



Entire Edwardsville Community Benefits from Edwardsville Futures Tennis Tournament

by Colin Feeney, Contributing Sports Writer
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EDWARDSVILLE – When the ninth edition of the Edwardsville Futures tennis tournament presented by the EGHM Foundation takes place Aug. 5-11 at the Edwardsville Tennis Center, there’s one thing that can be counted on, as has been the case for the previous eight tournaments.

The entire Edwardsville and surrounding communities reap great benefits from the tournament.

Whether it be economically, via community involvement with the tournament and its surrounding events, or even with the intangibles, the city of Edwardsville has benefitted strongly from hosting the tournament, and once again, expectations are very high and optimistic for this year's tournament.

"I'm hoping for great participation," said tournament director and Edwardsville High tennis coach Dave Lipe in an interview that followed a press conference held July 17 at the Country Hearth Inn and Suites in Edwardsville. "I'm hoping for cooperative weather. We've been working really hard all summer, all year, in fact, on this tournament. I think we've worked harder than we ever have before. We're hoping for a better fan experience.

"We've already been able to create several more community partners. I'm hoping for great play from the players, which I'm sure we'll get, and I'm looking forward to the event. We worked so hard, that once it finally comes, I'm hoping to enjoy it. I'm hoping to be able to have things in place, and to not stress over the event, but to just be able to enjoy the tournament like everyone else, like all the other tennis fans."

And the quality of play in the tournament is very good indeed, as a total of 31 ATP championships have been won by tournament alumni, most notably John Peers, who was part of the winning team that took the men's doubles at the 2017 Kia Australian Open, and was also a finalist at both Wimbledon and the U.S. Open in 2015. Most recently, Tennys Sandgren, the 2016 champion, went to the quarterfinals of the Australian Open and this year, reached the Round of 16 at Wimbledon.

"Tennys Sandgren is one of several players whose success continues to bolster the reputation of our tournament," Lipe said, "as truly the future of the ATP Tour. Players have to start someplace, and they start here, and they come through here, and then, they go on to do big things on the ATP Tour. And that's exciting for people to realize and recognize, and yeah, it's great. Anytime one of our alumni does something noteworthy on the ATP Tour, of course, that's a feather in the cap of our reputation."

Illinois 112th District State Representative Katie Stuart is also very excited for the tournament to begin, and knows from experience the excitement of a tennis tournament can be to a community.

"I'm really excited," Stuart said. "I love tennis. I played tennis as a young girl; I was not that good at it. I was lucky enough to live, actually, relatively close to Flushing (Meadow, N.Y.), so I've been to the U.S. Open a few times, so it's amazing to get professional tennis right here in our community."

Stuart described the experience of the Flushing Meadow center, where the U.S. Open is held, as a very positive one.

“Yeah, it was great,” Stuart said. “We would go to the opening rounds, where you could walk around the grounds and see lots of different matches going on at the same time, and that’s the kind of atmosphere you get here, where there are six courts going, and you could watch a different match, and that’s where it’s really exciting.”

Stuart is hoping for many good things for this year’s edition of the tournament.

“I’m hoping, for Emily’s (Cimarolli, one of the tournament’s associate directors) sake, and Dave’s sake and for everybody else, I hope they have good weather, I hope we don’t have to worry about thunderstorms, and not extreme heat like we have now. I hope that the players have a great experience, I hope the fans have a terrific experience, and then everybody, at the end of it, is looking forward to the tenth incantation, which I think is going to be wonderful.”

Cimarolli echoed Stuart’s take of being hopeful for good weather and good tennis throughout the week.

“I am just hoping for a good week of weather, first of all,” Cimarolli said with a laugh, “just a good fan base in our community, and just great competition throughout the players, and hope things all run smoothly.”

Cimarolli, along with Kirk Schlueter, are the tournament’s associate directors, and their duties are very much varied, but with the goal of having the tournament run as smoothly as possible.

“Kirk and I run two different roles, kind of,” Cimarolli said. “He’s more of the media side, working with the press releases, and then, all of the on-court setup, as far as like manual labor. And then, I run the tournament desk. And so, I check the players in, put them on the courts, record their scores, talk with the officials, and just make sure that the courts are moving on time, and things like that.”

As far as the players themselves, Cimarolli is anticipating many college stars from throughout the nation, as well as players who have ambitions to play on the ATP tour, and the Grand Slam events as well.

“As far as the players are concerned, a lot of the college guys come out during their off-season to prep for the next year of school,” Cimarolli said, “and many recent grads who have just graduated, looking to go farther on the pro circuit, and then to play the four majors after that. The list has not come out yet, but we usually have a pretty good crowd

from between all the top SEC schools, and Stanford and USC. And then as far as players internationally, so it's a pretty good draw."

Cimarolli also thought the recent success of Sandgren speaks well for the quality of the tournament.

"Absolutely," Cimarolli said. "All the best to Tennys, and it's great that he's been able to go far in the majors since leaving our tournament. But yeah, it just speaks to this kind of tournament. The players can start their careers here off in these local tournaments, and then go on and do great things at the majors."

And that the courts at Edwardsville High School, where the Edwardsville Tennis Center is located, are able to host a tournament of this caliber speaks well of both the facilities and the school itself.

"Oh, absolutely," said Edwardsville High School principal Dr. Dennis Cramsey. "To host an event at this high level, the caliber of athletes and coaches that come in from all around the world, and eat locally is just absolutely amazing."

Cramsey gave credit to the community's support of the school district for being able to host the tournament.

"Well, absolutely," Cramsey said. "I think we can thank our community years ago for providing such great facilities to us, to use not only for educational purposes, which is our primary focus but also to host events like this. Former superintendents like Bob Stuart initiated the construction of the new high school, but then Ed Hightower got the job done, and it has completely enhanced our facilities across the years to bring it to what it is today."

Cramsey also feels that events such as the Futures have a positive impact on the school's mission and curriculum as well.

"I think it just contributes to a culture of excellence that exists at Edwardsville High School," Cramsey said, "and our students understand, and not only are they getting a well-rounded education through a very well-delivered, rigorous curriculum, but there are so many other things that are happening outside the classroom that have taken us to the highest level that a high school can provide."

And Cramsey has been proud of the tournament and its growth during his tenure as principal.

“It’s been fun to watch the people come in, it’s been amazing to work with people like Dave Lipe, and I can’t speak enough about a hard-working, smart, and humble man that provides such a great event for this high school and this community,” Cramsey said.

Lipe is hopeful that one of the Futures alumni can win a singles championship of a Grand Slam tournament one day and knows that it could happen.

“You know, it’s happened.” Lipe said “(Andre) Agassi has played in tournaments this level. Andy Murray has played in tournaments at this level in this country. So we’ve had somebody win a Slam in doubles; we’ve had one of our alumni win a Slam in doubles. We’ve had a player get to the (semifinals), we’ve had a player win doubles, so that’s a good thing for our tournament.”

And it’s a strong possibility that the fans who come out to see the Futures could be seeing a future Grand Slam singles champion as well.

“We absolutely could,” Lipe said. “Anything’s possible, and we’re always rooting for these guys.”

For further information on the tournament, including volunteering opportunities and a calendar of events, please log onto the tournament’s website, www.edwardsvillefutures.com.