

COVID-19 Pandemic Forces Cancellation Of Edwardsville Futures Tennis Tournament, One Of Biggest Events Of Summer In Area

by Colin Feeney, Contributing Sports Writer
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EDWARDSVILLE - The current COVID-19 Coronavirus pandemic has disrupted sporting events and games locally, nationally and internationally, and now, the pandemic has forced cancellation of one of the biggest summer events in the area.

The \$25,000 Edwardsville Futures tennis tournament, presented by the EGHM Foundation and scheduled for Jun. 28-Jul. 5, was cancelled on Wednesday because of the pandemic. The International Tennis Federation, Women's Tennis Association and the United States Tennis Association Pro Circuit has suspended all play through July 17 because of the pandemic, forcing the cancellation of the event. The suspension has also caused the cancelation of the sport's most important tournament, the All-England Championships at Wimbledon for the first time in 75 years, along with the postponement of the French Open to August in Paris. The fate of the U.S. Open in Flushing Meadow, N.Y. in late August and early September, has yet to be determined.

The Futures tournament regularly attracts some of the best younger players in the world who are attempting to qualify for the Association of Tennis Professionals main tour, and is one of the most highly anticipated events of the summer season in the area. The matches regularly attract large crowds to the Edwardsville Tennis Center, and enjoys widespread community support.

"I feel bad for the players who were looking forward to coming back to play," said tournament director and Edwardsville High School head tennis coach Dave Lipe, "I feel bad for our sponsors, who like to be involved in the event, I fell bad for our staff and interns; we had a large number of new interns who were looking forward to being involved, I feel bad for the Edwardsville community, because there will be about a \$250,000 hit for our economy, and I feel bad for the fans who were looking forward to seeing the matches."

A lighting upgrade at the tennis center would have allowed some of the matches to be played at night, but Lipe emphasized that the decision to cancel the tournament was not his doing.

"That was a decision that was taken out of my hands," Lipe said, "and it's not my place to question it."

Still, Lipe is already looking forward to the 2021 edition, in which the Futures will be celebrating its 10th anniversary.

"We're looking forward to coming back bigger and better in 2021," Lipe said. "We're hoping to continue on with the support of our event from the EGHM Foundation, along with the support of (Edwardsville Community Unit) District 7 and the city of Edwardsville, along with our many sponsors."

In last year's singles finals, Cypriot Petros Chrysochos defeated Nathan Ponwith in a three-set thriller, 6-4, 2-6, 7-5, while the doubles title went to Liam Caruana and Ponwith over George Goldhoff and Alfredo Perez 4-6, 6-4, 10-5. And while Lipe is

disappointed that this year's tournament won't take place, he's already looking forward to next year's tournament.

"While we're disappointed, we also realize that a worldwide health issue is going on," Lipe said, "and we're looking forward to being back in 2021."