



USTA NORTH CAROLINA

FED CUP INSPIRATION GROWS TENNIS IN NORTH CAROLINA

Asheville, NC

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There is a lot of love for tennis in the mountain community, and it gives U.S. Fed Cup Captain Kathy Rinaldi goosebumps, "It makes me so proud. It gives me chills. It's events like these when the players can not only compete but give their time and inspire some of these young kids."

Inspire is one way to put it. Participation in youth tennis in Asheville has increased 90 percent in the year since the U.S. first round Fed Cup tie against the Netherlands.

"That's how we all started," says Rinaldi. "We were inspired as youngsters – whomever it was – Chrissie, Martina, Billie Jean – and hopefully we can do the same thing and motivate somebody."

Asheville Tennis Association's President Jeff Joyce says Team USA Tennis and the Fed Cup ties have created the spark of passion for the game. "Last year's tie gave our whole community a real jolt. Our numbers have gone up from private clubs and clinics to public parks."

Overall league participation is up more than 10 percent and North Carolina's longest running USTA Tournament, the Asheville Open, had a draw that was bursting at the seams in 2018.

USTA North Carolina Executive Director Kelly Gaines is unsurprised. "The folks in Asheville do such a great job from the volunteers to the staff at the venue. The people in North Carolina and surrounding areas have sold this place out, so enthusiasm like that is great for the game and for the state."

Rinaldi says the home court advantage does exist. "We need you guys to wear your red, white and blue. Support us hard. The players feel it. It makes a difference."

The Tar Heel state is enjoying a rare distinction: hosting back-to-back Fed Cup ties. The last location to be a repeat host was Delray Beach in 2005 and 2007. North Carolina also served as the home for consecutive Davis Cup ties in 2007 and 2008 in Winston-Salem – a feat not shared since Carlsbad, California hosted in 1981 and 1982.

The U.S. drew Australia for the 2019 World Group First Round back in July of 2018. The U.S. is 9-5 all-time vs. the Aussies, and won their last meeting, 4-0, in the 2016 World Group Playoff. Prior to that, the two countries hadn't met in Fed Cup since 1985.

The U.S. team includes No. 17 Madison Keys, No. 23 Danielle Collins, No. 36 Sofia Kenin and doubles No. 13 Nicole Melichar.

This year's Aussie team features World singles No. 14 and doubles No. 6 Ashleigh Barty, No. 46 Daria Gavrilova, No. 142 Priscilla Hon, No. 157 Kimberley Birrell and No. 160 Astra Sharma along with Captain Alicia Molik.

The USTA has partnered with Explore Asheville, Ingles Markets, Mercedes Benz of Asheville and the Omni Grove Park Inn to bring this event to Asheville.

This weekend's First Round matchup begins Saturday, Feb. 9 with two singles matches. Two reverse singles and a doubles rubber are to follow on Sunday, Feb. 10. The draw will be announced Friday, Feb. 8 at 12:00 p.m. EST.

The U.S. holds an overall 151-36 record in Fed Cup competition with a 41-6 record in home ties. For more information, including access to player and historical Fed Cup records, please go to www.usta.com/fedcup or www.fedcup.com.