

Robinson tennis tournament kicks off with special guest

Joseph Hayes, Times Herald

Published 6:35 p.m. ET July 31, 2017 | Updated 6:54 p.m. ET July 31, 2017



(Photo: Joseph Hayes, Times Herald)

Luke Jensen flashed a wide smile and let out a big laugh.

The former professional doubles tennis player appeared to be having just as much fun as his proteges watching his every move.

"My parents were physical education teachers, so I grew up in an environment with a lot of passion and purpose," said Jensen, who won the French Open doubles championship in 1993.

"I would say it's fun for me. I don't have to fake it. It's something where it doesn't matter what age or what level, if I can get them to try their best I hope it will translate into something else."

Day 1 of the 60th annual Francis J. Robinson Memorial Tennis Tournament at Sanborn Park featured several clinics led by Jensen as well as an exhibition match involving Jensen later in the day.



Former professional tennis player Luke Jensen has fun practicing his tennis/golf swing at Sanborn Park. *(Photo: Joseph Hayes, Times Herald)*

He was clearly the star of the day as person after person flocked to him for autographs and well wishes.

"I'm having a lot of fun," Port Huron Northern sophomore Isabella Murray said. "I'm surprised how hard he pushed us. I wasn't expecting it but it was a lot of fun. He was really helpful. He is just phenomenal and awesome. He helped me learn a couple of new things. I thought it was fun."

The tournament will officially begin at 5:30 p.m. Tuesday with open singles and women's singles play. On Wednesday, boys singles and girls doubles will take place in the morning, followed by adult singles in the evening.

On Thursday, girls singles and boys doubles will begin in the morning, followed by adult doubles in the evening. On Friday, mixed doubles will take place early in the day, as well as 10-and-under play, which will give way Friday evening to adult mixed doubles.

On Saturday, the semifinals will be held and everything will culminate with Sunday's finals.



Children and teens stand in the background as Luke Jensen serves at Sanborn Park. (Photo: Joseph Hayes, Times Herald)

"It's been unbelievable," tournament director Steve Pillon said. "We have had a great turnout so far.

"There is definitely a buzz bringing in a name like Luke Jensen and someone who is so passionate for the game and played at such a high level. It adds to the excitement of the event."

Before he left for the day, Jensen made sure to do his best to inspire as many people as possible, with an emphasis on character over merely championship results.

"It's amazing that this thing has been going on for 60 years," Jensen said of the Robinson Tournament.

"That's wood rackets, before cell phones and the internet and all of that stuff. To see how this community has embraced this game is impressive. I saw lots of boys and girls and adults and not one had a bad day today. It really says something about this community and how it has embraced this sport.

"In my career, I lost more doubles and singles matches than I won. But when it came down to loving the game, I won every game. I loved the whole process. In life, you get knocked down. Are you tough enough to handle it and have the confidence, courage and character to go forward? This sport really teaches those values and it's really a family sport. I can identify with these kids because we have the same DNA. I just want to make sure they have good character, too."

Contact Joseph Hayes at (810) 989-6268 or at jahayes@gannett.com. Follow him on Twitter @Joseph_Hayes11.