


Nara captures successful first USTA Women's Challenger

Created on Sunday, 21 July 2013 17:04 | Written by [Kerry Eggers](#) | 

Kurumi Nara and Alison Riske pounded baseline shots at each other for more than two hours Sunday afternoon at Tualatin Hills Tennis Center. When the smoke had cleared, Nara's three-set victory ended Portland's first women's pro tennis tournament in 36 years.

Nara, a 21-year-old native of Osaka, Japan, beat Riske 3-6, 6-3, 6-3 in the finals of the \$50,000 USTA Pro Circuit Oregon Women's Challenger, claiming the \$7,600 first prize and a berth in the main draw of the U.S. Open.

"My feet are tired, but my mind is fresh," said Nara, who entered the week ranked No. 126 on the Women's Tennis Association tour. "I stayed positive through today's match, and it worked out well."

It was the first international-caliber women's event in Portland since 1977, when 14-year-old Tracy Austin won the Avon Futures tournament at Mountain Park Racquet Club, two years before claiming her first U.S. Open crown.

The Portland event was added to the USTA Pro Circuit Challenger circuit late. Tournament director Jeff Carey and tournament organizer Brian Loomis -- a Tualatin Hills teaching pro and president of the Greater Oregon Tennis Council -- had only three months to secure sponsorship and put together the crew that ran the week-long event.

For a first step into shallow water, Carey and Loomis did well. The GPTC and Beynon & Tarkett Sports Company served as presenting sponsors, with such businesses as Laughing Planet Cafe, Mercedes Benz of Beaverton and Sunset Athletic Club among the 38 supporting sponsors. Chairs, linesmen and ball boys and ball girls were up to the task.

"I was a little concerned when I heard what we were going to try to accomplish in 90 days, but I've had such positive comments from players," Carey said. "They all seem to love Portland and were 100 percent positive on how we ran the events. It's been fantastic. I'm harder to please than most, but we set the bar at a good C-plus or B-minus. There are still all kinds of little things we can improve on."

Attendance was free through the week. About 300 spectators watched Saturday's singles semifinals and doubles final, and more than that were on hand for Sunday's singles final.

"It's been an awesome week," said Riske, 23, a Pittsburgh native who entered the day ranked No. 98 in the world after a string of victories here. "The event was first-class. It's hard to believe this is the first year they've had this tournament here. To have this many people show up, that was pretty impressive. It's hard to get that many people to a (WTA) Tour-level event, let alone a Challenger."

Missy Malool, a USTA Tour supervisor who travels to events week to week, gave it a thumb's up, too.

"We've had great weather and community support," Malool said. "I knew tennis is big in Portland, but I didn't realize how big. For a first-year event, (attendance) has been pretty remarkable. The seed is here, and now we have to grow it."

The USTA Pro Circuit Challenger Circuit provides young men and women with five level of events, ranging from purses of \$10,000 to \$100,000. Portland was in the middle echelon, drawing up-and-coming players such as Nara, who reached the second round at Wimbledon in 2010; Riske, 23, who made it to the third round of Wimbledon this year, and former U.S. Open junior champion Grace Min.

Riske and Nara both told me they'd love to return next year if the tournament returns to Portland. Carey will meet with Doug Menke -- general manager of the Tualatin Hills Park & Recreation District and an avid tennis player -- to determine whether the Challengers event will be back next summer.

"He'll have to find a way to budget for it, but I can't imagine Doug saying no," Carey said. "We've had a great start, and given a year to plan, I know we can do better on all counts."

The USTA would like Tualatin Hills to continue as a venue.

"Jeff and Brian have been in the game for a long time," Malool said. "There are little things we'll tweak, but we can overcome that. We go year by year, but our hope is to be back next year. Our goal is to make this a long-term event in Portland."

kerryeggers@portlandtribune.com