

Wimbledon opts to pay women same as men

The Associated Press

WIMBLEDON, England

After years of holding out against equal prize money, Wimbledon yielded to public pressure Thursday and agreed to pay female players as much as male players at the world's most prestigious tennis tournament.

The All England Club fell in line with other Grand Slam events and offered equal pay through all rounds at this year's tournament.

"Tennis is one of the few sports

"It's a victory for women's tennis, and a victory for women in general."

Amelie Mauresmo
2006 women's Wimbledon champion on tournament paying women equal to men

in which women and men compete in the same event at the same time," club chairman Tim Phillips said at a news conference. "We believe our decision to

offer equal prize money provides a boost for the game as a whole and recognizes the enormous contribution that women players make to the game and to Wimbledon."

Last year, men's champion Roger Federer received \$1.17 million and women's winner Amelie Mauresmo got \$1.17 million. "It is a victory for women's tennis, and a victory for women in general," Mauresmo said Thursday after reaching the semifinals of the Dubai Open. "It was really a matter of principle.

It is a question of equality."

The U.S. Open and Australian Open have paid equal prize money for years.

The French Open paid the men's and women's champions the same for the first time last year, although the overall prize fund remained bigger for the men. The WTA Tour lobbied for years to get Wimbledon to drop its "Victorian-era view" and pay the women the same as the men.

"This is an historic and defining moment for women in the sport of tennis and a significant

step forward for the equality of women in our society," WTA Tour chief executive Larry Scott said. "We commend the leadership of Wimbledon for its decisive action in recognizing the progress that women's tennis has made."

The general director of the French Tennis Federation, Jean-Francois Vilotte, said the French Open could follow Wimbledon's example in offering equal money for all rounds. No decision is expected before the federation's next meeting March 16.

The federation "doesn't plan to

sit on the decisions of 2006," Vilotte said. Equal pay "is an important recognition of the quality ... of women's tennis," Vilotte said.

Phillips said the Wimbledon committee met Wednesday and agreed unanimously "that the time is right to bring this subject to a logical conclusion and eliminate the difference."

The All England Club had gradually reduced the pay gap over the years but previously held out against equal prizes as a matter of principle.

• Hosts

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"In order for us to conduct all those events, we have to have schools that step up and serve as hosts," Ressa said. "Granted, some are more willing than others and do a better job than others. But it's critical that we have member schools that want to be hosts, and we really appreciate those that are willing to do that."

The IHSAA pays Center Grove just \$300 for hosting the event. The school also receives \$400 to pay for feeding more than 150 workers, athletes and coaches.

"Some people might hear that and say, 'What the heck are you doing hosting this?'" Zwitt said. "But it's just a fun event to host. It's one day, and we really enjoy it. But when it comes to the point where we don't enjoy it, we'll ask them to take it somewhere else for a while."

The Center Grove gym's seating capacity is 5,200, and during the past 10 years the average attendance for the meet has been 4,400. Zwitt said the only time the gym is more crowded than during the wrestling meet is graduation. More than 75 paid workers are needed to help run the meet, from taking tickets to making sure the parking lot isn't too congested.

About 15 parents of Center Grove wrestlers volunteer to work the hospitality room and help feed those involved.

Members of the school's band work the concession stands and

BY THE NUMBERS

A look at Center Grove High School hosting the IHSAA team wrestling state finals:

11

Consecutive years Center Grove High School has played host to the finals, including this year

4,400

Average attendance for the team meet in its first 10 years at Center Grove

5,200

Capacity of Center Grove's gym

\$300

Amount paid to Center Grove by the IHSAA to host the event

\$400

Stipend given to Center Grove to help feed the more than 150 workers, athletes and coaches

keep the money earned.

Trojans wrestlers are in charge of making sure the four mats are rolled out and then disassemble two mats following the first round.

Center Grove has never competed at the team state finals, but Zwitt hopes hosting the event will provide added motivation for the Trojans to reach the team finals. "I was always hoping it would be a carrot for our wrestling team someday," Zwitt said. "See it, work it and want to be a part of it. And we were almost there this year. It would be neat to have our own team at the final someday."

No school has made more trips to Center Grove for the state finals than Evansville Mater Dei. The Wildcats have won nine of

the 11 team state championships, and their coach, Mike Goebel, said Center Grove's facility is more than anyone could ask for.

Having the meet at the same venue each year provides benefits to competitors, fans and hosts, Goebel said.

"Those involved in hosting the tournament benefit from the experience and can run the tournament much more professionally and efficiently," he said. "For the teams that have also benefited from prior state tourney experiences, it helps them establish a routine, especially for the teams that must travel."

Goebel said fans can time the drive and know where they are going. Ressa said that's important, noting that Center Grove isn't conveniently located near an interstate.

"Teams may change, but for the core fans that are going to go to the meet no matter what, it's good to stay at the same place. We're not going to move for the sake of moving," Ressa said. "Center Grove does a good job of running it, and we don't have to worry at all."

On Saturday, Goebel will bring the defending-champion Wildcats back to Center Grove; and regardless of whether they repeat as champions or not, he knows what to expect from his gracious hosts.

"Coaches, teams and fans all walk away with a very good feeling about Center Grove," Goebel said. "The results may not be to every team's liking, but no one can complain about the treatment given. It's first-class all the way."

• Doubters

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"It still hasn't hit us that we're going to semistate," Dewitz said. "We never thought that we would."

The Trojans' run to the semi-state began with a sectional matchup against Franklin Central, the team responsible for ending the Trojans' seasons the past two years.

