

## Tennis Gamble Paying Off

South Florida Sun-Sentinel Editorial Board  
Posted February 6 2005

*(Copyright 2005 by the Sun-Sentinel)*

In 1992, Delray Beach city leaders took a calculated gamble on their aging downtown tennis center, pumping \$6.5 million into its renovation, complete with the addition of a world-class stadium meant to attract events from around the globe.

The goal: to provide the city with an international stage through which to showcase its vibrant community and award-winning flair.

It's official: The gamble has clearly paid off.

In April, some of the world's top-ranked women tennis players will converge on the Delray Beach Tennis Center, playing host to the prestigious Fed Cup match-up between the United States and Belgium. Possible contenders: Lindsay Davenport, Serena and Venus Williams, Jennifer Capriati and Justine Henin-Hardenne.

More promising than the event itself, which will draw tourists and their millions to Delray Beach's thriving downtown, is the international spotlight accompanying it. Broadcast around the world, the Fed Cup will bring the city priceless name recognition.

Delray should know. Last year, it hosted the Davis Cup quarterfinals between the United States and Sweden, attracting thousands of tennis enthusiasts to Delray's upscale eateries and hotels and coverage by ESPN2, *Sports Illustrated* and other media elite.

The Davis Cup success no doubt helped the city beat out other communities for the chance to host the Fed Cup. And there's no reason to believe Delray, its enthusiasm infectious from City Hall to Doc's ice cream shop to the Colony Hotel and Blue Anchor pub, won't build on its growing status in the world of tennis with even more signature events.

Its prestige is climbing with every new tournament, but Delray Beach's reputation as a tennis hub is hardly new. For years, local icon Chris Evert has held her star-studded winter charity tournament at the tennis center. It was built in the first place to house the annual Virginia Slims professional women's tournament, and since 1999, it's played host to the annual International Tennis Championship.

The beauty here, though, is that Delray's name in tennis does not define who it is. Hosting tennis tournaments is just one of the many things it does well. This is, after all, the two-time winner of the National Civic League's All-America City honors, noted for its community outreach and youth enrichment programs. It's been singled out as the best-run Florida town, the city with the best swimming beach in the Southeast and the eighth most "enlightened suburb" in the nation.

And to think 20 years ago, before its downtown revitalization became a model effort, Delray was commonly called Dull-ray. It's come a long way. Look no further than your TV set in April for proof.

## IT'S A RETURN OF SERVE DELRAY LANDS YET ANOTHER GLOBAL EVENT

*Mireidy Fernandez Staff Writer*

**South Florida Sun – Sentinel**, Fort Lauderdale, Fla.

Jan 31, 2005. pg. 1.B

*(Copyright 2005 by the Sun-Sentinel)*

A prestigious spring international women's tennis event could catapult the city into a tennis mecca.

That's the expectation city leaders are placing on the Fed Cup, a two-day April match featuring the top-ranking U.S. women's players, who will face Belgium.

There are strong odds that stars such as Lindsay Davenport, Serena and Venus Williams or Jennifer Capriati will compete. It's possible they may challenge Justine Henin-Hardenne, champion of the French and U.S. opens, and Kim Clijsters, another top-ranked player.

Delray Beach will roll out the red carpet for the April 23-24 matches, which city leaders and local business owners say give global name recognition to the city as a destination where tourists would yearn to visit and local businesses could reap the economic benefits.

Perry DonFrancisco, owner of Boston's on the Beach restaurant, thinks the sporting event is an opportunity to attract and impress first-time visitors.

"I think it has a residual effect that carries on to the future," he said. "We're fortunate to attract people here and once they're here, it's our job to give them an experience that they'll want to return for."

And it's a chance to rake in money in the lively downtown strip.

But the greater reason to welcome the likes of Davenport, ranked No. 1 in the world, is the possibility of other annual tennis events. Case in point: The city last year hosted the Davis Cup, which in part helped Delray Beach land its female counterpart, the Fed Cup.

Don't think landing a contract with the U.S. Tennis Association for a second year in a row is an easy feat for any city.

