

Cummings and Goings

US Open, NYT and Ken Volk

July 8, 2018

US Open

Come Tuesday, August 21, some of the hungriest tennis players in the world, 128 men and 128 women, will begin competing in the US Open Qualifying Tournament for 16 slots in each field of the main singles draw which begins play on Monday, August 27. Admission is free and open to the public with gates opening at 10 a.m. It can't get any better than that.

Most of the play is on the outer courts where you can watch close at eye level and feel the throb of the competition. If a match isn't quite to your liking, there's another going on the next court over and more down the way. No getting locked into an early round match on a show court that's a wipe-out. Good competition all over the place and for whatever reason, there is no crowd to fight like there is for main draw matches. And just because it is the qualifier doesn't mean you cannot see main draw players. Chances are good that at any one time, some of them will be working out on the practice courts which are an easy stroll down from the outer courts. The US Open Qualifiers is the best bargain in tennis, bar none.

This year's Open will have two new twists, the first being the use of a serve clock which will be prominently displayed for all to see, players and fans alike. The clock will start at the end of a point and players will have 25 seconds to serve for the next point. The 25 second serve clock will be a first for a Slam tournament or, for that matter, any other major tournament. Actually, the ITF continuous play rule already stipulates that there shall be a maximum of 20 seconds between points. What's going to be new is strict enforcement, and with this being the case, an additional 5 seconds have been added to allow for a period of adjustment. Something to keep an eye on.

The other thing new is that ball people will be rolling balls down to the serving end of the court rather than full-length throws. When balls are at the non-serving end of the court, the ball person at the net will serve as a relay to the ball people at the serving end. I like the change for two reasons. One is the opportunity to be a ball person will be open to candidates who, except for a limited arm, may otherwise have been well-qualified - not everyone has an arm that can accurately throw a ball the length of the court. The other is eliminating errant throws. Flying missiles are a potential hazard.

NYT

And for the best newsprint coverage of the tournament, the New York Times can't be beat. I know a lot of readers have gone digital, but if you are reading this, chances are you are a kindred soul who likes the comfort, convenience and feel of a newspaper. Then there are feature articles that you probably won't find anywhere else like: the US Open's seamstress,

what goes into maintaining grass courts, the fine-art painter who has been maintaining the Roland Garros scoreboard for 19 years, Serena on tour with her daughter, the WTA's effort to determine why the serve isn't as much of a weapon in the women's game, life on the ITF's Future Tour and what goes into it, how close professional tennis is to eliminating line judges - and a whole lot more.

Ken Volk

On my return from a trip to Door County, Wisconsin; Mackinac Island, Upper Michigan and Canada, I got a call from Fred Rasmussen, Baltimore Sun reporter, saying he was told that I would possibly have some comments on Ken Volk. Thus I learned that my long-time friend and doubles partner for many years had died. I doubt if I have ever have played with and against a more competitive player than Ken. My younger partner for over 20 years, Ray Bender, and I use to play against Ken and his partner, Bart Harvey. Usually, they had the bigger smile on their faces at the end of a match. On the court, Ken was all business. Off, he was a fun guy. I learned a lot about doubles from him. The year I turned 45, I got a call from Ken asking me to be his 45 and over tournament partner. We seldom lost. That first year we won a national tournament in Wheeling and an International tournament in Bermuda. We also went down to Greensboro, NC and played against the best teams in the area. I'll never forget a semifinal match against Maurice Everett, Chris's uncle, and his partner who were reigning 45 state champions. In a tight match at 4-all, Maurice slammed an overhead at Ken's feet. In the blink of an eye, Ken hit a forehand down his line. I'll never forget the look on Maurice's face; like an ox who's been gored. After that one shot, the wind was out of their sails and we won. The finals were even tougher, but we had a good day. One of the things you have to contend with when you get older is losing your contemporaries. There is a wistful sadness when you do. It's never easy.

By: Jim Cummings

Jim Cummings Bio:

Born in Marinette, WI

Longtime friend of the Cook family

Played varsity tennis for UW-Madison in the 50s

Officiated at over 25 US Opens as a chair and line umpire

Served on USTA's Rules Committee when Jack Stahr and Nick Powel were Chairs

Active senior player and Referee

Presently helps edit the Friend At Court

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