

Delray has major plans to become home for Tennis National Teams

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DELRAY BEACH · After aggressively pursuing and being granted the right to host Davis Cup and Fed Cup tennis matches in the last year, the city of Delray Beach is going after more.

It has opened talks with the United States Tennis Association to make the Delray Beach Tennis Center a permanent home site for the men's and women's national teams.

"We're in a very preliminary stage at best," Jeff Ryan, the USTA's director of team events, said Monday.

Essentially, all Ryan knows is the city is interested, and he has reported that interest up the executive chain.

Eventually, Ryan said, top officials of the USTA and the city manager will have to sit down and start talking details.

One of the first will be money. If it costs, on average, about \$250,000 to become the host city for an early-round Davis Cup match, the city could be looking at millions of dollars for a long-term contract.

Furthermore, it would be problematic for one city to become the permanent host site for both the Davis Cup (the men's event) and women's Fed Cup.

The women play their final in late September at about the same time the men play semifinal matches. What if the United States is in both? Is there enough fan support for back-to-back events? And if the stadium court surface had to be changed to accommodate each team, would there be enough time to do it?

Last year, hurricanes ripped through the state, making a mess of the Delray Beach Tennis Center and greatly affecting attendance at a men's professional tournament there. Is the USTA willing to chance locking into Delray Beach in September?

And while players could handle the extreme heat and humidity of late summer, would fans want to sit in that weather for four to five hours?

For years the USTA has had a philosophy of moving its Davis Cup and Fed Cup matches around the country, in part to bring professional tennis to cities that might not have an event.

The 1992 Davis Cup final between the United States and Switzerland, for example, was in Fort Worth, Texas. The recent U.S. Davis Cup loss to Croatia was in Carson, Calif.

There also are marketing issues. Could a South Florida population, which possibly could host on average two Davis Cup and two Fed Cup ties each year, become so

jaded that it would affect ticket sales?

One thing seems clear. The city of Delray Beach is prepared to pay significant sums to bring major team events to the tennis center.

Arlen Kantarian, the USTA's chief executive for professional tennis, is scheduled to arrive in Delray Beach on Wednesday. Sometime between then and the first Fed Cup match Saturday (United States vs. Belgium), it wouldn't be surprising if Kantarian sat down with high-placed city officials to discuss the tennis center as a permanent site.

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