

Local SPORTS

Tennis club excited about summer games

Mike Balsom
The Local

Last weekend's beautiful weather prompted a number of Niagara-on-the-Lake Tennis Club members to dig out their racquets and head to the six courts located at Memorial Park on King Street.

It was the first busy weekend of what should be a banner year for the club, chosen to be one of two sites to host tennis events for this August's 2022 Canada Summer Games.

Club president Hugh Dow is excited that the best young tennis players from across the country will be descending upon NOTL for competition from Aug. 6 to 13.

"It's a great opportunity for the club members to come and see some really good tennis," Dow tells The Local. "There have been some names in the past, such as (current pro) Eugenie Bouchard (2009), who have played in these games. There will be some up-and-comers and it's quite likely we'll see a few of them on the ATP (Association of Tennis Professionals) or WTA (Women's Tennis Association) tours in the future, and at the Olympics."

With the support of the town and the Canada Summer Games committee, the club is already involved in preparation for the tournament, which is now less than 100 days away.

Last week a group of club members gathered

to hang wind screens on the north east side fence. Dow says just beyond that barrier a set of temporary bleachers with seating for as many as 450 spectators will be placed for the August competition.

In a couple of weeks, the original four courts will be undergoing a resurfacing that will see the regulation area painted blue, matching the two new courts which opened last summer where the beach volleyball net once stood. That will reduce the capacity for tennis by two thirds for about a week, but it will be worth it.

Once the resurfacing has been completed, new scoreboards will be installed for use during the Games.

As well, before Aug. 6, new light standards will be erected for the newer courts, making all six available for night play. The town has agreed to cover the cost of the lights, while the resurfacing is taking place on the Canada Summer Games dime.

Finally, the pavilion will be refreshed with a new coat of paint some time before then, and new picnic tables have already arrived on site.

The entire park will be transformed during the Games.

"The pavilion area will be cordoned off," says Dow, pointing back behind the courts. "There will be hospitality tents, media tents, tents for each of the provinces and territories. The pool will be closed during

the period as they will be using the showers and change rooms. And the parking lot will be closed as well."

Past president Rosemary Goodwin is involved in the scheduling and administration of the actual tennis matches, while current vice president Marilyn Francis is heading up the venue committee, ensuring it meets the standards for the Summer Games. Dow says at least 40 club members have signed up for various volunteer roles for the Games.

"It's the biggest year we've ever had," exclaims Dow. "There's never been an event like this at the club. And it's spread all over the Niagara area."

Brock University is acting as the centre for Niagara's 2022 Canada Summer Games. Almost every one of Niagara's 12 municipalities is hosting at least one of the sports. Tennis matches will also be held at the Welland Tennis Club, while the Niagara-on-the-Lake Sailing club will be the sole host of both the sailing and para-sailing competitions.

"The tennis event will be the most visible here in the town," Dow says. "Town council has been very supportive, and the parks and recreation people are actively involved in making sure everything is up to scratch. It's a really big deal."

Perhaps due to the excitement of the big year, Dow says membership at the club is up for 2022. He says there are as many as 40 new members registered, bringing the total number close to 350.

Late Friday afternoon, about 30 members showed up for the first of three weekend clinics led by club professional Shawna Macfarlane. Two more clinics, free for members with their \$150 registration fee, take place this Thursday and Saturday.

There will be a Coffee and Mingle session this Saturday morning, while the first club social is scheduled for Sunday, May 29.

According to Dow, working with the Summer Games people has been an

interesting experience for all involved.

"There are so many moving parts to this, both volunteer and staff," says Dow. "It's huge. Just trying to figure out what the responsibilities are for each

group is quite challenging."

"Everything is going to look really, really good," he concludes. "The tennis club has really benefitted from having this event, on top of the prestige and the importance of hosting it."



Cosmo Condina and David Rodgers enjoy some chilly Friday morning tennis. (Photos by Mike Balsom)



Tennis club president Hugh Dow in front of the summer games banner.



Shawna Macfarlane gives lessons to club members.

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