

**March 26, 2009**

# Sony Ericsson Open

An interview with:

## JOHN ISNER

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

**Q. Good match.**

JOHN ISNER: Thanks.

**Q. Seems like you're riding a little wave of confidence. You've had some nice matches. Talk about Indian Wells and what that brought to this tournament.**

JOHN ISNER: Yeah, I played really well there. I put in a lot of work before that tournament. I had two weeks at home, which is kind of rare really when you're playing pro tennis. I took advantage of those two weeks and got a lot of work done and got a lot better, I felt like.

I carried that momentum into Indian Wells. Had a great tournament. Lost a close match, but then, you know, had kind of a quick turnaround here, having to play quallies. So I knew I needed to get ready for that.

So I only -- I mean, the only day I took off was the day I traveled back to the East Coast. So it was kind of a quick turnaround. Yeah, I'm pretty confident right now. I do have some momentum on my side, so that's helped me here.

**Q. You're probably sick of the height questions. You and Sam are playing back to back here. Two young American hopefuls. The players are getting bigger and bigger. I'm wondering, in your estimation, how has your height helped you, and how has it hurt you as far as tennis technique, things like that?**

JOHN ISNER: Yeah. Obviously it helps with my serve. You know, it's my biggest weapon. You know, it gives me a lot of leverage on my groundstrokes, too. I feel with my forehand I can get my weight behind it. If I hit it solid, it's going to be a good shot.

But, you know, I don't -- it kind of hurts with the movement. I mean, obviously I'm not going to

be as quick as -- for instance, the guy I play next, David Ferrer is -- he's a little rabbit out there.

You know, that's something that I can always improve on, and I felt like I have. You know, just certain things, getting down for low balls. In my case, I just got to stay strong and stay limber, and then that will help me a lot.

**Q. The volleying technique, staying low in the low ones at net? That's the tough one?**

JOHN ISNER: Exactly. I have to work a lot on my leg strength. I think that's the No. 1 -- most important thing for me. If my legs aren't underneath me, then I'm not going to do anything.

**Q. When did the growth spurt come? Were you ever torn between basketball and tennis, or was it always tennis?**

JOHN ISNER: No, I was torn between both of those. When I was about 15 I kind of had to give one up, because up until that point I was traveling with basketball and tennis, and also having to -- you know, missed a lot of practices with basketball and missed a lot of tournaments with tennis.

So I stuck with tennis. I felt like tennis would give me the best opportunity to get a scholarship to college. Kept up with it, got a scholarship, and it was my senior year in high school. I was about 17, 18. I grew like seven inches.

**Q. Whoa.**

JOHN ISNER: Yeah. I didn't really expect it. I shot past both my brothers.

**Q. How tall are they are?**

JOHN ISNER: 6'3", 6'4". One is 6'3" one is 6'4". I felt like every day I woke up and I was a little bit taller.

**Q. How did that affect your shoes, your knees aching?**

JOHN ISNER: My knees never really bothered me, which is surprising. I couldn't really wear the hand-me-down clothes from my brothers anymore, so my mom was always going back to

the store and getting me new shoes and new pants and whatnot.

But I think I'm safe now buying clothes.

**Q. What did the shoe size go, from what to what?**

JOHN ISNER: Whew, probably like a 13 to a 15, maybe.

**Q. That's not bad.**

JOHN ISNER: I don't think it shot up that high.

**Q. Did basketball coaches like just want you? Senior year in high school, college...**

JOHN ISNER: Especially in high school. I was -- I was actually a pretty good basketball player. I felt like I could have gone somewhere in basketball, too. Yeah, basketball coaches were, you know, not mad, I guess a bit disappointed I wasn't playing.

**Q. What college did you end up going to?**

JOHN ISNER: Georgia.

**Q. Dog. You look at March Madness, do you say, Hey, man, I could be there? Well, Georgia is not there, but do you feel like you should be there?**

JOHN ISNER: I mean, no, not now. Maybe if I'd played a little bit of -- you know, played up until my senior in high school or maybe a little in college. Not now. It's strictly tennis.

**Q. What's the key going to be against Ferrer? He has a really good return of serve, obviously. I think you're 0-1.**

JOHN ISNER: I'm 0-2 against him. He beat me one time. I won the first set and then I lost 2 and 2. He absolutely just throttled me. The guy is tough. He makes a lot of balls, and he's in unbelievable shape. He's like a bulldog out there, real feisty and doesn't give anything up.

