



LCCC/USTA Tourney has international flair each year

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
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GODFREY – One way to bring people from around the world together is the international language of sport.

Tennis is a sport everyone around the world can understand; it's a simple game, can be played on many kinds of surfaces (clay, grass, hardcourts) and easy to watch; the world's top players are well-known to fans everywhere.

This week's **United States Tennis Association Lewis and Clark Community College Men's Futures Tournament** has players from both the USA in it, but also a good share of international players also taking part; nations such as Argentina, Colombia, Australia, Israel and the Bahamas are being represented in this week's singles and doubles competitions.

One of those players is the second-seeded player in the singles draw, Facundo Mena, comes from Buenos Aires, Argentina; the nation's best-known athletes are soccer players such as Lionel Messi and Diego Maradona, but tennis is also a popular sport in the South American nation.

“It's (tennis) is popular (in Argentina), but soccer is the most popular (sport),” Mena said. “When you are young, you want to play soccer; you have friends and neighbors who want to play soccer. I was introduced to tennis by my father; he was an upper-echelon player. I was deciding whether to play soccer or tennis, and when I was 10 years old, I decided to play tennis.”

Dekel Bar, who hails from Haifa, Israel, began playing at 9 years of age and has been at the game for the past 14 years. “I just started (playing tennis) as a hobby,” Bar said, “and then got serious (about playing). I model my game after Tomas Berdych (a Czech player who was a finalist at Wimbledon in 2010, losing to Rafael Nadal in the Gentlemen's singles final).”

Australia has one of the world's great tennis heritages; many of the world's top players, such as Ken Rosewall, John Newcombe, Pat Cash, Margaret Court, Rod Laver and Evonne Goolagong (to name a few) have called The Land Down Under home; several Australians are among the international players taking part in this week's tournament.

One player is Marc Pohlman, who hails from Melbourne (the site of each year's first Grand Slam event, the Kia Australian Open). “My parents got me involved in tennis when I was 4 years old,” Pohlman said. “My brother played as well. We have a really good history (of tennis in Australia); it's good, I just keep trying to do my best and hopefully be with those names one day.”

Another Australian, Daniel Hobart, hails from Adelaide. “I only decided to start playing properly when I was 14,” Hobart said. “Before that, I was playing socially and that was influenced by my dad and definitely by my mom as well; she's been one of my biggest influences.

“There's been so many great Australian players who have come through and they're definitely someone to look up to; it's every Australian tennis player's dream to play in the Australian Open before your home crowd. Everyone in Australia loves tennis; it's one of the biggest sports right behind (Australian Rules football; Hobart is a devoted supporter of the Adelaide Crows of the Australian Football League).”

One of the best parts of tennis at this level is the opportunity to travel around the world, meet people and learn about different cultures. “I've traveled pretty much the whole world and I'm only 18,” Hobart said. “That's all because of tennis; you get to see the world.”

“I've been to a lot of places, experienced different foods and different environments and I'm always learning and trying to pick up on something unique about a place (he visits),” Pohlmann said. “I would love coming back to the States.”

“The traveling is great; you get to meet a lot of people from all over the world,” Bar said, “(experience) a lot of cultures; it's great. You learn a lot (about the world and people).”

“It's nice; I'm very happy to be here,” Mena said. “You can know the world and people; it's nice to travel (around the world). If I don't have the tennis, I don't meet the people I know now.”

