



# **Liam Caruana Becomes First Repeat Winner in Edwardsville Futures History With Doubles Final Win With Nathan Ponwith 4-6, 6-4, 10-5**

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EDWARDSVILLE – Liam Caruana, originally from Rome, Italy, now from Austin, Tex., made history on Saturday when he teamed up with Nathan Ponwith of Tempe, Ariz., and Arizona State University to defeat the team of Alfredo Perez and George Goldhoff 4-6, 6-4, 10-5 to win the doubles championship of the \$25,000 Edwardsville Futures presented by The EGHM Foundation tennis tournament at the Edwardsville Tennis Center.

With the win, Caruana becomes the first player to repeat as a champion in either the singles or doubles in the nine-year history of the Futures. Caruana teamed with Nicolas Alvarez to win the title in 2018.

“It was a really good match,” Caruana said in a post-match interview. “It was fun to be a part of, and it was a good match.”

Caruana and Ponwith, after dropping the first set, were able to take advantage of two service breaks in the second set to win, then took the first five points in the third set tiebreak to win the match.

“I think when we got that initial break in the second set, we really like raised our energy,” Caruana said. “We started playing smarter, and we started playing, like, our strengths, so I think that was the key, and just focusing on every single ball. We really got off to a good start in the third set tiebreak, and we were helping each other out.”

Both teams played well throughout the match, very much worthy of a final.

“They played a very solid match,” Caruana said. “They gave us a couple of balls In the second set that let us get back into the match, but they played a clean match, and we’re fortunate to win it.”

Perez felt that he and Goldhoff played well throughout the entire week, and Perez had a good first experience with his partner.

“It was a great week for sure,” Perez, a native of Havana, Cuba, now of Coral Gables, Fla., and playing for the University of Florida, said. “It’s my first time playing with George, so we’re just getting to know each other. I would say there’s a bright future ahead if we keep playing together.”

Perez’s serve was broken twice in the second set, and he also felt that it was a key to the outcome of the match.

“For sure, not getting broken,” Perez said. “If I would have held my serve more. I just got broken two times in the second set. I felt like we were the better team, maybe, like, they’re a great team, too. But, I felt like we were ahead most of the time, I just got to serve better. It’s men’s doubles, so you’ve got to hold your serves.”

The third set tiebreak was also a key, as mistakes by Perez and Goldhoff led to a 5-0 lead for Caruana and Ponwith.

“We made some mistakes early, but they played well,” Perez said, “and they really took advantage of the poor start in the tiebreaker for us. They didn’t really make any mistakes in the tiebreaker, so we couldn’t catch up.”

Goldhoff's first time in the Futures tournament was a successful one, getting to the doubles final, and feels that he's progressing very well.

"No, it was a great week," Goldhoff, who plays for the University of Texas, said. "It was my first time in a Futures \$25K doubles semifinals, so as long as there's progression week through week, I'm OK with that. But definitely today, I would have loved to come away with the title as well."

Goldhoff felt that he and Perez stuck to their game plan well in the opening set, but Caruana and Ponwith raised their game when they got behind.

"Well, I think in the first set, we were executing our game plan very well," Goldhoff said, "and we were making a lot of the shots we needed to make to beat a team like that. And whenever you play teams that good, they're usually going to raise their level whenever they go down. And that's exactly what happened, as everybody could see. I think the margins are so small, and I think if we made a couple of first serves here and there, and maybe made a couple of returns, maybe we could have come back in the second, but it's hard to tell in tennis. You can't think that way."

Goldhoff and Perez kept battling throughout the match, but the second and third set setbacks were very hard to overcome.

"Whenever you start out 5-0, and I double-faulted a couple of times to give them a little bit of momentum, it's tough to rebound back from," Goldhoff said, "but we just kept on telling ourselves 'let's just keep on getting every point we can, and maybe something will happen.' And, again, they hit their spots in the big moments, and not really much you can do."

The first set was a bit of a see-saw affair, with Goldhoff and Perez serving first, and the team quickly won the first game of the match, but Caruana and Ponwith just as quickly won the next game to even the set at 1-1. Play went back and forth from there, with both teams holding their serves, which would make the first service break crucial. It came at 5-4 for Goldhoff and Perez, when at deuce and the next point deciding the game, Perez hit a shot that bounced off the tape at the top of the net and fell into the court to give Perez and Goldhoff the point, game and set at 6-4.

The two teams held service in the opening games of the second set, but Caruana and Ponwith, making good shots, went up a service break in the third game to take a 2-1 lead, then held their serve in the next game to go-ahead 3-1. Perez hit a nice groundstroke shot in the next game that made it 15-0, which helped his team come back to 3-2, but another hold by Caruana and Ponwith made the set 4-2. In the next game, at 15-15, a high lob shot by Caruana and Ponwith went high into the air, which Perez

cleverly tapped over the net with both Caruana and Ponwith anticipating a smash for the point. But Caruana and Ponwith got another service break to take the game and go ahead 5-2 in the set. Goldhoff and Perez returned the favor to make it 5-3, then won the next game to pull to within 5-4, but Caruana and Ponwith, mixing their shots well, got a drop shot to fall perfectly to win the next game and the set 6-4, forcing a deciding third set tiebreak, with the first team to get to 10 points while leading by at least two winning the set and match.

And at the start of the tiebreak, it was Caruana and Ponwith gaining the momentum while scoring the first five points of the set to take a quick 5-0 lead. Goldhoff and Perez fought back with good shotmaking to cut the lead back to 5-2, but Caruana and Ponwith won three of the next four points to make it 8-3. A perfect shot and a great service return by Goldhoff and Perez cut the lead to 8-5, but Ponwith made a big shot to bring it to 9-5 and match point, where Caruana made a brilliant passing shot to clinch the tiebreak and match at 10-5.

Caruana wasn't even thinking that he was the first-ever repeat winner of either the singles or doubles in tournament history, but still felt it was a great honor.

"Yeah, it was pretty cool," Caruana said. "Honestly, I wasn't really thinking about it too much, but yeah, winning it twice feels obviously even better. It was really fun playing this year."

And Caruana will have some mixed memories of this year's tournament as well.

"Negative singles, but very good doubles feelings," Caruana said with a laugh. "Just good energy to go into the next tournament. Obviously, when you finish with a win in anything, it's huge, and I'll just try to use it for the next tournament."

Perez will also have excellent memories of the week as well.

"Oh, yeah, for sure," Perez said. "It's a great tournament, great crowd for an unbelievable Future. It's a great memory, for sure."

Goldhoff will also come away with positive memories of the week and hopes to use them for his upcoming tournaments.

"There's a lot of stuff that I want to take away," Goldhoff said, "but the biggest thing is, I mean, I just have to be prepared for whatever happens in any situation. I felt like that, after the first set, we kind of relaxed a little bit instead of locking down, and I think just

being prepared for people to raise their level, and the finals, you're playing against a team who also wants to win really badly. So I just think being prepared, and being ready for anything.

"I'm just really pumped, that I had a really good tournament," Goldhoff continued, "moving on to Memphis, but it's a good start to the summer, and I'm excited for the rest of it."

And Caruana thanked everyone associated with the tournament for their hospitality and hard work.

"I just like to thanks everybody that made this event possible," Caruana said. "All the ball kids; I didn't get to thank them before. All the ball kids, the umpires, everybody that was here supporting."