



HEINEKEN'S RED STAR CAFÉ LOCATED ON THE SOUTHWEST CORNER OUTSIDE ASHE STADIUM.

they kind of promote the history of the game here... it adds another dimension where it's not just another tennis tournament, but an event as well."

Of course, the US Open wasn't always all that. It began in 1881 in the much more cozy confines of the Newport Casino in Newport, Rhode Island, now home to the International Tennis Hall of Fame (ITHF). That year saw Richard Sears reigning on the grass courts to win the men's singles trophy. He also won the second year, and the third, and every year following until Henry Slocum finally became the tournament's second champion in its eighth year. Women joined the fray in 1887, and the event grew so fast that in 1915 organizers moved it to the exclusive West Side Tennis Club in Queens, New York. There it grew again, and in 1978 the U.S. Tennis Association (USTA) moved the tournament to the old World's Fair grounds in Flushing Meadows, New York. The event's further evolution has all happened there, at an ever-expanding facility now named the USTA Billie Jean King National Tennis Center.

Throughout its thirteen decades, the US Open has pioneered much change in tennis. It was the first Grand Slam to offer equal prize money to men and women, to use the tiebreaker to make



MARIA SHARAPOVA AT A POST-MATCH PRESS CONFERENCE.

sets finite and to adopt instant replay for overruling line calls.

The US Open is also one of the few tennis tournaments where crowds are—to be slightly euphemistic—more than politely enthusiastic. The traditional tennis fans are by all means present, but alongside them come the fervent locals who are fans of all honest sporting competition. You can hear them in the streets, on the subways and in the country club grill rooms; for two weeks at

the end of every summer, New Yorkers know what's happening, point by point, match by match, session by session, at the highest-attended annual sporting event in their city.

You also hear them in the stands. Loud, thunder-inducing cheers and stomps when a fellow American or up-and-coming talent has achieved victory. It's one of the reasons the Open is such a tough tournament to contest.

"It took me a while to enjoy playing here the first few years,"



REIGNING MEN'S SINGLES CHAMPION ROGER FEDERER.

Courtesy Heineken: Michael Heiman/Getty Images; Opposite page: Rob Tringali/Sportschrome/Getty Images

TOURNAMENT DETAILS

US OPEN

August 25 – September 7

USTA Billie Jean King National Tennis Center
New York City
www.usopen.org

SPECIAL EVENTS:

Arthur Ashe Kids' Day
Saturday, August 23

Qualifying Tournament
(complimentary admission)
August 19–22

says Andre Agassi, the men's singles champ in 1994 and '99. "If you don't understand the mentality of the people, if you don't appreciate the city, then you don't appreciate playing here. It took me a while to understand the mentality of a New Yorker. They don't have a lot of time to waste. If they're going to do something, they're going to bring it. They expect the same from you. That's something I've grown to appreciate and embrace."

Maria Sharapova, who won the women's singles title in 2006, agrees that playing in the US Open brings unique pressures. "I love coming to New York, I love playing in front of these fans," she says. "[But] I think it's the toughest Grand Slam to win, just because of the traffic, getting here. It's just a busy city."

Even Roger Federer, winner of the last four men's singles titles and arguably the most mentally strong player in the history of the game, admits that New York is a difficult environment for competition. "It's an intimidating city when you come here and you've got the skyscrapers, and the walk through the city," he says. "It's different. It's a very, very busy city."

So how does a fan get into the US Open? The tournament boasts attendance records almost every year and the USTA does a good job of making sure people can get in. Still, by the time you read this article, all the remaining tickets will be for the high reaches of Arthur Ashe Stadium, which, with a capacity of 23,733, just happens to be the largest tennis arena in the world. An alternative is to buy a grounds pass, which doesn't permit entry to Ashe, but does allow the fan to attend matches in the two smaller stadiums and at the fourteen side courts.

For the good tickets in Ashe, check the event website, www.usopen.org, where you can sometimes purchase tickets directly from box holders and other subscribers who are not using all their seats.

US OPEN: A HISTORICAL PEEK

1881 The first U.S. National Singles Championships is played in Newport, R.I. Dick Sears wins the inaugural men's singles title.

1887 The first women's national tournament is held at a separate venue in Philadelphia. Ellen Hansell wins the singles title.

1892 Mabel Cahill becomes the first player to win the tournament's triple crown (singles, doubles and mixed doubles).

1903 Laurie Doherty becomes the first foreign player to win a U.S. National Championship title.

1915 The tournament moves to

the West Side Tennis Club in Queens, N.Y.

1938 Don Budge wins the men's singles championship and becomes the first player to capture the Grand Slam (all four major tournaments in the same year).

1950 Althea Gibson becomes

the first African-American to play in the U.S. National Championships; seven years later she becomes the first African-American to win.

1953 Maureen Connolly wins the women's singles title and becomes the first woman to accomplish a Grand Slam.

1967 Billie Jean King becomes the first player to win the tournament playing with a metal racquet.

1968 The "Open Era" begins, and Arthur Ashe and Virginia Wade win the first "US Open" singles draws. Ashe's title makes him the first African-American man to win the event.

