



Top seeds Shropshire, Haworth advance to final of Pro Wildcard Challenge

by Colin Feeney, Contributing Sports Writer
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EDWARDSVILLE -Top-seeded Sam Shropshire and second-seed Chris Haworth both advanced to the championship match of the Pro Wildcard Challenge presented by THEBANK of Edwardsville on Wednesday morning and afternoon at the Edwardsville High School Tennis Center.

Shropshire advanced to the final by defeating Stefan Frijanic in the quarterfinals, 6-1, 6-2. He led Toby Boyer 6-1, 4-0 in the semifinals when Boyer was forced to retire in the second set due to leg cramps. Meanwhile, Haworth defeated Kris Ortega in his quarterfinal match 6-2, 6-0, and Nicholas Shamma 6-3, 6-2 in the semis.

In the other quarterfinal matches held Wednesday morning, Boyer defeated Alex Gomet in three sets 6-4, 2-6, 7-6, winning the third set tiebreaker 7-4, while Shamma upended Joe Van Meter in straight sets 6-1, 6-2.

The tournament, which is a lead-in for a qualifier for next week's Edwardsville Futures Tournament, has gone very well, and Tournament Director Dave Lipe couldn't be happier.

“It's been outstanding for many reasons,” Lipe said. “We were able to generate some revenue for our tournament, and we have to thank the presenting sponsor, THEBANK of Edwardsville, for sponsoring this wildcard tournament along with our other wildcard

tournament, the Edwardsville Open. So, it's been productive and time well spent in that way, and it's also been great for these players.

“These players have all found multiple matches,” Lipe continued, “at their respective skill levels. So it's been fantastic for the development of all of these players. They've all played a ton of tennis, and it's been a good tool for all of them, from our two finalists tomorrow to our kids who played it out for 21st and 22nd this morning.”

Each player has played four matches, and will have an optional match tomorrow, if they so choose to play it. There's still much at stake in tomorrow's final, as the winner of the match gets a automatic wildcard berth into the main draw of the Edwardsville Futures. The loser, along with both Shamma and Boyer, will get berths into the qualifying tournament, which begins Saturday morning at both the EHS Center and the courts at SIU-Edwardsville. Qualifying matches run through Sunday, with the Futures tournament beginning on Monday morning.

“There's still a lot to be decided,” Lipe said. “One of these two guys tomorrow is going to get a main draw wildcard, and that's a big deal. It's been a productive experience from that standpoint, as well, as we've been able to sift through these guys, and let the best players have an opportunity to nab those wild cards or those (qualifying) wild cards.

“And then, lastly, it's been very productive in the sense that our local players. . .from Edwardsville, Belleville East, Mascoutah High School, Marquette (Catholic), among others,” Lipe said. “All those schools are represented, and it's been a very good learning tool for those kids, and a good tool for their programs.”

Lipe also cited the economic boom that hosting a tournament such as this has provided to the Edwardsville area.

“It's good economically,” Lipe said. “All the local businesses get about two dozen or so people from out of town that are staying here, sleeping here, eating here, and gassing their cars here. It's a positive from that experience as well. The weather has cooperated, and the level of play has been outstanding. Our guys throughout this tournament have been really good and really strong, and it's just been a very, very positive experience.”

Lipe recognized Kirk Schlueter and Jack Desse for their help, and expects some great tennis to be played when the Futures tournament begins next week.

“Even higher skill level,” Lipe said. “That's the thing; we've got three tournaments back to back to back here. The Pro Wildcard Challenge, this tournament, the (qualifiers), and then the main draw. So it's three tournaments, a draw of 23, a draw of 64, and a draw of 32. Some players will participate in more than one of those draws, many will participate

in just one of those draws. I expect a greater level of competition, we're supposed to have good weather, and I expect record numbers of fans to come out.”

And activities surrounding the main draw will be held throughout the week. Included are various community nights, an adult clinic and kids' high-performance clinic, and a night with Mitch and Friends, a program that introduces the sport of tennis to disabled children.

“It's a big deal to all of us that are working hard and getting ready for it,” Lipe said. “A big thanks to the EGHM Foundation for continuing to host our tournament, and the City of Edwardsville for their continued support as well for the entire tournament.”





WEDNESDAY'S RESULTS

QUARTERFINALS

Sam Shropshire def. Stefan Frijanic 6-1, 6-2

Toby Boyer def. Alex Gomet 6-4, 2-6, 7-6 (7-4)

Nicholas Shamma def. Joe Van Meter 6-1, 6-2

Chris Haworth def. Kris Ortega 6-2, 6-0

SEMIFINALS

Shropshire def. Boyer 6-1, 4-0 (retired)