



Edwardsville hosts week-long Futures Tournament, concludes Pro Wildcard Challenge

by Brent Feeney, Sports Writer
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EDWARDSVILLE – Even the biggest names in tennis had to start somewhere.

That's the idea behind the Edwardsville Futures Tournament, a week-long tournament sanctioned by the United States Tennis Association and presented by the EGHM Foundation, that gives players from around the world a chance to play and build up experience that could one day lead them to the ATP World Tour or to one of the Grand Slam tournaments (the Australian Open, French Open, Wimbledon or the U.S. Open).

The tournament, a part of the USTA's Pro Circuit, will have 32 players in main draw in the singles competition and 32 teams in the doubles competition competing for a \$15,000 purse; play is scheduled to begin in the tournament Monday morning, with finals in both singles and doubles set for Aug. 2 at Edwardsville High's tennis complex.

The run-up to the tournament began Thursday with the Pro Wildcard Challenge, a tournament that saw the winner qualify for an available wild card spot into the main draw; in the final, Brazilian Gabriel Friederich, who plays for the University of South Carolina, defeated Chicago's Tim Kopinsky, who plays for the University of Illinois, 6-4, 6-4. Another tournament, which provides wild-card spots for other players in the draw, began Saturday and is scheduled to end Sunday, with matches taking place at both Edwardsville High and the SIU-Edwardsville courts.

“This is the fifth year for the Futures tournament here,” said tournament director and Edwardsville High tennis coach Dave Lipe. “We'll have a few professional players here, but for the most part, the players are going to be college players who are hoping to further their aspirations of playing on the pro circuit.”

The main sponsors of the tournament include Comfort Inn of Edwardsville, the City of Edwardsville and TheBANK of Edwardsville. “Without the sponsors, we couldn't have a tournament like this,” Lipe said. “It's a great thing for the community and we really appreciate all of our sponsors and fans who come out to support the tournament.”

In the short history of the tournament, the event has seen players move on to the upper echelon of the tennis world; in fact, John Peers, an Australian from Melbourne who played in the inaugural Futures tournament in 2011, teamed up with Jamie Murray of Great Britain to reach the recent Gentlemen's Doubles final at Wimbledon, losing to Jean-Julian Rojer of The Netherlands and Horia Tecai of Romania in straight sets.

“We've had players from all over the world – from places like Brazil, Australia, Canada and England and from states like New York, California and Florida – come here to play. Last year, we had a guy who came up through the qualifying tournaments to reach the main draw here and wound up beating the No. 1 seed, so you never know what's going to happen.

“We have several wild-card spots available to us, but our thing is to make players win their way into it; we don't give spots away. The best part about this tournament is that you may see someone who could go on to take part or even win one of the major tournaments.”

One of the top parts of the tournament is the support it gets from the community at large. “People come here from all over the world and get to see what we have to offer in the Edwardsville area,” said tournament marketing director Kim Geminn. “We have players who stay with host families while they're here and it gives people from the area a chance to meet others from around the world.

“There's been a lot of friendships that have developed from people meeting each other and talking during the tournament; not only that, get to see what we're all about here. It's a great thing for everyone.”

Players who come to the tournament are aspiring to find themselves someday as being regulars on the ATP World Tour. One such player is San Diego's Henry Craig, who plays for the University of Denver and who had spent the summer taking part in USTA evens in the Midwest.

“I played in tournaments in Tulsa (Okla.) and Wichita (Kan.) before I went up to Godfrey and played in a tournament there,” Craig said. “The tournament here is very close to the Godfrey tournament and it's been a good experience for me. I'm hoping to get some ATP points and also improve my game for the next college season.

“It's my first time in this area, and it can be pretty difficult to play, especially considering how humid it gets here, but it's how it is.”

Another player, Ryan Lipman of Nashville, Tenn., is coming off some hip surgery and is a few weeks from being able to return to play, but he's in Edwardsville to take a look at the competition and to coach his brother Maxx, who currently plays for the University of Florida (Ryan Lipman graduated from Vanderbilt University).

“I've played In Godfrey and in Decatur and it's a good experience,” Lipman said. “I'm staying with a friend of mine who lives here, the Pazarnik family, who I played with at Vanderbilt before he transferred to Illinois. I'm hoping, once I can play again (Lipman thinks he's about 3-4 weeks away from returning to competition), to get good enough to rank in the top 100 players.

“I'm taking a look at the competition while coaching my brother, and I'm really looking forward to getting back.”

For more information on the tournament, including upcoming matches and the latest news, visit the tournament's web site at www.edwardsvillefutures.com

