

Bela's withdrawal and Mike's tears: "2024 will be my last year"

It's a sad moment for **Fernando Belasteguin**, for **Milano Premier Padel P1**, and for all those who love this sport and are fans of the "Lejenda." Bela is withdrawing from the tournament due to the elbow that seemed healed but has once again betrayed him. Not only that: 2023 will be the first season in 27 years in which he didn't raise a trophy. The next one will be the last of an incredible career that made history and, in some way, the future of padel tennis. Today's meeting at the **Allianz Cloud** – where the Argentine was accompanied by partner **Mike Yanguas** – has become a broader moment of reflection, where the champion has summed up a very long career full of successes and shared his plans for the future. "It's the same injury as before. Until Thursday, I was doing great, the training was going well. On Sunday night, I had the first discomforts, and progressively, I got worse until Tuesday when I felt the elbow was very inflamed. We are trying to understand what happened," he said.

Naturally, there is the disappointment of a champion who counted on the last tournament of the season to close the year with a trophy, which would have been the first with Yanguas. "We are sorry not to be able to play; we were training very well. The disappointment is great, but when these things happen, there's nothing you can do". For the first time in 27 years, Bela will finish the season without trophies. "I wanted to win with Mike, and probably the responsibility is mine. But I believe I've had a lot of consistency all these years, and it was something important. Now I will try to recover; we'll see what happens next year".

Speaking of **2024**, Belasteguin admits that "it will be the **last year** I play, and with which I will close the 30 years of my career". A statement that overwhelms Mike Yanguas: Bela's partner tries to hold back tears, hiding his face in his hoodie, but to no avail. Bela hugs him, Mike cries, and even the eyes of the 'Lejenda' get moist. Then Yanguas pays tribute to his partner-master: "Everything I've learned from him has been incredible", said the Spaniard. "Fernando is so **determined and competitive** that despite the pain, he did everything to be by my side and accompany me in yesterday's match. This example of never giving up, always giving your best, I will remember forever".

Bela, also moved, then continued telling his long-term plans: "I will definitely stay in the world of padel, first of all with my clubs. We should open a center in **Barcelona** in the coming years, and I want to help young people develop their careers. I would never have become what I am if they hadn't helped me. I have an important network of contacts known by practicing this sport, but I have never called. But to help young people grow and become champions, I will call them one by one". At the moment, he excludes commitments as a coach or **coach of Argentina** in the short term: "There is a team that arrived last year; they have a good project, and they need time. But anyway, as I said, I will try to help young people

grow". What are the most important things for an aspiring champion? Bela has no doubts: "Discipline in work and then family".

Finally, a thought also for **Juan Martin Diaz**, another legend who leaves padel and who was celebrated today at the Allianz Cloud in Milan. "We played together for 13 years, winning everything, and there is always great respect between us. We lived in a time when the most important thing was to compete with those in front of us, without thinking about interviews, social networks, and followers," concluded Belasteguín, with a reflection that is almost a warning for today's champions and those of the future. "We knew how to prioritize the most important things, and ego never ruined us".