

April 9, 2016



**Sloane Stephens defeats Angelique Kerber
(ret.)
6-3, 3-0
Semifinal Round**

An Interview With: Sloane Stephens

Q. Sloane, not the typical way to make it to the finals, but you've been coming here for a few years. What's it feel like to play on Sunday here?

SLOANE STEPHENS: I've never played on Sunday here, so I don't think I've ever practiced -- well, I practiced on Sunday here.

I don't know. It's exciting. It's nice. It's nice to be in another final this year and it's nice to be playing well on the clay. So it's a good start for me I think.

Q. Do you feel like your game is getting better each and every day?

SLOANE STEPHENS: Yeah, definitely. It's improving. Like I said, three finals this year is not bad. So yeah, everything is getting better. Couldn't ask for much more.

Q. You never take anything for granted at this stage, but I mean when you go to a final because your opponent wasn't feeling 100 percent, not feeling well at all really, does that factor in to the experience of making a final in a tournament or, hey, you made the finals, it doesn't matter, this is a great day?

SLOANE STEPHENS: I'm not sure -- making a final is making a final, but I think there's kind of a buildup to that. It wasn't just because of

today she wasn't feeling well. I think the matches I played previously, like yesterday I was down a match point and things like that. So I think going into today I was just looking forward to getting out there, and the same I'll do tomorrow, just looking forward to getting back on the court.

Q. When you got on the court, was there a point in the match where you said this is not the typical Angie Kerber or something is wrong on the other side of the net or did you know before the match she was sick or how did it come to you?

SLOANE STEPHENS: No. I didn't know anything. I just thought I'm going out to play a match. It's going to be a tough semifinal, obviously Angie's a great player. So yeah, I really wasn't thinking anything. I just thought it was going to be a battle. And unfortunately she wasn't feeling well. But I mean it's understandable. It happens. I wish her well. I hope she gets better soon because I know they have Fed Cup coming up next week. So yeah, that's all you can really do in that sort of situation.

Q. You've had a rather short relationship with your current coach, Kamau?

SLOANE STEPHENS: Kamau.

Q. Sorry.

SLOANE STEPHENS: That's okay. You're not the first person.

Q. And can you tell me what attracted you to him? Like what was the thing he had about tennis coaching that you saw attractive for you in your tennis career?

SLOANE STEPHENS: I'd say, oh, my God, no one's ever asked me that. I think he's just a good coach. I've known him for a while. We have good chemistry. We work well together. I mean I don't know. I think we just get along really well. We have a good on-court chemistry, which is good. And I don't know. Yeah. I just like him a lot, I guess.

Q. Okay. And I read in an article in one of the Chicago papers, probably the only one left, he said, "I tell parents that if they follow my plan, I can guarantee their kids a free college education." Has he guaranteed you anything because he's coaching you?

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SLOANE STEPHENS: No. (Laughs). I need to ask him why I haven't gotten a guarantee.

But no, but I think that statement is true. The kids in his academy, he's taken them from beginners and some of those kids, like they played in the PowerShares last night in Chicago with Agassi and Blake and all of them, and they were amazing! And he's taught those little kids since they were babies. So I think for him that statement with those parents is very accurate.

Q. Curious, Sloane, are you more excited you get a little more rest or maybe a little more anxious heading into the championship not playing a full two sets?

SLOANE STEPHENS: No. Doesn't matter. I'm just going to go out and play and have fun and enjoy myself.

Q. Obviously everybody has talked about how you've struggled at this tournament for several years before this year, but your play stepped up after you left here last year. You've won three titles since last year. Do you feel like it's your game or there's something you learned about how to play here specifically as to why you're in the finals this year here?

SLOANE STEPHENS: I think it's just a different mindset. I've always had -- I love this place. It's always been a really great environment, Eleanor and Bob have been amazing since I started playing here.

I think I just came in thinking, I love this tournament; I have nothing to lose, and I always play like garbage here. I need to just figure it out. So this year I just decided I was going to come out and do the best I possibly could, and if that meant I lost first round, then okay, whatever.

But I mean I just tried to say to myself I don't have anything to lose. I might as well just go have fun. I love Charleston. Why wouldn't I want to be here until Sunday? So I think taking on that mindset has helped me because I'm going to be here on Sunday.

Q. What do you think about the sort of feast or famine nature of your year so far? You win the tournament or you go out early, and is that okay as long as you're winning tournaments?

SLOANE STEPHENS: I mean I don't want to lose first round. But I mean I guess sometimes

it's going to happen. Obviously, like I said on my ESPN set, it's not like I've been playing scrubs. I've been playing some pretty tough players, and it's tough playing someone that you grew up playing tennis with and that you grew up playing juniors with and that you've always had pretty tough battles with.

So I think for me Indian Wells, Miami was just a tough situation, having a bye first round, not playing a match. The other people I played had already played a match and were well into the tournament.

It's not okay to lose first round, but I have won two tournaments this year; I'm in another final, so I wouldn't say that I'm having a bad season, but I'm definitely going to try to improve on those first round losses.

Q. And I heard you talk on TV about your Shoes4Souls. You've had good turn out in Charleston. Can you tell us a little bit about that?

SLOANE STEPHENS: Yeah. So last week we got 47 pounds of shoes, so Bob and Eleanor want to beat Miami, which I think we're going to do. Did you see the picture? It's like supes cute. So it's me holding up a pair of shoes, and then she's on the ground. It's in the grass. It's very cute.

So yeah, we're going to beat 47 pounds, and it's turned out really good. Bob and Eleanor, they've given a lot more tickets away than I think they thought they were going to. But it's worked out really nice.

Q. How much fun are you having off court? You've stayed I think 10, 15 minutes and signed autographs, and the fans really seem to take to you here, and I think after ESPN you almost made some sort of like speech on stage. You really seem to be embracing this week in Charleston because you're hanging around.

SLOANE STEPHENS: Yeah, as I said, different mindset. So I kind of just was like, oh, I've never had the opportunity to sign that many autographs. Let's be real. Because I've never won that many matches here. (Laughs).

So I think maybe I just -- you know, the people are so nice here. I mean it doesn't hurt to sign autographs. It doesn't hurt to stay five

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minutes extra. So for me it's been okay. It's not bad. And obviously I love it here, so yeah.

Q. How fresh do you feel heading into -- you played some short matches -- yesterday was a longer one, but how fresh do you feel heading into a Sunday final? Have you ever felt this fresh or do you feel like you've worked pretty hard this week and you'll have to grind it out tomorrow?

SLOANE STEPHENS: I think I've worked pretty hard this week, but obviously I'm going to play the winner of that match who is two great players, so I know I'm going to play someone tough so I just have to go out and do the best I can and just go out there and compete. I think whoever I play is going to have played four matches, five matches, too, so we're in the same boat. We're all in the same boat when you get to the finals.

End of Interview

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