

Edwardville/USTA Futures tournament grows by leaps and bounds

by Brent Feeney, Sports Writer
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EDWARDSVILLE – For a tournament that got started just six years ago because of a sudden opening in the **United States Tennis Association Futures** schedule, the **Edwardville Futures tournament** has grown by leaps and bounds.

This year's edition of the Edwardsville Futures presented by the EGHM Foundation will get started in earnest Monday, though a tournament that determined one of the two wild-card entries the tournament is permitted to offer took part this week; it was won by Strong Kircheimer, who will be in the main singles draw of 32.

The tournament, part of the USTA Futures circuit and a part of what has become known as the Illinois Swing, a series of Futures tournaments that got under way with the Lewis and Clark Community College Men's Futures Tournament this week, will feature a 32-player singles bracket and 16-team doubles bracket, with matches being held at the Edwardsville High School tennis complex throughout the week.

“From Day 1, before we started, Dr. (Ed) Hightower (the former Edwardsville District 7 superintendent) called Lewis and Clark (who have been holding their Futures tournament for 19 years now) to make sure they would be OK with this. Not only have they been OK with it, they've been supportive of it,” said EHS tennis coach and **tournament director Dave Lipe**. “It's a great fit for the players (taking part in the tournaments), to go from Godfrey to Edwardsville to Decatur to Champaign (the four sites for the Illinois Swing portion of the Futures tour), we've marketed this as the Illinois Swing; the USTA loves the concept.”

For example, Godfrey and Edwardsville are a quick drive between each other; it gives players who are in the LCCC tournament a chance to play in the wild-card tournament in Edwardsville as well. “Guys lose in Godfrey, and then we've got here the Pro Wild Card Challenge,” Lipe said. “I've heard more than one person say 'it's perfect the way you have this tournament.’

“We just finished a tournament that started Tuesday and ended (Thursday) for wild cards for this tournament, so guys are done in Godfrey and instead of just sitting around for a week, waiting for the next tournament to start, I had another tournament right there for wild cards. Some guys were literally still playing doubles in Godfrey who came and played singles here in the morning for a wild card; it just makes sense for the players.”

The impact of the tournament in Edwardsville goes far beyond the tennis courts; the city of Edwardsville reaps many benefits from the tournament, said EGHM Foundation president Joe Gugger. “We have a very strong partnership for this event,” Gugger said. “It was initiated because we wanted to have an ongoing relationship with the (Edwardsville) school district for the community, the tennis courts and also the USTA because it's a perfect network for being able to set the right examples for our kids within the district.

“As much as anything, we wanted to bring strong support for the community in terms of bringing business and revenue back to our community because it really is a 10-day tournament, and over that 10 days, we're able to bring in probably a quarter of a million dollars worth of business to the Edwardsville/Glen Carbon community. Because of that, we've had tremendous support from not only Dr. (Lynda) Andre (the Edwardsville school superintendent) and Dr. (EHS principal Dennis) Cramsey, but also the entire school board and our business leaders.”

“I've had the opportunity to sit in on a few meetings and gotten to know Mr. Gugger and several of the other members of the foundation and they're all about promoting student activity, whether it be on the tennis court with an event like this or whether it be in the classroom,” **Cramsey** said. “What a huge, huge effort they make to expand the technology that exists in our classrooms and ultimately, that generates a higher level of learning for our students, which we are all about.

“One of the things you're going to see over the next or so is about more than tennis; it's about people.”

In addition to the tournament play each day, several other events will be taking place during the tournament; the organization **Mitch 'n Friends will be hosting a Monday evening** event to give young people with special needs the chance to learn about tennis and First Clover Leaf Bank will be hosting Kids Night Sunday evening to give area youngsters a chance to learn about the game. For older youth players, a high-performance tennis clinic will be held Tuesday and Thursday evenings which will feature collegiate coaches and several of the tournament's players providing instruction on tennis, while an adult doubles clinic featuring Italian Tennis Federation coach Donato Campagnoli will take place Friday evening and Family Day will take place the morning of July 30.

The tournament's championship matches are set for July 31, crowning champions in the singles and doubles competition before the Illinois Swing heads to Decatur. For more information and updated information, including scores, throughout the tournament, visit the web page www.edwardsvillefutures.com.