

LocalSPORTS

Davis Cup and winning Canadian tennis team visit NOTL

Mike Balsom The Local

Rosemary Goodwin could hardly contain her joy Thursday when she welcomed tennis lovers to the court on the property of Sam and Robin Ridesic in Niagara-on-the-Lake. Behind her, encased in protective plexiglas, sat the 123-year-old Davis Cup, the tennis world's most prestigious team prize.

"Get your head together," she muttered to herself as she shuffled through her notes, clearly shaken by the magnitude of the event. "The reason were here, we have the Davis Cup, and Canada is the champion."

As the crowd cheered, she went on.

"As if that wasn't enough, Captain Canada," she said, "the captain of Team Canada, Frank Dancevic, born and raised in Niagara Falls, this is your home, and this is your day. And Queen's Royal Park, named in honour of a magnificent resort hotel that was built here in the 1860s, hosted some of the most prestigious and gala international (tennis) tournaments."

The location of the Ridesic's court, just across Front Street from the park, was chosen for its history, as it was at the Queen's Royal Resort that the idea of a trophy for international play came about.

It was through Goodwin's efforts that the trophy, won by the team of Felix Auger-

Aliassime, Gabriel Diallo, Alexis Galarneau, Vasek Pospisil and Denis Shapovalov, captained by Dancevic, arrived in NOTL for the four-hour event.

The stop was the final one on the Sobey's Davis Cup Champions Tour, celebrating the first time for Canada to capture the title in 122 years last year.

A food tent was set up in Queen's Royal Park, while the many visitors were encouraged to have their photos taken both with the cup and in front of a green screen, where their images would be stitched in beside those of Team Canada's competitors.

Many were in awe at the size and scope of the 110-cm tall, 107 cm in diameter, 231.5 pound trophy as they posed in front of it.

Along with the trophy came Hatem McDadi, Tennis Canada's senior vice president of high performance, along with representatives from the Ontario Tennis Association, retired Davis Cup competitors Harry Fauquier and Pierre Lamarche, Dancevic and his family, and many coaches and supporters of the Niagara Falls-born pro, a veteran Davis Cup player himself who retired from competition in 2020.

Goodwin, a director on the NOTL Tennis Club board, lauded Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa for his support back in 2013 when he advocated as a councillor for improvements to the



Tennis fan Ted Scott snaps a photo of the Davis Cup.

club's courts at Memorial Park.

"He provided the leadership that brought us the best parks tennis courts in all of the Niagara region and beyond," said Goodwin. "It was one of the best decisions that this council ever made. We're so glad to have him here."

After McDadi gave a vivid description of Canada's breakthrough 2022 Davis Cup victory, he introduced the team captain by shedding light on his guidance at last year's tournament in Spain.

"Frank and his team were on a mission," said McDadi. "What happened on the court to win was not only a tribute to the team but to Frank's leadership and the staff that helped prepare the team."

Dancevic took to the microphone and talked about his early

development as a player, driving around Niagara looking for an open court where he could get an hour or more in to practice. He would bring with him tape and string to repair the nets at some of the public courts.

"I drove by one of my old practice grounds," he laughed, "the Lions Club in St. Davids. I remember back in the day the courts were all crooked and you had to chase the balls into the forest. They've done a wonderful job repainting the courts to make it a wonderful place to train."

Dancevic thanked his local coaches for his success, including Leslie Murch, Doug Carter and Dave Boland.

"They were always there, always welcoming," said Dancevic. "They essentially made me into the player I became. Without everybody's help, including Rosemary, it's difficult to achieve great things."

Dancevic called it "a miracle" to have the Davis Cup sitting in NOTL Thursday.

"There's so many obstacles that you have to face along the

way," he explained. "You have to have the right players, the energy, the chemistry, to have them play well at the right times. When one guy's down, another has to step in. Everyone has to get along off the court, too. There are so many moving parts that make this happen."

The ceremony concluded with Niagara Falls mayor Jim Diodati presenting Dancevic with a key to the Honeymoon City.

"This is the key to our hearts, Frank," Diodati said, "as we welcome you back to Niagara. It's one of a kind. Like you, there's not another one in the world. As the ambassador of Canada for tennis, sportsmanship and as a champion, today it's official, welcome home, thank you very much, you've made us proud."

Following Thursday's event, the Davis Cup made its way to Toronto's Sobey's Stadium where it was to go on display during Tennis Canada's National Bank Open, which began this weekend.



Camilla Yoxall of St. Davids poses in front of the Davis Cup. (Photos by Mike Balsom)



Rosemary Goodwin welcomes Hatem McDadi, Tennis Canada's senior vice-president of high performance, to the podium.



Davis Cup tour event hosts Robin and Sam Ridesic.



Team Canada captain and Niagara Falls native Frank Dancevic.

Local HAPPENINGS

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Every Thursday
4 - 7 p.m.
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1 piece \$12 2 piece \$17
with fries and coleslaw
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Legion

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905-468-2353 | legion124@gmail.com

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