

a PROUD History

Past successes provide powerful inspiration as the Australian Davis Cup team targets a 29th victory in the world team event – especially at Kooyong, that history is most profound of all.

BY JEREMY STYLES



"TO BE BACK AT KOORYONG FOR DAVIS CUP IS A BONUS FOR US. WE FEEL THIS VENUE GIVES US THE BEST POSSIBLE CHANCE AGAINST WHAT WILL LIKELY BE A STRONG CZECH TEAM."

LLEYTON HEWITT

If there's one thing the Australian Davis Cup team will always have on its side, it's history. The 28 world team titles that the host nation has claimed are just four below the US, the most prolific champions of the world team event. Great Britain, with 10 titles, is the only other nation to hit double figures in its Davis Cup tally.

It's at Kooyong Lawn Tennis Club that Australia's Davis Cup history is most profound. While Australia's last outing to the spiritual home of Australian tennis ended in a World Group first-round loss to the US in 2016, the nation has also claimed some of its most memorable Davis Cup victories at Kooyong. Between 1946 and 2006, Australia claimed nine of the 10 ties contested here.

One of the most important performances was in 1983, when a team comprising Pat Cash, John Fitzgerald, Mark Edmondson and Paul McNamee defeated Sweden – led by the higher-ranked Mats Wilander – in the final.

Australia secured another Davis Cup title at Kooyong three years later, again defeating Sweden in the final. Cash was the unquestionable hero of that victory, defeating Stefan

Edberg 13-11 13-11 6-4 in his opening rubber and recovering from a two-sets deficit to overcome Mikael Pernfors and set up a 3-2 triumph for the host nation.

It continued a fairy-tale run for the 21-year-old Cash, who in 1983 was the youngest man to compete in a Davis Cup final. "This is a fantastic feeling," said the Victorian. "In a way, this is my greatest moment in tennis."

Neale Fraser, who'd achieved his fourth Davis Cup title as Australian captain, described it as the best performance he'd witnessed by an Australian in the competition. Cash, who would go on to win Wimbledon the following year, could only agree.

"That's the best comeback I've ever made," he said. "He just played amazing tennis in the first two sets. I gutsed out the match better than I've ever done before."

Lleyton Hewitt was among those who were inspired by the two Davis Cup titles that Australia claimed at the iconic tennis venue. "To play Davis Cup in Melbourne, the home of tennis in Australia, at a club like Kooyong with so much tennis history is a privilege," said Hewitt, when the competition returned there in 2016.



▲ **SPIRITUAL HOME:** The Kooyong Lawn Tennis Club has played host to some of Australia's most successful Davis Cup moments. Lleyton Hewitt and John Peers pushed the Bryan brothers to five sets at the most recent Davis Cup encounter at the historic venue, while the 1986 Davis Cup team (below) claimed the coveted title against Sweden.



► **COUNTRY HEROES:** Fans scramble for Pat Cash's autograph at the Queens Tennis Club in London in 1986 (right), John Peers and Sam Groth talk tactics on their way to victory over Slovakia in the Davis Cup World Group Play-off in 2016, the Aussie team remain in the World Group after a 3-0 whitewash of the Slovakian team in Sydney last year.



DID YOU KNOW?

- The winner of this tie faces Switzerland or the US in the quarterfinal.
- Australia has played the Czech Republic eight times, winning all but one of those ties.
- Lleyton Hewitt, the team captain, is Australia's most prolific Davis Cup player. His 42 ties are the most contested by an Australian and his overall 58-21 record includes the most wins.
- This week marks only the second time a Davis Cup tie at Kooyong has been contested on a hard court.

"Some of my biggest memories of Davis Cup are watching replays of Pat Cash and the boys at Kooyong in '83 and '86. I don't know how many times I've watched those videos. (It is) such a special time in Australian history."

Hewitt himself - now the team captain - featured in Australia's 5-0 whitewash of Belarus in a second-round tie at Kooyong in 2006, which was the first tie played on a hard court at the venue. The most prolific Davis Cup player in Australia's history also came out of retirement to contest the doubles with John Peers as the team faced the US in 2016.

The Australians lost in five hard-fought sets to Bob and Mike Bryan, but were arguably richer for the experience. Peers, contesting Davis Cup

for the first time, said it was a privilege to compete alongside his teammates in such unique circumstances.

"It was an amazing experience," said the Victorian. "It was an honour playing with (Lleyton), to share the court and see how he handles (the occasion). We sort of fed off each other... it was an incredible experience with him."

Given the rich past, Hewitt is naturally delighted to return to Kooyong as the team faces the Czech Republic in 2017. "To be back at Kooyong for Davis Cup is a bonus for us. We feel this venue gives us the best possible chance against what will likely be a strong Czech team," he said.

"Kooyong holds so much history and provides a handy option for both teams straight

after the Aussie Open.

