now?

PETE SAMPRAS: I think it's pretty good. I mean, I think it's hard to duplicate what we had with **Jim**, myself, **Michael** and **Andre**. I think it's unfair to **Andy** and **James** and the rest to compare what happened the last 10 years to where they're at, where they're going.

I think it's in pretty good shape. Unfortunately for **American** tennis, we do have **Federer/Nadal** who are really good, really kind of dominating the game at the moment.

I think **James** and **Andy** really can kind of get it together and do some things at the **Open**. But knowing **American** fans and **American** media, we expect **Wimbledon** winners, we expect **US Open** winners, we expect an **American** No. 1 in the world. Hard to do that. I think **James** and **Andy** have potential, but it takes a great player and someone that can handle it all.

I think they have it, but it takes a lot of commitment, a lot of sacrifice. Hopefully they can figure something out.

Q. Seems like you're trying out World TeamTennis to ease back into the competitive scene here, but also have some fun. I have to imagine Jim Courier has hit you up for the Champions Tour.

PETE SAMPRAS: Yeah, he has. I've talked to **Jim**. I'm not quite ready for that sort of deal. Playing a few one-nighters here and there is something that's competitive but it's not cut-throat like **Jim's** deal with those guys. It's a little more serious. I'm just not quite ready. I don't know if I

ever will be ready to play those things. I'm just easing my way back into it.

World TeamTennis is a great, fun arena that I've been a part of a few times playing the **Elton John AIDS Foundation** night. It's a little fun to see some doubles, singles, mixed doubles. See a little bit of everything. It's maybe my way of giving back a little bit to the sport, doing a lot more interaction with the fans, with the media, with sponsors. I'm just easing my way back into it, not looking to come back at any point. Just have a little fun, give my life a little structure and focus.

Q. You talked about structure. With World TeamTennis, it looks like you're looking for new ways to (indiscernible) tennis. Have you considered coaching at all?

PETE SAMPRAS: No. No interest.

Q. Even at Wimbledon, serve-and-volley tennis seems more or less extinct. Do you intend to serve and volley when you're playing out there?

PETE SAMPRAS: I will die serving and volleying. Yeah, I mean, even yesterday I was serving pretty hard and coming in. It's my natural instinct, something I'm pretty natural at. I don't know if I'll be able to get to the net as quickly as I used to, but I'll be coming in.

Q. Do you think players today still could make that an effective strategy?

PETE SAMPRAS: Serve and volley?

Q. Yes.

PETE SAMPRAS: I don't think it's anything you learn overnight. I think it's something you do as a kid. As you get older, you get better at it. I don't think it's something you wake up at 23 and say, I'm going to serve and volley. As a former tennis player, I miss the serve and volley tennis, watching it, especially on grass. Now everyone is staying back. I miss that contrast of someone being able to come in and someone staying back.

Q. Earlier there was a question about American tennis. One thing I've been wondering about, other greats from your time, a lot of them were in Bollettieri Academy or something like it. Do you think that's necessary for a player today? As far as I know,

you weren't in that.

PETE SAMPRAS: I think it depends where you're from. With someone like **Andre** and **Jim**, growing up in an area where there was not a lot of competition, I think **Bollettieri** was a great thing just to be able to play other players, whereas I had **Michael Chang**, players of that type in southern **Cal**. I didn't feel like I needed to go anywhere. If you're from **Mississippi**, you have nobody to practice with, it's cold in the winter, I think going down to a **Florida** academy is something I recommend.

Q. This time of year, is this when you miss it the most, during Wimbledon? Have you gotten past that?

PETE SAMPRAS: I think I always will miss it. I miss it. I'm just so familiar with that feeling of playing there, the court, just the daily life at **Wimbledon**. I'll miss it at 34, 44, 54. So familiar with the place, so many good memories, that I think these are the two weeks that I really do miss the sport.

And I miss the **Open** and the rest, but I think these two are just -- I was so successful, so many good memories there, I definitely miss it.

Q. When you played Federer back at Wimbledon, when you lost to him, was it clear to you this might be the heir apparent?

PETE SAMPRAS: At the time, I wasn't sure. I knew he was talented. I mean, I knew he was really, really good. I actually didn't play a bad match. I just lost a tight one at the end.

I didn't know how far he was going to take it and where he was going to go. I think I've seen him the last couple years just get a little better, a little better, just kind of figure it out. I mean, that's what I think guys -- I figured it out. You just kind of figure it out on your own. He has his formula for being the best player in the world, like I had.

I didn't know if he was going to dominate like he is today, but just who I see, him playing the way he's playing, I just think he's really, really good. Kind of sit back and watch him, put myself on the other side of the net, see how I would play him. You know, I think we both would have our hands full.

Q. With all the talk about Andre retiring, obviously Andre is not on the top of his game now. You retired, you still won a Grand Slam. Was it harder for you to retire

knowing you could still win and still play at the top of your game?

PETE SAMPRAS: It was a tough decision. It took me probably six months to get to the grips with moving on, not playing any more. It was the next year after the **Open**. I thought I was going to get ready for **Wimbledon**. After three days of practice, that's when I knew in my heart that it was time to move on. It wasn't in my blood any more. I didn't want to practice. At the end of the day, I had nothing left to prove to myself. It was time to call it a day.

Everyone's path to retirement is different, especially in tennis. It's not like a team sports guy where they have the last year of their contract and they're done.

Andre physically has gone through some tough times the last year. I think mentally it's taken its toll. When you do all that work at 35, 36, you want the instant reward. When he didn't get it, I think that took a little bit out of him.

I think physically, just dealing with a bad back, coming back, not playing for six months, can't expect to be at the level that he once was. To announce it, to be able to pay homage to him over the next couple months is something that he obviously planned.

It was time. I think he felt in his heart it was time to move on, give it one last kind of go at it and see how it goes.

Q. What is your handicap in golf? Are you going to be playing in the celebrity event in Tahoe?

PETE SAMPRAS: I actually can't play in the **Tahoe** event because I am playing **World TeamTennis**. I'm about four. I've gotten a little bit better. Still just an athlete playing golf, I'm not a golfer. I don't know all those little nuances of the game that you just know as a kid, as a pro. I just have fun with it, just grip it and rip it.

JOSH WEISSMAN: We're going to wrap this up here. I want to thank **Pete** again for coming on. We will see him through the month in July, **Newport Beach, Sacramento, Philadelphia, Hartford, St. Louis, Houston** and **New York**.

PETE SAMPRAS: All right, guys.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

ASAP sports

...when all is said, we're done.®

visit our archives at asapsports.com

P. Sampras – 07.06.06

NOTE: For more information on WTT, visit www.WTT.com.

Pete Sampras WTT Match Schedule:

Mon., July 10 – St. Louis @ Newport Beach
Wed., July 12 – Newport Beach @ Sacramento
Tues., July 18 – Newport Beach @ Philadelphia
Wed., July 19 – Newport Beach @ NY Sportimes
Fri., July 21 – Newport Beach @ Hartford
Sun., July 23 – Newport Beach @ St. Louis
Mon., July 24 – Newport Beach @ Houston