1969 Vic Seixas plays in his 28th U.S. championship, still a record. Rod Laver wins the men's title and becomes the only player to twice earn a Grand Slam.

1970 For the first time in the history of tennis majors, tiebreaks are used to resolve 6-6 sets.

1973 Breaking ranks with the other majors, the US Open becomes the first Grand Slam event to award equal prize money to men and women.

1975 The US Open switches from grass to clay courts, and schedules its first night matches.

1978 The tournament moves to the hard courts of its current site, the USTA National Tennis Center in Flushing Meadows, Queens. Jimmy Connors and Chris Evert win the singles titles.

1979 At 16 years, 8 months and 28 days old, Tracy Austin becomes the youngest player ever to win an American national singles title.

Whether you spend \$44 on a grounds pass, \$400 for a loge seat or \$4,000 to sit in a courtside box, a ticket for any session in the tournament's first four days may well be the best deal in sports. During that time, so many matches are scheduled that the stadiums can't contain all the seeded players. The biggest stars will still be showcased in Ashe and the flanking Louis Armstrong Stadium. But other top players and plenty of up-and-comers will compete out on the side courts, where fans can get exhilaratingly close to the action. Buy a ticket for a day session, and you can even stay through the evening matches; you'll lose your reserved seat in the stadium once the session changes, but you'll still be able to roam the grounds, eat at the on-site restaurants, and watch tennis on the sixteen other courts.



During the second week, the dwindled-down draw means fewer matches are scheduled, but the remaining contests are big: the quarters, the semis and the finals. And the outer courts will still be abuzz with doubles, juniors and professional wheelchair matches. Though doubles may be the pro game's lesser attraction, it is in fact a thrilling form of the game to watch. The juniors are also great to follow, especially when a few years later you'll be able to say you saw the newest tennis powerhouse way back when. And the wheelchair players are so skilled that it's easy to forget they're also inspiring—wheeling around the court and changing direction faster than some able-bodied players.

While tennis is the main act, it's certainly not the US Open's only attraction. Six on-site restaurants (some exclusive, depending on the ticket you hold) serve everything from steak and seafood to fine wines and Cuban cuisine. Additionally, the food court, while busier than the restaurants, offers a wide array of good fare.

The grounds offer shopping, as well: Nike, Wilson, Lacoste and Polo Ralph Lauren all operate retail outlets on the east side of the tennis center. And the history-minded can visit the US Open Gallery beneath Armstrong Stadium, which offers an annual exhibit organized by the ITTF.

The US Open is also a tournament where the sponsors get in the game. Pattie Falch, marketing manager for Heineken, an Open sponsor for the past seventeen years, says that her company

and others aren't present just to sell, but also to participate in the ambiance. "We really want to give people a great experience," she says. "We don't want to go in and just spend money to sponsor something without truly being able to activate it and make sure anybody who is involved—whether it's a consumer or the USTA—is really getting the best experience that they can. We want to elevate people's experience at the Open."

In that vein, Heineken recently introduced roaming vendors with portable kegs in backpacks, as well as the Red Star Café, located outside the southwest corner of Ashe Stadium. The café has a more relaxed atmosphere where patrons can order an extra cold Heineken and watch the matches on the scores of television sets. They also host Heineken Day, where on Saturday evening of Labor Day weekend, all Arthur Ashe Stadium ticket holders receive a limited edition Heineken Premium Light US Open hat upon entry. And if that weren't enough, Heineken also hosts an extravagant player party the Friday night before the tournament.

Though the US Open is an incubator of innovation in tennis and sports entertainment, it's also one of the guardians of the game's tradition and history. That latter charge will be on full display throughout the 2008 tournament. The opening ceremony, Monday, August 25, will honor the fortieth anniversary of the dawn of the Open Era, when amateurs and pros were first allowed to compete together. All thirty-nine of the living Open Era singles winners have been invited, and five-time champ Pete Sampras will be inducted into the Court of Champions, which honors the greatest players in the history of the tournament.

"The 2008 US Open will be a celebration of history," says USTA spokesman Chris Widmaier. "By looking back at the past... we can see how much the game has grown. The tournament, once again, will be a great marriage of tradition and innovation."

That marriage has created one of the finest sporting events in the country, a tournament that offers world-class action, topnotch food, a unique culture and an unparalleled fan experience.

"It's the closest tournament to my heart," Agassi says. "I don't think there's any other environment like it in the world of sports."
—CCQ

US OPEN: A HISTORICAL PEEK

1981 The tournament celebrates its 100th anniversary.

1984 John Newcombe, Stan Smith, Ivan Lendl, Pat Cash, Jimmy Connors, John McEnroe, Chris Evert and Martina Navratilova combine to play four matches that last over twelve

hours, a spectacular display of tennis since known as "Super Saturday."

1997 Arthur Ashe Stadium opens as the largest tennis arena in the world.

2001 Venus and Serena Williams become the first siblings to play

against each other for a women's single's title. Venus wins 6-2, 6-4 in the tournament's first final to be broadcast on prime-time television.

2005 659,538 spectators attend the US Open, a standing record for any tennis tournament.

2006 The US Open becomes

the first major tennis event to use instant replay as a means of reversing line calls.