It's unusual for the same city to win back-to-back bids for an event of this caliber, said Jeff Ryan, director of team events with the USTA, which holds the Davis and Fed cups and owns and operates the U.S. Open.

"In terms of Delray attracting an event back this quickly, it's a real testament to the area of what a real crown jewel it is to the tennis center," he said.

City leaders hope to duplicate the financial success from the Davis Cup event, which attracted droves of tourists, filled downtown sidewalk cafes and increased hotel bookings, business leaders said. Though there's no way to quantify how much the city profited from the Davis Cup, local leaders hope the Fed Cup will thrust Delray Beach into a world-class destination that is recognized for more than its posh hotels, upscale restaurants and sandy beach.

"The Davis Cup definitely helped us last year," said Jestena Boughton, owner of the Colony Hotel & Cabana Club. "We would hope that the same thing would happen this year."

Rick Konsavage, general manager of the Delray Beach Marriott Hotel, also hopes for economic benefits.

"It should be a very nice impact. It will help business and shoulder part of our season," he said, referring to the tourist-dependent area.

Others are more middle-of-the-road about Fed Cup's effect in Delray Beach.

"It has to be good for the merchants because it's bringing in new people. I don't know that it affects business that much," said David Cook, manager of Hand's Stationers, a gift and office supply store.

Brahm Dubin, president of JCD Sports Group, the management firm that runs the Delray Beach Tennis Center, said based on a Tourist Development Council formula, the Fed Cup would have an estimated \$1.3 million economic impact in Delray Beach and the surrounding areas.

Delray Beach went all out for the Davis Cup last year. The city distributed 50,000 specially made coasters to 50 city restaurants to honor and welcome tennis aces such as Andy Roddick, Mardy Fish and Bob and Mike Bryan. This year, there will be another warm welcome. Leaders will hand out welcome fliers for business owners to display on their windows, distribute coasters to downtown restaurants in honor of Fed Cup and offer pamphlets with restaurant listings for night owls craving a late-night bite.

It's that kind of detail and gesture that both fans and players appreciate, Ryan said.

"The players notice all that stuff. They love all that stuff," he said. "They promised an awful lot and we got that and then some. They way over-delivered."

For the Fed Cup, the city promised to pay \$150,000 before the event, resurface the stadium tennis court and provide 150 VIP parking spaces, said Dubin, who submitted the bid to the USTA. The city won't get a rental fee for the stadium, but the city may sell seven local sponsorships. The USTA will be entitled to 25 percent of the proceeds from the sales of the sponsorships for the first \$200,000. Thereafter, the city can keep 100 percent of the profit.

In return, Delray Beach gets an opportunity for international recognition in countries where tennis is a favorite sport, Ryan said.

"In Europe, where this competition is mounds bigger than here, people are going to be reading about this kind of attention and international recognition," he said.

Hosting a tennis match here translates into worldwide marketing for the city, said Bill Wood, president of the Delray Beach Chamber of Commerce.

"The business community really bends over backward to play host to the folks that are here," Wood said. "All of this taken together will have an impact on Palm Beach County and tourism in Delray Beach. It has a real impact on recognition. Every time there's a tennis event, the Delray Beach name goes out."

Though a popular hub for tennis these days, the tennis center wasn't always thriving. For several years, the stadium was underutilized and remained dark 50 to 51 weeks a year, Mayor Jeff Perlman said.

"We're now starting to get those events that will lead to other events," he said. "Having the proximity to Atlantic Avenue and having restaurants, a hotel and the beach is fun for the players and the fans. It becomes an incredible combination of amenities you put together within walking distance."

Perlman said the city's partnership with the USTA is bound to strengthen.

"They know that coming to Delray is not a risk -- it's a sure thing," he said.

Mireidy Fernandez can be reached at [mmfernandez@sun-sentinel.com](mailto:mmfernandez@sun-sentinel.com) or 561-243-6690.

#### IF YOU GO

The U.S. Tennis Association will conduct the U.S. v. Belgium Fed Cup matches on April 23-24. The event will be at the Delray Beach Tennis Center, 201 W. Atlantic Ave.