Heading into sectional play, Center Grove had lost three of its final five regular-season games and didn't look like a team ready to contend for a state title.

But during the week of practice leading up to the sectional opener, something changed.

"There was suddenly a totally different attitude in practice," Lentz said. "They concentrated. They were listening. They were focused. I think opening up against Franklin Central had something to do with it."

It was a chance for revenge, and a spirited Center Grove team didn't disappoint, beating the Flashes by 11.

The Trojans went on to knock off Southport and Decatur Central to capture their first sectional title since 2001.

Lentz said he was afraid the team would be satisfied with just a sectional title.

But the draw for the regional provided Center Grove with another shot at righting an earlier season wrong.

In their first regional game, the Trojans faced Metropolitan Interscholastic Conference foe Ben Davis, a team that had beaten the Trojans by 14 points a month earlier.

And again, the Trojans exacted their revenge, beating the eighth-ranked Giants by six points.

Then came the regional final against No. 1-ranked and previously unbeaten Hamilton Southeastern.

A true underdog, Center Grove pulled the surprise of the tournament in dramatic fashion as senior Hillary Bowling hit the second of two free throws with a second remaining to give the Trojans a one-point victory.

Of course, few will let Bowling forget she hit the second free throw only after tossing up an air ball on her first attempt.

"I was going up there thinking I can hit it, and then after I missed it, I was kind of embarrassed," she said. "I was like, 'I better make this next one.'"

She did, the Trojans won, and the celebration began.

"I've never had so much fun in



STAFF PHOTO BY JOE SABA

Center Grove senior Gina Phillips drives to the basket Saturday against Ben Davis. The Trojans beat the Giants to advance to the semistate.

my life," Dewitz said. "All the nerves hit me after the game. I kind of doubled over a few times. But playing together as a team and playing with the No. 1 team in the state was just an awesome experience."

Freshman Kirsten Gliemann added, "It's like we can't stop smiling. You want to tell everybody, and you want everybody to know."

Center Grove is the only unranked team remaining in the tournament, as No. 2 South Bend Washington (26-1) will play No. 7 Anderson (24-2) in the other semistate final.

That shouldn't faze the Trojans, though.

Center Grove was the only unranked team at its regional and still prevailed.

"We don't need to be ranked to show how good we are," Bowling said. "Rankings don't matter. All it does is provide more motivation for us."

Motivation won't be a problem for Saturday's game.

Lentz starts four seniors, and he said he believes some of the team's recent determination has a lot to do with the reality that the next game might be their last.

Before the tournament games, Dewitz reminds the team of that. "I go into every game and I tell the girls in the huddle, 'This is not going to be our last game. This is not going to be the last time we're warming up together,'" she said.

"We don't want this to end because this is just too much fun."

• Turn

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Winners of four straight heading into tonight's semifinal against No. 4 seed Defiance (16-8, 9-7 HCAC), the Grizzlies are confident of extending their momentum into the conference tournament, the winner of which receives an automatic bid to the NCAA Division III Tournament.

No. 2 seed Transylvania plays No. 3 Bluffton in the first of tonight's two semifinal games.

"We know that we can beat anybody that we play," said sophomore point guard Jace Redman, the Grizzlies' season scoring leader at 12.5 ppg. "At this point, it doesn't matter who we play. We know we're going to play well and do our thing."

That's pretty much what the Grizzlies have done for the past month. After getting off to a rocky conference start in January, the low point being the flameout at Defiance, the Grizzlies have been the class of the highly competitive HCAC.

Playing with demonstrably more focus and determination in recent weeks, Franklin has beaten every HCAC opponent at least once and has scored 68 or more points in each of its past nine games. Moreover, the Grizzlies have been solid defensively and

play with a veteran poise that belies their youth.

They have two sophomores in the starting lineup and a total of six who regularly contribute.

But when Prather ponders the Grizzlies' strengths and the fuel behind their resurgence, he points to a single source: the players. He credits them for making the decision to turn around a season that was teetering another direction.

"You always make the pitch that a team's goal should be, as we call it, 'Playing best when it matters most,'" Prather said. "And these guys really wrapped their hands around that concept and decided that they were going to make sure that was the case."

"To have hammered out an 8-1 record on the end of a knock-down, drag-out conference season I think was just incredibly impressive."

Part of the turnaround can be attributed to the improved inside play of undersized center Marty Young, a 6-foot-3 junior whose versatility as a scorer and passer often creates matchup problems for defenses that usually focus on the Grizzlies' gifted shooters.

Another part can be traced to better offensive patience, which the Grizzlies lacked during their slump. But the catalyst was the determination of players not to cash-in their season when things weren't going well.

For example, Tudor became

resolved on the long bus ride home from Defiance and encouraged teammates to do the same.

A few days later, Redman sent teammates an e-mail reminding them that their season was far from over and that a conference championship was well within reach. "That was just one game where we didn't show up to play at all," Redman said. "We all agreed it was time to turn our season around if we were going to make something of it."

"I just wanted to make sure everyone understood that our season wasn't over yet, that we still had a great shot to win the conference."

They did, and they have a chance to win another championship this weekend.

Tonight's semifinal winners play for the tournament championship Saturday evening at Franklin's Spurlock Center.

"Right now, I feel like we're unstoppable if we play the way we've been playing and don't change anything," Redman said. "I think we've really figured out as a team how to play to be successful."

Tudor agrees. "It just seems like everything's clicking," Tudor said. "We all feed off one another. We just feed off each other's energy. We're just at the top of our (game) right now."

"Our whole team can't wait for (tonight) to come."

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