

Press Conference Previews Edwardsville Futures Tennis Tournament, Event Adds Much To Community's Economy

by Colin Feeney, Contributing Sports Writer
July 17 2023 9:49 AM



EDWARDSVILLE - A press conference held Friday afternoon previewed the Edwardsville Futures tennis tournament, presented by the EGHM Foundation, with the 12th annual event to be held July 24-30 at the Edwardsville Tennis Center. at Edwardsville High School. The conference was held at the Holiday Inn Express Hotel, which will serve as a flagship hotel for the event.

The tournament is an important stepping stone for the younger players who compete in the tournament, with many going on to success in both the Association of Tennis Professionals world tour and the Grand Slam events. The tournament's become one of the most anticipated events on the United States Tennis Association's Futures Tour, which is also the only professional tennis tournament in the St. Louis area.

"Year number 12. Here we go," said tournament director Dave Lipe, who's also the boys and girls tennis coach at Edwardsville High School. "Maybe the trademark of this tournament is that we work really hard every year to make it better. To involve more people, to up our marketing game, to make our organization a little tighter, to improve our facilities, to do something every year to make it better. And we continue to grow and it continues to be a summer tennis favorite for local tennis fans locally, regionally, nationally and globally. As Mr. (Joe) Gugger (the president of the EGHM Foundation) alluded to, players love to come here because there's a lot of buzz about them and about the matches. Oftentimes, they don't get nearly the type of excitement created and the type of attention that we give them here in Edwardsville.

"Also, the facilities are fantastic," Lipe continued. "The hotel room in which you're sitting in right now and the fact in that within two minutes, players can walk to over 30 restaurants is amazing."

The restaurants in the area are considered top-notch and are an important part of the Edwardsville area economy, which benefits greatly from the event. The EGHM Foundation, which is an organization of local business leaders who works closely with Edwardsville Community Unit School District 7, has been the title sponsor of the event since its inception and continues to work to help improve the tournament.

"This is year number 12 now for doing it," Gugger said, "and that's still a pretty special accomplishment for a community this size to have hosted an event this big and this important. But then, the tennis community, not just locally, not just in the Missouri Valley or this area, but for national. I think we're still the only high school facility in the country that the USTA allows to host an event like that. And I know that talking with the players over the last 12 years or so, they love coming here. They love the community, small town community involvement, yet it's close enough to St. Louis, it's close enough to the different activities that they can participate and have easy access to everything. And we, as people, Edwardsville and the school district, we're proud to be able to host a facility like this and we certainly want to thank Dr. (Patrick) Shelton (the superintendent of the Edwardsville School District) and the school board for continuing to support this and allowing us to be in the forefront within the tennis community."

Gugger also mentioned that many of the umpires and linesperson who will help officiate at the tournament will have the possibility to go on and become officials at the U.S.

Open in Flushing Meadow, N.Y., which is the final Grand Slam event of the season and this year will be held Aug. 28-Sept. 10.

"I'm sure some of the officials this year will be officials of the U.S. Open in New York at the end of August," Gugger said. "Anyway, it's a great tournament, it has great participation, it's a partnership between the school district, between the coaching staff, between everybody that's in this room and we certainly thank everybody."

Many players have gone on to success in not only the Grand Slam events, but also in the Olympics and the Davis Cup competitions as well.

"Watching the guys play here on our courts," Lipe said, "and then winning championships in (Grand) Slams is like, it's just crazy. We're still learning what it means to host this tournament, but one of the things it means is that you are hosting tomorrow's Slam champions today. And that's a lot of fun; that's why it's called the Futures."

Some of the familiar events, such as Kids Night, presented by the Village of Glen Carbon, where kids 18-and-under will be admitted free and will occur on opening night, July 24, and Diversity Day, where underserved minority players will have the opportunity to be able to play, are back. along with the popular Mitch-N-Friends clinic, where special needs players will be able to play with the various players and coaches. Diversity Day is set for July 26 at Liberty Middle School, while the Mitch-N-Friends clinic will be held at the Edwardsville YMCA on July 27.

A big addition will be during the wild card qualifying events, which begins July 20, will feature former Edwardsville High girls champion Chloe Koons will be playing in qualifying matches for the Evansville, Ind., women's tournament, which will be held the same time as the Futures. It's a first for the Futures and will be the first steps in possibly adding a women's division in the future.

"I wanted to feature women players," Lipe said, "and I wanted to promote the women's game and I'm glad we were able to do that. And I'm grateful to Kim at the Evansville tournament for doing that and I'm excited for Chloe to have that opportunity."

Fan Appreciation Day, presented by Edwardsville Township, returns on July 28, where all Edwardsville Township members will be admitted free and Bagley Farms Meat Market will be grilling food for fans all day, a first for the tournament. Other improvements include the formation of an Advisory Board, which was formed to create ways to improve the tournament, which this year involved the creation of a promotional video and will also have a tournament-in-review video. A Patron's Pass, which will benefit the EGHM Foundation, will also be available, where fans can buy a week-long family pass for \$50 and allow them admission to each day of the tournament. The

biggest change will be the addition of evening matches, where one match per day will be played at 6 p.m. on the middle three days of the event to allow working fans to attend the tournament.

Lipe acknowledged that his job is difficult and he couldn't get things done without the tremendous help of the volunteers who add so much to the tournament's organization.

"My job is difficult, because there are so many moving parts," Lipe said. "But that's also what makes it so fun for me. Because it challenges me. I've developed several skills that I didn't really have before I started doing this. This is the hardest thing I do professionally. Teaching school, I've been doing for 30 years, coaching tennis I've been doing for 30 years. But this is something else. And I don't think I was very good at it when I started and I'm not sure I'm good at it now, but I feel like I'm getting better. But I can only do it with you all. We can only get it done together. So I really mean it when I say it takes all of you to pull this thing off."