

August 18, 2009



Western & Southern Financial Group®

MASTERS & WOMEN'S OPEN

I. KUNITSYN/J. Blake

7-6, 6-7, 6-4

An interview with:

JAMES BLAKE

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. How did you feel out there physically?

JAMES BLAKE: Not my best. A little bit of an upset stomach. I don't know if that's from the heat or nerves. I don't know what it's from, but had an upset stomach and didn't feel great. Actually got a lot better in the third set. Maybe because it cooled off, I don't know. But I was feeling okay after that.

My toe was reacting pretty well. That hopefully is not gonna be a concern at all at the Open. That's a positive to take from it.

Q. Obviously this is a time of year when you've really shined, and frustrating with the injury. What positive do you take of the post Wimbledon season?

JAMES BLAKE: Well, you know, as much as I didn't feel great out there today, I know physically I'm gonna be all right for the Open, because I did a ton of work in the pool, on the bike, and just in general on my legs for the last four weeks when I couldn't do much else.

So I have a good feeling from that. But it's tough to take positive from playing only one match and losing that match. Just gotta look forward to the Open and hope it gets better.

I know I've been down in the rankings before, and sometimes it's fun to fight your way back and be the underdog for a little while. Maybe that's what I'm gonna have to do. Right now I'm

just -- you know, after not playing for a little while you don't feel as confident on the big points and you don't feel like you've got that kind of next gear at 4-All in the third or something like that.

But I hope to have it there for the Open. I know the adrenaline will be going even more so there with my fans. I'll look for positives at the Open.

Q. Is it something that you look forward to, the challenge of trying to fight your way back up, or is it something that seems frustrating?

JAMES BLAKE: Well, I'd love to be top 10 my entire career and feel like I just kind of coast through. No one does that. Even if it looks like Roger or Rafa do that, they don't. They work hard. They have to go out there and win every single day. It's not like anyone just goes out and gives it to them. No one can just coast. No one does it easily.

I obviously haven't had the same situations as them, but I've done my best with what I've been given and the situations I've been in. That's another positive that I can take from today. I did my best and fought hard. I saved a bunch of breakpoints, down a break in the second and down a break in the third.

So I know that mentality is still there. I still want to win matches and I still want to fight. If that ever goes away then I'm really in trouble. But I know I want to fight and I know I want to win matches.

That's something that will still push me. It's frustrating at times to go down in the rankings, but I haven't really looked at them. I actually have no idea what I'm ranked at right now. I stopped looking at them when I got hurt and I knew I was gonna drop.

So I don't know what I'm ranked, but I know I'll have to get back up there if I want to get seeded at a lot of big tournaments.

But other than that, I just need to play my game.

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Q. In the forward for the book *Charging the Net*, you talked about being inspired by Serena and Venus. I know they have a lot of tennis left, but what do you think their legacy will be? Will it be how they changed the game or how they transcended the game?

JAMES BLAKE: You know, I think their legacy is gonna be something where they did change the game. Before them, girls like Martina Hingis were able to kind of dominate just with kind of skill and finesse. Those girls just turned it into a power game and just started, you know, kind of ripping through. Anyone that didn't have the power to hit them off the baseline, they were gonna be in trouble, because they were just so physically dominating.

A lot of girls have caught up now to make it very entertaining to watch. But when you see girls kind of standing on the baseline kind of going toe to toe with them, like the Dementievas and like the Safinas and Henin when she was in her prime, and Clijsters. So they definitely changed the game. That right there is a legacy.

Also, they're both on pace for being in the consideration for greatest of all-time. Serena is a little ahead right now in the slams, but what they have done on the court is just tremendous.

Like you said, they have a lot more time left, so I'm excited to see how great they can be.

Q. You talked a moment ago about your motivation. What is your enjoyment level right now playing tennis?

JAMES BLAKE: Practices are tough when I'm not playing well, to be perfectly honest. I want to come back and be playing well, and I'm a little impatient when it comes to that.

But once I get out on the court for a match, I'm enjoying it a lot. I'm sure it didn't look like it today because I wasn't feeling my best. I'm still excited. Woke up this morning and I'm excited to have that match day, to pack up the bag for the match, to go through the warm-up and go through the pre-match routine and do all that kind of stuff.

I definitely enjoy the competition. I wasn't enjoying killing it on the bike the last few weeks, but I never have in my career. So that's a part of it though, and you enjoy it when you're done with it. The 30 or 45 minutes you're on the bike you never really are that excited, but when you're done, it's a good feeling for the rest of the day.