The women's event features a best-of-five series with two singles matches April 23 and two reverse singles matches and one doubles match April 24. The U.S. Fed Cup captain is Zina Garrison, 41, who retired in 1997 after 15 years as a professional.

Tickets range from \$35 to \$225 per person for both days of competition. Tickets go on sale at 10 a.m. Feb. 21 and can be purchased by calling 1-888-334-8782.

## **U.S. TEAM TO SEND ITS BEST (DAVENPORT) VS. BELGIUM**

*Michael Russo Staff Writer*

**South Florida Sun – Sentinel**, Fort Lauderdale, Fla.

Jan 21, 2005. pg. 6.C

*(Copyright 2005 by the Sun-Sentinel)*

Lindsay Davenport, the top-ranked women's tennis player in the world, will be on the court for the United States when it hosts Belgium in a Fed Cup quarterfinal at the Delray Beach Tennis Center on April 23-24.

U.S. Fed Cup captain Zina Garrison says she'll be targeting the three other Americans ranked in the top 10 -- Serena Williams (7), her sister Venus (9) and Jennifer Capriati (10) -- to round out the four-player team that would be seeking the United States' record 18th title.

"I am very excited Lindsay has committed," Garrison said Thursday from her home in Houston. "Lindsay has been a true leader on and off the court; she's shown that in how she's been a champion, and she's looking forward to bringing the Cup back to the U.S."

"I have also put out [overtures] to Serena, Venus and Jennifer, and they've all been responsive."

Belgium boasts two elite players in Kim Clijsters and Justine Henin-Hardenne, but Clijsters is out with a left wrist injury and Henin-Hardenne is out with a right knee injury. It is uncertain whether Clijsters and/or Henin-Hardenne will be able to compete in Delray Beach.

If they do, and if the Williams sisters and Capriati join Davenport (28-2 in Fed Cup play) on the U.S. team, the quarterfinal would feature six former No. 1-ranked players.

"That would truly be amazing," Garrison said, "but Belgium has a lot of good, young juniors, too. So I don't care if they come or don't come. It's still going to be tough."

Serena Williams, who was mentored by Garrison when she first got onto the WTA Tour, expressed interest in playing in the Fed Cup earlier this week. "I really want to play for Zina," she said.

When told the quarterfinal was in Delray, Williams, who lives in Palm Beach Gardens, said, "That's perfect. It doesn't get better than that."

Venus Williams said Thursday at the Australian Open that she planned to get in touch with Garrison. "I had a commitment before, but now I don't. I just found out this morning," Venus said. "So I'm really excited."

If the Williams sisters both play, they'd likely play doubles, which means Martina Navratilova, the 12th-ranked doubles player, would be left out.

"Martina is one of the best doubles players in the world, but I haven't had a chance to catch up with her," Garrison said. "I'm not throwing out anybody, though."

Garrison is expected to announce the team in mid-February.

If the United States defeats Belgium, it would play the winner of Russia vs. Italy in the semifinals in July.

Tickets go on sale Feb. 21 at 10 a.m. and range from \$35 to \$225 for both days of competition and can be purchased by calling 888- 334-USTA.

Michael Russo can be reached at [mrusso@sun-sentinel.com](mailto:mrusso@sun-sentinel.com).

## DELRAY WILL PLAY HOST TO FED CUP

*Charles Bricker*

**South Florida Sun – Sentinel**, Fort Lauderdale, Fla.

Jan 12, 2005. pg. 7.C

*(Copyright 2005 by the Sun-Sentinel)*

The USTA formally announced Tuesday that the Delray Beach Tennis Center would be the site for the April 23-24 first-round Fed Cup match between the United States and Belgium.

Tickets will begin selling in February at a time to be announced and further information is available at 1-888-334-USTA.

Each four-player team will play four singles and one doubles match.

Fed Cup captain Zina Garrison can select from among Serena and Venus Williams, Lindsay Davenport and Jennifer Capriati. Martina Navratilova is available for doubles.

The top two Belgians are former No. 1 ranked players -- Justine Henin-Hardenne and Kim Clijsters. Both are off the tour with injuries but are expected to be playing by April.

--Charles Bricker