Momentum is on the side of the Australians in other ways too. After bowing out to the US 3-1 in the World Group first round last year, the team were in impressive form as they returned to the upper echelon with a 3-0 win over Slovakia in the World Group Play-off contested in Sydney last September.

Nick Kyrgios and Bernard Tomic gave the host nation a commanding lead as they each claimed straight-sets wins - over Andrej Martin and Jozef Kovalik respectively - on the opening day, before Sam Groth and John Peers wrapped up the tie with a win over Martin and Igor Zelenay in the doubles, also without the loss of a set.

Meanwhile, other young Australians are also lining up to



► **YOU BEAUTY:** Captain Lleyton Hewitt congratulates John Peers after he was part of the doubles combination to seal the victory for Australia against Slovakia in 2016.

represent their nation. Jordan Thompson, who peaked at world No.75 after upsetting the higher-ranked David Ferrer en route to the Brisbane quarterfinals, has made no secret that Davis Cup is a priority.

It also seems only a matter of time before Alex De Minaur makes a mark in the Australian team. Inspired by Hewitt and privileged to have the more senior Australian support him on occasion, the 17-year-old showed his spirit as he defeated Gerald Melzer in five sets for his major match win at the recent Australian Open.

The home team will need that enthusiasm in the challenge against the Czech Republic, which has claimed two of their three Davis Cup titles in the past five years. That record has been

helped by the influence of Tomas Berdych - although the long-time top 10 star and fellow Czech stalwart Radek Stepanek were both absent when Australia defeated the Czech Republic 3-2 in the World Group first round in 2015.

The most recent of eight meetings between the two nations, it was a tie that highlighted some burgeoning talent within the Australian team. Contested in the tough away environment of Ostrava, Thanasi Kokkinakis recovered from a two-sets deficit to defeat Lukas Rosol and Tomic claimed both singles rubbers, over Jiri Vesely and Rosol, without the loss of a set.

That year, Australia progressed all the way to the World Group semifinals, losing

a hard-fought encounter to eventual champions Great Britain by the narrowest of margins. "We were awfully close last year," said Hewitt, as the team secured their return to the upper echelon. "Hopefully this is the start of a big 2017 for us."

Returning to a venue that's provided such important chapters in Australia's Davis Cup history is an important portent of success in the team event. Not that committed team members will need a significant reminder this week - like character traits that are woven through generations, the ability of Australian players to peak while representing their nation is a quality that's been passed on from champion to champion.



► **CHARACTERS:** The Fanatics took the tie against the US to another level, dressing up as now American President Donald Trump.

AUSTRALIAN TEAM



NICK KYRGIOS

► Coming off a breakthrough season in which he claimed three career titles and rose to world No.13, a big 2017 seems likely for Kyrgios. Adding to the 4-3 singles record he's achieved in Davis Cup will be a priority.



JORDAN THOMPSON

► Already 2017 is a career-best season for Jordan Thompson, who reached his first ATP quarterfinal in Brisbane and won the doubles with Thanasi Kokkinakis. The Sydneysider won his first Australian Open match, over Joao Sousa, in five sets.



JOHN PEERS

► A winner of 11 doubles titles on the professional tour, the Victorian claimed his biggest win at the ATP World Tour finals with Henri Kontinen last November. His record is 2-2 in Davis Cup.



SAM GROTH

► Few players have cherished the chance to represent Australia as much as Groth, who first did so in 2014. With a 2-2 record in both singles and doubles, the versatile Victorian has doubles wins with Peers and Lleyton Hewitt.

► **UNBELIEVABLE:** Teammates celebrate with Lukas Rosol after he sealed the victory in the live fifth rubber against Germany in 2016.



◀ **STRETCH:** Lukas Rosol pushed Bernard Tomic to two tiebreak sets, but the Aussie was too strong in the reverse singles rubber in 2015.

▲ **CELEBRATE:** The taste of victory was celebrated on court as the Czech team claimed the tie against Germany to reach the quarterfinal stage in 2016.



▲ **TEAM BOND:** Team captain Jaroslav Navratil (left) with the team taking on Australia in 2015 (l to r) Lukas Rosol, Jiri Vesely, Jan Mertl and Adam Pavlasek.



▲ **SYDNEY ICON:** The Sydney Opera House was the iconic backdrop for the team set to meet Slovakia in September 2016 (l to r) Bernard Tomic, John Peers, Sam Groth, Nick Kyrgios and captain Lleyton Hewitt.

▼ **PERFECT START:** The Australians took a 2-0 lead against the Czech Republic on day one in March 2015.



▲ **OVERJOYED:** Lleyton Hewitt defeated Aleksandr Nedovyesov in the live fifth rubber to take Australia to the World Group semifinal in 2015.



► **TOUGH BATTLE:** Adam Pavlasek (far right) and Jiri Vesely were too strong for the Sam Groth and Lleyton Hewitt pairing in 2015.