

Sneaky Pete's tennis tourney attracts record attendance

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Attracting a record field of 188 players, the 15th annual Sneaky Pete's Tennis Championships at The Club at Sterling Oaks in North Naples needed more days to be completed than the customary eight. Director of tennis Paul Barrus reported that a combined 33 more players entered the men's and women's open singles divisions this year than in 2013. The winners of these two divisions, plus the men's open doubles play, couldn't be determined by the player lunch and awards ceremony March 8.

The extra time needed to finish perhaps our area's largest independent tournament didn't put a damper on the second Saturday proceedings as the rest of the divisions finished with many matchups. The men's 4.5 singles final pitted defending champion and No. 2 seed Tom Zucchi, who plays on Sterling Oaks USTA league teams, against southpaw Lazaro Martinez, a coach at the Sanchez-Casal Academy at the Naples Bath and Tennis Club and playing in his first-ever U.S. tournament. Neither had lost a set leading up to it.

Martinez broke serve first with a crosscourt forehand winner to go up 4-2 and then eventually forced a wide backhand return after a long rally to hold and notch the first set at 6-3. He deftly mixed heavy topspin and biting underspin shots off both sides, keeping his opponent on the defensive much of the time.

Serving at 1-3 in the second stanza in perhaps the match's longest game, Zucchi couldn't convert two game points and also held off three break points but not a fourth when he could only watch another clutch forehand crosscourt winner streak by.

Turning up the aggression and all-court coverage a little more as he said later, Zucchi mounted a comeback, winning the next two games. However, Martinez steadied, holding his next serve at love including hitting two service winners and then broke to win. Afterward, Martinez complimented his opponent ("He's so consistent, there were many long points") while Zucchi noted the firepower he had just faced.

Third-seeded Dan Toppin and Ed Harbold, both of Naples and staples in USTA leagues, went up against fourth seeds Luis Ramirez and Paul Kwong, both of Estero, who play at The Club at Rapallo at Coconut Point, for the men's 8.0 doubles title. This grueling affair went to three sets with the Naples duo prevailing 5-7, 6-3, 6-2.