I'm going to have to beat him, that's for sure. He's not going to beat himself. Hopefully I can go in there with a good game plan. You know, like I said, I am confident. I'm going to need to serve well and return well and hit some big groundstrokes and kind of throw off his rhythm a little bit.

**Q. There are so few breaks of serve in a lot of matches you play. I think you were down a break in the last set of your final qualifying match. How did you just stay mentally into it and fight back?**

JOHN ISNER: Yeah, he was -- I was down 6-2, 5-3. He was playing well, the guy, my opponent. I hadn't touched a serve up until that point.

But, you know, it was tough to close out a match, especially out here with these guys. I almost kind of blew it out there serving at 5-4.

You know, I stuck with it, put a lot of balls in play, and, you know, put a little pressure on him, and he kind of cracked. Then I broke him, then I held, and then I broke him again. I think I won like rolled off seven games in a row after that point, so that was big.

**Q. Are you and Sam tight maybe because of the things you have in common?**

JOHN ISNER: Well, no, not so much that. I'm actually really, really good friends with Sam. Before Indian Wells I was at his house practicing in LA for a couple of days. We keep in touch a lot, yeah.

**Q. Who wins one-on-one basketball?**

JOHN ISNER: Never played basketball. I'd take him, though.

**Q. You had the breakthrough a few years ago when you first came up, and kind of really got a little quiet the last few years. What has happened? What needs to happen for you to like make an impression?**

JOHN ISNER: Yeah, um, you know, I did have that breakthrough, and it was -- you know, obviously it was really good for me. You know, it gave me a lot of exposure, but at the same time, you know, I kind of got ahead of my learning curve, you know, so to say.

You know, nobody makes it to the top 100 really that quickly right off on the tour. I got there and I really wasn't ready for it, and I started losing a lot of matches. I think it was even last year this tournament I lost in three sets my first match. My confidence dipped, and I didn't do anything for the next three months. And then, you know, then next thing you know, summer rolls around and I had a lot of points to defend and it fell off.

But, you know, this is my second time

around, and I knew this would be a lot easier. Last year this time, I was ranked higher than I am now, but I'm a much, much better player now than I was last year.

**Q. How?**

JOHN ISNER: I just -- you know, just would come and -- you know, playing against these guys week in and week out, and, you know, putting in the time on the practice court. I've gotten a lot stronger. A lot of times it takes big guys longer to develop. I still think my best tennis is probably even two years ahead of me. I'm going to continue to get stronger.

I have a big frame. I need to keep a lot of meat on it.

**Q. What are your plans for the clay court season? What are your thoughts? It's not an ideal surface for you, but I think in the French Open you were up two sets over Chela.**

JOHN ISNER: That was the best match I played all year. I was playing really, really well on the clay. You know, a lot of times the clay kind of goes how the weather goes. It can play really fast and high bouncing, which is good for me.

I don't -- I mean, I think I should do well on clay, to be honest with you. It's going to give me more time on my return and on my groundstrokes. My serve, I think my serve should be effective on any court. I'm actually looking forward to the clay court season. I think I could make some noise.

**Q. When you and Sam are hanging out, do people come up to you and say, What NBA team do you guys play for? Do you get silly comments like that?**

JOHN ISNER: Walking down the street last week, some guy comes up to me. Wow, you're tall. Same thing to Sam. Asked if we were brothers and crap like that.

**Q. How about the NBA question?**

JOHN ISNER: No, he didn't ask that one actually. He could have been a little drunk. I don't know.

**Q. In Miami?**

JOHN ISNER: Yeah, it was in South Beach.

**Q. Are you just sick of those height questions?**

JOHN ISNER: I get them a lot. I get them a lot.

**Q. What's your response?**

JOHN ISNER: I just say tall. They ask me if I play basketball. I just say -- sometimes I say I like to say I play like weird sports like water polo. I told them I was a chess player before. I just like to see their reaction.

**Q. Have you got a choice in the NCAA?**

JOHN ISNER: I have Louisville in my bracket, which is -- I don't want to talk about my bracket. It's so bad. I'm in a group with, you know, 19 of my friends. There's no way I can come back. I'm in the cellar right now.

**Q. What killed you?**

JOHN ISNER: I had a lot of upset picks. They just I didn't legally come to fruition, you know. God, I don't know. I had UCLA in the Elite 8 for some reason. They got crushed with Villanova. A lot of stupid picks. I mean, there was a lot of chalk this year, and I didn't go that way.

**Q. You have to go Big East.**

JOHN ISNER: Big East is rough, yeah.

**FastScripts by ASAP Sports**