



WTA 500

Wednesday, April 1, 2026

Madison Keys def. Donna Vekic
6-2, 6-3
Round of 32

An Interview With Madison Keys

THE MODERATOR: Madi, congratulations and welcome back to Charleston. Just your thoughts on the first match on clay for the season.

MADISON KEYS: Pretty happy overall, I think. Getting off to a really good start with a couple of breaks, and I think I served really well. And, overall, not a whole lot of things to be upset about today.

THE MODERATOR: Great. Questions?

Q. It can be tricky against an opponent like her, especially coming through qualifying, she's got a little momentum. So you probably knew that as you came into the match.

Just talk about what it's like to face her, because she's obviously been much closer to the top of the game.

MADISON KEYS: Yeah. Donna is a great tennis player, and you always know that she has an incredibly high level. Doesn't really matter what she's currently ranked.

So I went into today being really aware of that and just kind of knowing that I needed to try to get off to a really good start and just try to keep the momentum on my side, just because she's obviously great, and then I think she's also very good on clay courts, as she's shown. So really just trying to get off to the best start as I could today.

Q. I'm sorry everyone's always asking you about Bravo.

MADISON KEYS: Oh, my gosh.

Q. But we're in Charleston. We're in the capital of Bravo reality TV right now. There's "Southern Charm." There's "Southern Hospitality." I'm curious if you've consumed any of the Charleston reality shows.

MADISON KEYS: I don't watch "Southern Charm" or -- what's the other one? "Southern Hospitality." But I did meet Venita and her mom the other day, and her mom is like the biggest tennis fan ever, and she's so sweet, and it was so nice. And I met Sally, too. I asked her about her chickens, because someone told me that.

But, yeah, I don't watch that. But I've been like very obsessed with like the other drama that's happening.

Q. (Inaudible).

MADISON KEYS: Crazy! Crazy! Guys, it's like there's so many things happening right now. And none of them are great. But to be honest, at least we have something to just bond together over.

Q. I assume you're Team Sierra in the whole --

MADISON KEYS: Obviously! Didn't you see that West is maybe cheating on her?

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Q. He is.

MADISON KEYS: Yes!

Q. He was in Mexico. (Inaudible).

MADISON KEYS: But he's also cheating on Amanda right now!

Q. Oh. He is?

MADISON KEYS: Yes! There's rumors of that now! Yes! Potentially with Sierra! No, it's crazy. It's crazy.

Q. (Inaudible)?

MADISON KEYS: A joint statement was like the craziest PR move I've ever seen in my entire life. No, it's crazy.

Q. Might be looking for a new home and all of that stuff. I know your experience. I think you were sick. Okay, so sorry about that. But what do you like want to see for that event in the future? What do you hope it becomes?

MADISON KEYS: I mean, I think that it becomes something that can -- I always go back and forth on if I feel like it should be in one place and then give it the opportunity to really grow or if I really like the fact that it kind of gets to move around and tennis fans from all over get to experience it. So I really -- I don't know where I land on like if I would want one thing or the other. But I just really want it to go to a place where people love tennis and they'll come out and they'll support. And, I mean, it's the thing that we all dream of playing. It's the event of the entire year that everyone is talking about, and I just hope that it ends up in a place that tennis fans get to see it and appreciate it and it gets to be the event it deserves to be.

Q. Do you think tennis fans like understand how big of a deal it is? Like I feel like a lot of people might be surprised to hear you say it's the thing we talk about all year, but I don't know.

MADISON KEYS: I think it's hard because obviously you have -- I think if you're like a hard-core tennis fan, you appreciate it. I think more of the kind of like surface-level tennis fans, I mean, we kind of all know that they just check in and out around the slams and stuff.

I mean, it's literally the race to the Finals. I mean, it's like the only thing that we talk about. So I would hope that the true fans appreciate, like, what we're racing to. (Laughs).

Q. We were talking about the record prize money at this tournament. I wanted to ask you about the funding the benefits program, also a part of that. I understand that's like a council move that happens where you guys are just like, yes, we want that. Do you know how that works?

