

Robinson tennis tournament starts

Tennis

Good time Tuesday; players get serious today

A VOLLEY OF FUN

BOB GROSS

TIMES HERALD

Tuesday evening was all about having a good time at the Sanborn Park tennis courts in Port Huron.

Wednesday, they get serious. That doesn't mean the 247 players in the Francis J. Robinson Memorial International Tennis Tournament won't be having fun, but they'll be playing for something more than a towel or T-shirt.

The Robinson kicked off Tuesday with a warm-up and single-point tournament. The 'pock' of swatted tennis balls reverberated through the park along with lots of laughter despite temperatures in the high 80s.

'It's a lot of fun,' said Todd Distelrath, of St. Clair. 'My kids are really involved in tennis at the Port Huron Tennis House, and we look forward to this every year.'

Distelrath will be playing in the tournament as will his sons Troy, 16; Derek, 12; and Dylan, 10.

'It's a great community event,' Distelrath said. 'A lot of families participate.'

A lot of families do participate. Jen Douglas and Jane Anne Ruffing, both of Port Huron, will be playing doubles together.

They're sisters-in-law.

Douglas said there will be no harsh words in the event of unforced errors.

'My brother would come after me,' she said.

Her three sons, Finn, 9; Cameron, 7; and Macauley, 6, all will be playing in the special kids' event Friday at the Robinson.

'Our whole families are going to come watch,' Douglas said. 'The whole community comes.'

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Todd Distelrath of St. Clair returns the ball during practice for the Francis J. Robinson Memorial Tennis Tournament on Tuesday at Sanborn Park in Port Huron.

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Ruffing agreed that the Robinson is one of those special Port Huron events, like the Port Huron-to-Mackinac Sailboat Race, that brings the community together, 'plus you're exercising at the same time.'

Exercise was one reason Kevin and Jody Brown of Petrolia, Ontario, got their son, Elijah, interested in tennis.

'He's been playing since September here in Port Huron,' Kevin Brown said. 'This was something that we were able to keep him active through the winter.' Brown said it will be Elijah's first Robinson.

'For him, he was very shy when he first started,' Brown said. 'It's kind of helped him defeat that fear.'

The Browns also appreciate that tennis can be a lifetime sport.

'You see a lot of the old guys out here in their 70s and 80s and they're still going strong,' Kevin Brown said.

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Lew Evenson of Port Huron runs and reaches to return the ball during practice for the Francis J. Robinson Memorial Tennis Tournament on Tuesday at Sanborn Park in Port Huron.

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