

Tennis league expanding into Richmond

Recreational teams an offshoot of World TeamTennis; could bring major names to area

BY LOUIS LLOVIO
Richmond Times-Dispatch

World TeamTennis, the competitive league co-founded by Billie Jean King in the 1970s, is expanding into Richmond with a recreational league that could, in coming years, bring some of the top names in the sport to the area.

Virginia Tennis is organizing and administering the local league in Richmond.

Tom Hood, president of Virginia Tennis, said he was drawn to the concept because of the flexibility it offers.

Players at almost every skill level will be able to form teams and compete against one another in singles, doubles and mixed doubles competitions. The teams are grouped according to players' skills levels.

"The WTT format is about both genders working together on an equal playing field and it adds an extra dimension to team competition," King said.

The teams will be able to form their own subleagues and compete against others in the area.

The big advantage of World TeamTennis, organizers say, is that players in each division can play for regional and national titles, including a chance to play at the WTT Nationals.

Hood would not say if the long-term goal is to bring a team to Richmond, but said he'd like to see the Washington Kastles play a match here in the next couple of years.

World TeamTennis has a long history in the mid-Atlantic region, which could make Richmond a natural spot for expansion, some in the sport say.

World TeamTennis was started in 1974 but shut down after five seasons. It was restarted in 1981 and has continued since then.

The professional league is made up of eight teams in two conferences.

In addition to young talented professionals, team rosters are dotted with some big names in modern tennis. John McEnroe, Jim Courier, Andy Roddick, Mardy Fish and the Bryan brothers are all on teams.

Martina Hingis, who was once ranked first in the world and a champion at Wimbledon, the U.S. Open and the Australian Open, plays for Washington.

To introduce the team concept to the area, Virginia Tennis is holding the World TeamTennis Richmond Invitational today at

If you go:

What: World TeamTennis Richmond Invitational

When: 4:30 p.m. today

Where: Willow Oaks Country Club, 6228 Forest Hill Ave.

Cost: Free

Contact: (804) 320-3244

the Willow Oaks Country Club.

The free match will feature four teams made up of some top club pros and players in the area. The winning team gets \$1,500 in prize money and qualifies for the WTT Finals at Indian Wells, Calif., later this year.

Cris Robinson, director of tennis at Willow Oaks and one of the team captains Saturday, described the event as a festival of tennis with mascots and prizes, where spectators can bring lawn chairs to watch.

Hood would like to see the league start early next year.

LLLovio@timesdispatch.com
(804) 649-6348
Twitter: @LouisLLovio