MADISON KEYS: I'm not currently on council. So I can't say for certain. I would assume, having been on the council in the past, I would assume that would have gotten brought up in council and they would have had some sort of say to that. Most things that happen usually have to be okayed by the player council.

But I think it's -- I mean, I think it's amazing. I think that --

Q. The benefits part of it, why is that important?

MADISON KEYS: Well, it's really important because the prize money obviously goes directly to each individual. But the benefits are really important because they help support the entire tour. It goes towards pension. It goes towards retirement. It goes towards our insurance and all the things that really help everyone on the tour.

So I've always been a big believer that we should try to do as much as we can to support that, because the more people that we can support while they're playing and setting themselves up for a better future, I think that's just what players deserve.

We are out here, and we're giving it our all, and we're doing everything that we can to put up great performances and be a great product, and I think that's the best way that we can support them.

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Q. Madi, you just kind of mentioned how a lot of the really casual tennis fans kind of only tune in for the majors pretty much. I know there's been talks about what ways that can be fixed, maybe like a premier or premium tour. I don't know if you've heard of that, or like really trying to hone in on the 1000s. What are your thoughts on that, and what are maybe some other ways you think that the more casual tennis fans tune in to other tournaments outside of the majors?

MADISON KEYS: I think it would actually be really hard to get the casual fan to kind of tune in more. There's so much tennis, and it's all of the time. So I think to ask people to be in it all of the time I just don't really think is super realistic in the same way that -- I mean, I don't really watch tons of other sports in general, but it would be the same way as like everyone tunes in for the NBA Finals. Like you might not watch all season, but you have way more eyes on the Finals.

So I don't think it's necessarily a bad thing. I think you have the opportunity to kind of get the people who are on the fence of being the casual and how do you persuade a few more of them to get more into it, and I think a lot of that comes through story telling and showing the personalities of the players.

I have found that tennis fans will religiously follow you and wake up and watch all of your matches when they get to know you, because they feel like they a connection. And I think that's a really important thing that the tour is starting to do a good job of and showcasing more than just the names that you're going to see all of the time.

You want to showcase all the people who are winning the 250s, winning 500s and having the run of their life somewhere and then capturing all those people who fall in love with those runs to then get them to pay attention to all of the other weeks.

Q. And I just wanted to ask you, it's April Fool's Day and I don't know how you feel about that holiday. Do you have any like favorite or least favorite like April Fool's Day pranks that you've encountered over the years?

MADISON KEYS: He might kill me for telling you, but Bob actually made me play a prank on my agent today. Yeah. On my agent. So we texted her in like a group chat, and we're like, oh, my gosh, did you hear what happened with her podcast and everything? And then Bob also texted her, like, hey, we need to talk, and then none of us responded. (Laughs).

She did figure it out. She said she was freaking out for like 20 minutes and then saw the date and just texted all of us that she hates us. (Laughs). It was very funny.

Q. Madi, love your sweatshirt.

MADISON KEYS: Thank you.

Q. I love the collab that (indiscernible) did with the tournament. But I think it also highlights so many people love this tournament and want to watch it and be able to highlight, because that's also women's run business, and they like to highlight that sort of thing. What is so sort of special about the Charleston tournament specifically, and kind of in how they promote women's sports?

MADISON KEYS: Well, I would say I think the first thing that comes to mind is obviously it's the longest run women's only tournament. So it has incredible history at the start. And then I think just that the tournament continues to back us.

It's always amazing, and I think you see that, and you feel that, and the fact that they are the first tournament to provide equal prize money and the benefits. And they're so willing to go above and beyond to create a phenomenal tournament.

And I think we as players feel that. And then I think you see the fans also see that and love that. And it's just -- there's just this willingness of like everyone kind of works together. The tournament works with the players, the players work with the fans. And it's just, to me, just one of like the best ecosystems to kind of work in. And I think you just see that.

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Everyone loves Charleston. Everyone loves playing here. Everyone loves coming here. I always tell people, if there's a tournament that you're trying to go to, you should absolutely go to Charleston because it's a big tournament, but it feels so quaint, and you could see a lot of the players, and everyone is just so friendly.

So I just think that there's a reason that this has been the longest running tournament, and I think it makes it very evident and apparent.

End of Interview

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