Playing tennis I still love. It's a little tougher sometimes when you're practicing and not

playing your best and you want it to just click in. You want it to be the same as it was when you were confident. For a little while there today it did. I was playing well at times in the match.

So as long as I know it can come back and it's gonna be there, the practices will get less and less frustrating, I know. I think I'm -- as impatient as I am, I'm more patient than I was when I was 21 years old. So I'm learning that I can't be great in every practice, and after taking four weeks off I'm definitely not gonna be great in every practice. So I have to weather the storm, if you will, of being a little frustrated and losing a few practices when I'm not playing my best.

Q. Has there ever been a point when you have not enjoyed the competition, or is that when you'll know it's time to leave?

JAMES BLAKE: Yeah, I don't think I've ever not enjoyed actually competing in matches. I really can't think of a time. That, to me, is so exciting. When I'm hurt, that's what I miss. When I'm healthy, that's what I love. I just love being out there and competing, so I've never not enjoyed that.

There are definitely times when I've gotten up and maybe not felt like practicing and pushed myself through it and felt good about that. Then there are days when if you really don't feel like practicing and you're gonna create bad habits, you're too tired, too sore, something like that, you need to take a day off, that's happened, too. But never for a match.

Q. On Sam and Andy, you played Sam a couple times and beat him. He seems to be making definite strides, and Andy as well. He's sort of put himself back in the conversation of the top 5. Can you give me some thoughts on those two guys.

JAMES BLAKE: Yeah, Sam is playing a lot better. I think we've all kind of seen how good he is. Whether it's in practice or matches, he's got such a big serve that he can be dangerous to anyone. He's got such a great attitude. He goes out there and goes for his shots and plays aggressive. I love that attitude in a young player. It hasn't changed with a lot of people questioning whether he needs to be safer or anything like that. I love his attitude and his confidence. He's just such a great kid. I want to see him keep doing well. I'm happy for him for how well he's done and

how well he did in L.A. and Indy and everything. Yeah, he's someone that will be really good.

And Andy, ure man, Andy is playing really great. I remember hitting with him at the beginning of the year and thinking he's poised to do some real work this year, do some damage, and he has done it and he hasn't not dropped one step. He's been in every match. Even when he's losing -- he's lost to Del Potro in the last couple weeks, but in tight matches that he could've won. Seems like every match is like that, that he can win. He's given himself chances, and he's definitely in some of the best shape of his career.

In my opinion, he's playing better than when he was No. 1 in the world. I've watched and practiced with him, and it just shows how much the game has improved, how much Roger and Rafa and Novak and Andy Murray and those guys have improved. Because I honestly think Andy Roddick is a better player now than when he was No. 1 in the world. It's really something exciting to see in the came game is why it's probably tough to come care eras.

Q. You're a veteran, and you know what it takes to stay motivated. Different things motivate people. What do you think keeps a guy like Federer motivated and going?

JAMES BLAKE: Yeah, that's tough for me to speak on. I can't say I've really walked a mile in his shoes. I've never been the guy with a target on his back for the whole year for really now six, seven years. He's just done some impressive things. I'm so happy that he's such a great champion that we have to be an ambassador of our sport. He gives back to the community, is great for the fans. Just a genuinely nice guy.

You know, it's tough for me to say what motivations him. I'm not with him day-to-day. I really don't know what pushes him every day. But whatever it is, you know, I'm happy he keeps doing it. It's great for our sport.

Q. A lot of guys, Murray has now got a group of people traveling with him, and Djokovic just added Todd Martin as a coach. I think Todd worked in the past with Robby, and now he's with Novak.

JAMES BLAKE: He worked with Mardy. Todd's a great tennis mind. Andy Murray has a great team. You know, a young guy that's that successful, to have a good team around is really important. It keeps his head on straight. He's a fun guy to hang out with in the locker room. He

just won a huge title. He could come in here with a big head, a big attitude, and he didn't at all.

First thing I said is, Congratulations, and he's talking about golf, he's talking about something else and is just as relaxed as can be. He plays down really how good he is. It's really good to see when a young player has the right kind of people around him. Miles Maclagan, his coach, and Jez and couple of those other trainers traveling with him over in Europe.

They all seem to be very genuine people looking out for his best interests. If you're gonna surround yourself with those kind of people, you're gonna be on the right track. Sets you up for a happier just in general life when you got the right kind of people around you.

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