

Local SPORTS

Davis Cup on tennis tour stopping in NOTL

Mike Balsom
The Local

It's the tennis world's equivalent to a visit by the NHL's Stanley Cup.

The International Tennis Federation's Davis Cup, awarded annually to the men's tennis championship team out of almost 140 countries, will be in Niagara-on-the-Lake for four hours on the afternoon of Thursday, Aug. 3.

Team Canada won the international tournament in 2022, defeating Australia in the final in Malaga, Spain. Felix Auger-Aliassime clinched the victory over Alex de Minaur to give Canada their first Davis Cup win in the cup's 122-year history.

As part of the win, the victors get to hold onto the prize until the following year's tournament, scheduled for this November. The NOTL stop is part of the Sobey's Davis Cup Champions Tour that has seen the cup travel across the country.

Looking into the storied history of the cup itself, the visit to town makes perfect sense. As well, the host site for the event, on the court at the home of Sam and Robin

Ridesic, former Queen's Royal Park, is another logical choice.

Ridesic and NOTL Tennis Club director Rosemary Goodwin stand on the Ridesic family's own tennis court, where next Thursday's festivities will take place. Queen's Royal Park, on the site of the old hotel that once housed one of the most important tennis courts in Canada, is visible just across Front Street.

"There used to be a hotel, Queen's Royal Hotel there," Robin tells The Local. "They had the first lawn tennis courts in Niagara, if not all of Canada. It was at the Queen's Royal Hotel where the idea for the Davis Cup was conceived."

In fact, it was in 1896 at the seventh annual Canadian Open Tennis Championship at the Queen's Royal Hotel when millionaire tennis player Dwight Davis was presented with the idea of sponsoring a cup.

Four years later, the first international event between the United States and Great Britain was held, and the silver and gold Davis Cup was presented to the winners for the very first time.

The cup itself is impres-

sive. Through its first two decades, it was just the gold and silver cup, with the names of the champions from 1900 to 1919 engraved right on it. In 1921, a silver tray was added, where the winners from the following 13 years are recognized.

Like the Stanley Cup, it kept growing through the years. The champions from 1933 onwards are engraved on mahogany plinths, with Canada now officially part of the bottom tier. According to the Tennis Canada website, the trophy is 110 centimetres tall, 107 centimetres in diameter at its widest point, and weighs 231.5 pounds.

That annual Canadian Open Tennis Tournament in NOTL, where the idea for the Davis Cup was first posed, eventually morphed into what today is known as the National Bank Open. With that tournament happening in Toronto Aug. 4 through 13, the cup making a stop in NOTL just a day before is fitting.

"Niagara-on-the-Lake doesn't receive the credit it should for its place in the tennis world," Goodwin says. "There's a lot more to this town's history than war-



Robin Ridesic and Rosemary Goodwin have planned an event to welcome the Davis Cup, along with Frank Dancevic, a tennis player from Niagara who is now captain of the Canadian men's national team. (Mike Balsom)

There was huge social change from the 1890s through to the 1920s. Niagara-on-the-Lake was central to that in an amazing way."

Another special connection is that the captain of Team Canada, who will accompany the Davis Cup to Front Street next week, is a Niagara native. Frank Dancevic, born and raised in Niagara Falls, was named captain of the men's national team in 2017. Dancevic represented Canada as a competitor in the Davis Cup for more than a decade, beginning in 2002.

"To have the team captain be from Niagara is incredible," says Goodwin. "We wanted to not only have the trophy, but to also have the captain, so that Niagara could recognize him. There were a lot of local people involved in helping him grow into a national-level tennis player. It's a big thing to have an athlete from Niagara who ends up contributing to a national team effort."

Goodwin says Dancevic's parents, John and Doris, will

be in town for the event, as well as local coaches Doug Carter, Lezlie Murch and Dave Boland, who all contributed to Dancevic's development. Davis Cup players Harry Fauquier and Pierre Lamarche will also be on site, along with Tennis Canada senior vice-president of high performance Hatem McDadi. "We've applied to the town for a special events permit, and hope to have a small portion of Front Street closed to accommodate a celebration atmosphere," Goodwin adds. "Visitors will have an opportunity to view the trophy up close and have photos taken with the trophy, and with Frank. And we're thinking about adding a couple of nets on the street."

The Ridesics, a self-professed tennis family, couldn't be more happy to host the event.

"My in-laws met on a tennis court, our four kids play tennis, and Sam was a very competitive tennis player," says Robin. "He played all over the U.S. and Canada

when he was a teenager. I play too, though I'm not as good as the rest of them. We appreciate the sport in particular, that's why we're honoured to bring the cup here."

The NOTL visit is one of the final ones on the tour. On Friday, the Davis Cup moves on to Toronto's Sobey's Stadium, where it will be on display during the National Bank Open. From there, it's on to Montreal's Stade IGA for the Omnium Banque Nationale tournament.

Of all the planning that has gone into the celebration, Ridesic deflects the credit to Goodwin.

"Rosemary has put in a tremendous amount of work for this," she says. "And it's going to be lovely for Niagara-on-the-Lake to see the Davis Cup and interact with it, and to celebrate Canada's win."

The Davis Cup will be on the Ridesic tennis court facing Front Street this Thursday from 3 to 7 p.m. A program featuring an address by Dancevic will begin at 4 p.m. There is no cost to attend.

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The Davis Cup will be on display in NOTL Aug. 3. (Tennis Canada photo)