

Ekurhuleni hosts Wheelchair Tennis qualifiers



Wheelchair Tennis South Africa's (WTSA) superstars Kgothatso Montjane, Evans Maripa and Lucas Sithole prepare for a double-headed feast for fans. The Airports Company South African Open is being played at Ellis Park from April 21-25, followed by the Airports Company South Africa Joburg Open in Ekurhuleni. The South African players will also use the opportunity to prepare for the Paralympic Games, which will be taking place in London later in the year. Second from the right is tournament director Holger Losch.

With the qualification for this year's Paralympics just three weeks away, the international wheelchair tennis tournaments to be staged in Gauteng are of greater significance than ever before.

Ekurhuleni has its role to play, with the second of two tournaments, a grade two tour event being staged at the Gauteng East Tennis Complex, from April 27 to May 1.

This year's Paralympics take place in London from August 29 to September 9 and the qualification cut-off is May 21.

The two South African events are sanctioned by the International Tennis Federation (ITF) and form part of the ITF World Wheelchair Tennis Tour.

As a result of the proximity to the Paralympic cut-off, a large international and local entry is predicted.

"It's a real honour for Wheelchair Tennis South Africa and our sponsor, ACSA, to be hosting these prestigious events," said tournament director Holger Losch.

"One of our goals for 2013 is for South Africa to host a Wheelchair Super Series event. There are very few of them on the tour and it will

be a first for Africa.

"The success of the ACSA SA Open and ACSA Joburg Open will help us to convince the ITF South Africa and Africa that we are ready to host a Super Series.

"This will also help our own players, as they will be able to play at home and earn valuable world ranking points."

The men's and women's champions of last year will be back to defend their titles and there will also be some new visitors to the tournament.

Tadeusz Kruszelnicki, from Poland, won the men's event last year, while runner-up Ben Weekes loved South Africa and is excited to come back and compete in the event again.

Women's world number five, Sabine Ellerbrock, is the current defending champion and she could face an interesting showdown with world number 10, Kgothatso Montjane of South Africa.

The South African will be looking to go one better this year, after going down in last year's final.

However, she is currently in top form and is a strong contender for the title.

South Africa has some of the world's best players and topping that list is Montjane, who is currently ranked at number

10 in singles and number 14 in doubles.

In fact, South Africa has 10 women ranked in the top 100.

Other than Montjane, Celia du Toit is at number 30, Rosalea van der Meer at number 36, Mabel Mankgele is at number 70, Tsholofelo Sibanda at number 74, Sihphokazi Fuma at number 91 and Thado Hlatswayo at number 93.

As far as the men are concerned Sydwell Mathonsi is ranked at number 37 in singles and 36 in doubles.

Eliphias Maripa is ranked 52 in singles and at 37 in doubles.

Airports Company South Africa (ACSA) continues to support Wheelchair Tennis in South Africa and is delighted to be hosting these two major events in Gauteng.

"The tournaments give a golden opportunity to our local talent, especially in the year of the Paralympics where South Africa will be represented," said ACSA's group manager: communications Solomon Makgale.

"We, as Airports Company South Africa, are honoured to be part of an initiative that has assisted in growing wheelchair tennis in the country."