

Hjikata Notches Second Consecutive Futures Singles Championship Sunday At Edwardsville Over Kirchheimer 6-3, 6-1

by Brandon Harris
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EDWARDSVILLE – Rinky Hijikata notched his second consecutive Futures championship this weekend at the Edwardsville Men’s Futures. The Australian world number 708 won convincingly with a 6-3, 6-1 victory over America’s world number 533, Strong Kirchheimer, to claim the title.

Kirchheimer got off to a strong start in the first set going up a break for a 3-2 lead. The following game would begin with a double fault, would lead Hijikata breaking back, and a momentum shift that would seem to last to its conclusion.

Hijikata would rattle off the next six games - winning the first set 6-3, immediately breaking his opponent’s serve, and consolidating the break for a 2-0 second set cushion. Hijikata acknowledged his opponent’s strong start but still felt confident about his game, “I went down an early break but I did not feel like I was in a lot of trouble. I get a few lucky breaks and just kind of rolled with it.” Those breaks and momentum helped him cap off his second consecutive championship with a 6-1 second set victory.

In a post-game interview, Kirchheimer commented on the difficulties he experienced with withholding his serve. “I had done a really good job with my serve. I hadn’t been

broken on my serve till today and then the flood gates opened.” Playing opponents with strong returns was not new to Kirchmeimer; but the serving conditions for the final were certainly new.

For much of the weeklong tournament, the weather had been hot and dry. Championship Sunday began with morning thunderstorms making for mild temperatures but also brought the unforgiving Midwest humidity. While the final was played in unique conditions, neither player credited the weather for the result.

“Today was definitely different. Obviously with the rain this morning, conditions were a lot heavier. Things had been moving quickly here all week; the courts are very fast. I just need to do a better job adjusting for heavier conditions.” Strong Kirchheimer said about conditions.





Meanwhile, Rinky Hijikata was inviting to today's conditions. "Not too much of an adjustment. It was a little bit windy today but that was about the only thing. Being mindful of that and trying to use that to my advantage. Yesterday and the last few days had been so hot but today was nice with the little bit of a breeze. A lot more comfortable playing today... that's for sure!"

While the conditions had their effects on the two players, there was one thing about today's final that both could agree on. The fans.

"It's been unreal. I feel like the community has really gotten behind this tournament. It means a lot to us players. At this stage, it beats playing in front of no one. It is so much more fun when you got a crowd and I absolutely love it. I was so thankful for everyone that came out today." - Hijikata.

"It's tremendous. Having fans, it's big. Especially with COVID, the last year and a half has been playing a lot of events without spectators. I played a final in Portugal last fall with a similar court atmosphere, just no fans. So, it was really great to have people out every day this week." - Kirchheimer.

At the end of the match, Champion Hijikata thanked his full team and North Carolina University for their help with his victory. It feels unanimous that the local sports

community is thankful to the players, staff, maintenance workers, and fans that helped make the 10th Year of The Edwardsville Futures another one to remember!



Road to the Final

Hijikata

R1: def. Peter Bertran 6-3, 6-0

R2: def. Olivier Stuart 7-6 (7-4), 7-6 (7-3)

QF: def. Blaise Bicknell w.o

SF: def. Cannon Kingsley 7-6 (7-3), 6-7 (6-8), 6-2

Kirchheimer

R1: def. Reese Stalder 7-6 (7-4), 7-6 (7-3)

R2: def. Victor Lilov w.o

QF: def. Elliot Spizzirri 6-2, 6-0

SF: def. C Langmo 6-4, 6-4





