

July 2, 2010

Charles R. Bantz, Chancellor
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Chancellor Bantz:

Even though I know you've declared the scheduled closing and eventual demolition of the Indianapolis Tennis Center on the IUPUI campus next month to be a "done deal," (in a letter to the USTA/Midwest Section as quoted by the *Indianapolis Business Journal*) I would hope there is still time to reach some sort of compromise that will allow the Tennis Center to continue to serve its many thousands of customers while still letting the university to achieve many of its original goals for that campus corridor.

Like many in the local tennis community, I was caught off-guard when the unveiling of the university's long-range master plan excluded the Tennis Center (as well as the Michael Carroll Track & Field complex at that time). I attended one of the public sessions, along with representatives of the USTA/Midwest Section and the Central Indiana Tennis Association, and when asked about its disappearance, a representative danced around the question, noting that this was still a "long-range planning document...and final determination (of what to do with that space) had yet to be finalized."

While the future of the Indianapolis Tennis Championships was being debated last fall, and the news came that the NCAA would be expanding its nearby headquarters, speculation was that the indoor facility would become a victim of that project. In fact, until the April announcement of the Center's closing, we were led to believe the impact on the Tennis Center would be minimal, with only a portion of it being used as a staging area for the construction project.

The announcement by the Indianapolis Tennis Championships in December didn't catch anyone by surprise, but I believe the university put too much emphasis on this event and its impact on the Tennis Center when moving forward with redevelopment of that area. No one argues that the massive stadium court had become a literal "white elephant" - outdated and in an ongoing state of disrepair. And, frankly, its demolition would have no impact whatsoever on the function of the remainder of the Tennis Center since it was used just that one week of the year for the tournament.

In fact, the loss of the tournament would actually benefit the Tennis Center since it could now remain open to its members, guests, and events – and continue to generate operating revenue – during those several weeks it had normally been closed for Tennis Championships operations.

It would seem to me the planners and decision-makers of the university were extremely shortsighted, paying very little to no attention to what actually goes on at the Tennis Center the other 51 weeks of the year which include, but are not limited to:

- US Tennis Association-sanctioned men's and women's fall/winter and summer tennis leagues

- *From mid-May through July of this year, every court was being used by the summer league every weeknight (according to the ITC online calendar)*
- Central Indiana Women's Indoor Tennis League, which runs fall-spring
- World Team Tennis – three indoor leagues playing every Sunday afternoon from October-April, as well as an outdoor summer league
- Junior Team Tennis
- Indy Tennis Association
- National Junior Tennis League
- Back-up indoor facility for the IHSAA state tennis finals
- Pearson Ford Open and women's Midwest Open Series tournament
- Midwestern Tennis Association (MIDTAC) annual championships
- IUPUI men's and women's tennis teams practice and home matches
- NCAA Summit League tournaments
- Youth 'QuickStart' tournament (QuickStart is a program introduced by the NCAA to teach tennis to young kids through the use of modified courts and equipment)
- Tennis Center-sponsored tournaments, in-house leagues, clinics and private lessons
- Seasonal court time reserved by the center's 900 members
- Walk-on court usage by students, members and non-members

Then, there's the Tennis Center distinction of being one of only six Regional Training Centers designated by the USTA for use in teaching and training the top junior players in the region – players who will likely go on to play collegiately and represent the future of American tennis. This is a direct result of the Tennis Center's ability to attract and retain many of the top junior instructors in the Indianapolis area.

It's also the local practice venue for ATP pro tour Rajeev Ram (who's ranked in the top 80 tennis players in the world), as well as Brooke Austin, who's ranked in the top 3 players in the country in the girls' 14-under division and has represented the United States in several international competitions.

According to recreation industry studies, for the last several years tennis has been the fastest-growing individual recreational sport – eclipsing even golf. And with the growth in local tennis leagues, we need more tennis courts and facilities, not less. I know there is a plan that's been put forth for a new multi-sport complex on the near-westside that could conceivably host a new tennis center. But I can't believe it makes common sense, not to mention financial sense at this particular moment, to demolish a perfectly good, serviceable, well-maintained and well-managed tennis facility just to reinvent it to a lesser extent a few miles away.

I noted earlier the Michael Carroll Track & Field Stadium was also left off the initial master plan, only to be reinserted later, apparently after further discussions with USA Track & Field. However, in checking its online schedule, I found just 19 events listed during the *seven months* the complex is open. In contrast, the Tennis Center's indoor facility was booked for 30 events this past *March* alone.

In keeping the Tennis Center's indoor facility and remaining seven outdoor courts, I believe the university could still go forward with plans to connect to the new Cultural Trail along Blackford Street – even

though there is already ample access via Michigan and New York streets – and could design a very attractive promenade from the new parking garage extension to the building to be constructed at the present tennis stadium site.

Of course, the only downside is that the NCAA would have to do without its desired prominent or picturesque main entry drive to its expanded headquarters (which the indoor facility demolition seems to be facilitating since the physical construction doesn't encroach on the indoor facility's current footprint).

On its website, the NCAA likes to tout its commitment to the community by *“creating meaningful change through volunteerism, in-kind assistance and monetary support. The Association considers support for organizations and programs that directly align with the NCAA mission and values. The NCAA places special emphasis in four primary areas; athletics, education, health services and youth.”* How ironic that, in this instance, its own Executive Committee would place a higher priority on architectural aesthetics than a world-class facility that places emphasis in the same four areas.

I have heard the explanation that the Tennis Center isn't “student-focused”. I'm not sure how the university tracks that – I don't know if a facility use breakdown of “student” versus “non-student” is available – or if there's a benchmark student-use percentage that has been established for university recreational facilities. However, I can say that in all of the tennis league-related emails I receive as a player and team captain, I do notice quite a few addresses with “@iupui.edu”. So there are a number of students and/or faculty using the facility in some manner.

I know it goes against everything the university, the City of Indianapolis and the State of Indiana worked for in luring the NCAA headquarters to the city to say “no” when the NCAA makes a request. But that's just what needs to be done just this once. Take the funds being allocated for the demolition of the indoor facility and put them to use in redesigning the NCAA headquarters entryway in a manner that preserves the indoor facility.

To see what is being planned for the Tennis Center indoor facility and the courts that are still left is nothing less than a slap in the face to the many thousands of players who utilize those facilities year-in and year-out, not to mention the Indianapolis tennis community at large and those local leaders whose energy (and finances) helped make it one of the premier facilities of its kind.

Sincerely,

Scott Cooper
Publisher, Indianapolis Tennis Magazine

Cc: Mark Emmert, Chief Executive, NCAA
Mayor Greg Ballard, City of Indianapolis
Governor Mitch Daniels, State of Indiana

Mark Saunders, Chief Executive, USTA/Midwest Section
Lucy Garvin, Chairman of the Board & President, U.S. Tennis Association
Sheila Schildbach, Executive Director, Central Indiana Tennis Association
Joseph Kirsch, President, Central Indiana Tennis Association Board of Directors
Barbara Wynne, Indianapolis Junior Tennis Development Fund
James Martin, Editor-in-Chief, Tennis Magazine
Tim Cleland, president, Indiana High School Tennis Coaches Association
Susan Williams, president, Indiana Sports Corporation
Anthony Schoettle, Indianapolis Business Journal
Jim Lefko, Senior Editor-Sports, Indianapolis Star
Anthony Calhoun, Sports Director, WISH-TV Channel 8
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