



The Tournament Directors

12/04/2024 Behind the success of the Porsche Tennis Grand Prix is a strong team.

Leadership duo

Behind the success of the Porsche Tennis Grand Prix is a strong team. Markus Günthardt as the Tournament Director and Anke Huber as the Operating Tournament Director have formed a successful leadership duo ever since 2005.

Markus Günthardt, himself a professional on the ATP Tour from 1978 to 1985 and a Davis Cup player for Switzerland, has been the tournament director since 2005. He remained in the game after the end of a playing career that took him to No. 40 in the world doubles rankings. First as the tournament director of the Eurocard Open and ATP Tour World Championships, later as the tournament director of the WTA Finals in Istanbul as well as the WTA Finals in Singapore and Shenzhen. His experience is also in demand on the WTA Tournament Council. He lives with his wife and two children in Madrid and Switzerland.

Anke Huber has been the Operating Tournament Director of the Porsche Tennis Grand Prix since 2002. The German, who reached a career high of No. 4 in the WTA world rankings, played her stand-out match when she and compatriot Steffi Graf contested the 1995 Masters final. One year later, she reached her only Grand Slam final at the Australian Open. During the course of her career, she won a total of 12 WTA tournaments. At the Porsche Tennis Grand Prix, she won the tournament in 1991 (against Martina Navratilova) and again in 1994 (against Mary Pierce). She retired after the 2001 WTA Masters. Of the 632 matches she played, she managed to win 418. Anke Huber has two children and lives with her family in Frankenthal, Germany.

Anke Huber, Operating Tournament Director

Year for year the Porsche Tennis Grand Prix presents its audience with a world class field. This year nine Top 10 players will be competing in the Porsche Arena. "The players like coming to Stuttgart," says the Operating Tournament Director Anke Huber in an interview. "We also go to great lengths to make sure they feel at home here and can display their best tennis."

Anke, the 47th Porsche Tennis Grand Prix will present its audience with an exclusive field of players. How satisfied are you when looking at the entry list?

"We're naturally again very satisfied. With title holder Iga Swiatek, the reigning Australian Open champion Aryna Sabalenka and Coco Gauff, who last year won her first Grand Slam in New York, in the line-up, the world's top players will all be here. All-in-all, we will be presenting nine Top 10 players and nine Grand Slam champions in the Porsche Arena. That's pretty respectable."

How pleasing is it for you that Angelique Kerber is returning to form after giving birth?

"We're very grateful that Angie was one of the first players to decide to enter our tournament. The pure fact that she will be appearing in the Porsche Arena ups the standing of the Porsche Tennis Grand Prix enormously. Our spectators couldn't wish for anything more than watching the Porsche Brand Ambassador and the two-time Stuttgart winner live again after a one-year break."

Will her wins at the WTA 1000 Masters tournament in Indian Wells give her the necessary confidence after such a long time away from the game?

"Definitely. In Indian Wells she after all also beat the Top 10 player Jelena Ostapenko and therefore knows she has improved considerably since the start of the season in Australia. Emma Raducanu, our second Brand Ambassador in the field, was also in good form in Indian Wells. Hopefully she'll continue in the same vein in Stuttgart."

The world's top tennis players have been coming almost en bloc to Stuttgart over the years. Is it a given in the meantime?

"No, it's not quite so simple. We no longer have to convince the players that have already been here and who have played quite well about the quality of our tournament. They know exactly what they can expect. It's different with younger players and those that don't know our tournament so well. You still have to work on convincing some of them every now and again."

What do you say to such players?

"I tell them about what they can expect here. That we go the extra mile to offer them conditions in which they can display their best tennis, starting with the excellent practice facilities right up to the fantastic Porsche Arena with the great crowd. And we try to anticipate the players' every wish in the tournament week."

How difficult is it to retain the high level of tennis at the Porsche Tennis Grand Prix?

"Stuttgart is a fixture for many players when planning their season. They feel at home here and like coming back to us. It gives us a certain amount of pride. It's also so nice seeing them feeling at home. But as I said, it would be presumptuous to expect that we automatically have eight or nine Top 10 players every year. We go to a lot of trouble to make sure everything stays that way."

When and how do you contact the players in respect of the tournament?

"It generally happens in late autumn when you can see which players are so far up the world rankings so that they are high enough to be in with a good chance of getting into our main draw. I call or write to the players and their management and take advantage of big events like, this year, the WTA Finals in Cancun to talk to them personally."

Looking at international women's tennis, what do you see?

"The standard is for sure better than two, three years ago. There is less to choose between the players at the top and there's greater consistency. There were times when six or seven players broke into the Top 10 in a season and then quickly dropped out again. It's no longer the case. With players like Iga Swiatek, Aryna Sabalenka, Coco Gauff and Jessica Pegula, there's more continuity at the top."

Who are her "players of the year" and what makes them stand out?

"Iga Swiatek and Aryna Sabalenka have been outstanding. The fact that these two exceptional players contested the final of the Porsche Tennis Grand Prix in each of the past two years is an honour for our tournament. Iga is unbelievably consistent even though she has lost a few matches recently. She's concentrated and focussed and moves around the court extremely well. She's already got a lot of experience for her age. Aryna's strengths are her explosive power and energy. She can play incredibly quickly, has a powerful serve and showed at this year's Australian Open that she can win a Grand Slam. Coco Gauff also excites me. Her triumph at the US Open has given her a big boost, one I've waiting for the whole time. She'll definitely be somebody people have on their cards in the next years when Grand

Slam titles are up for grabs."

When was it clear the trio also be competing in the Porsche Arena in 2024?

"In the case of Iga and Aryna, it was quite early on. You should never feel certain, but with the finalists in the past two years, we were pretty sure it was going to happen. Iga after all has the rare chance to win her third consecutive title, and therefore go down in the history books. After the 2023 final, Aryna said she just had to win a Porsche. And Coco has told us over and over again just how much she likes it in Stuttgart."

The last German winner was Laura Siegemund in 2017. Do you see a talented youngster that can follow in her footsteps?

"At the moment, there's nobody in Germany that you feel is capable of doing it. We have to be patient and wait two or three years to see if our highly talented players Noma Noha Akugue, Eva Lys or Ella Seidel manage to get to the top. After a successful generation that included players like Angie Kerber, Julia Görges and Andrea Petkovic, it's relatively normal that there will initially be a gap. There are a number of young hopefuls in the junior teams supported by Porsche who have to be given the necessary time to develop."

Talking about Angelique Kerber, the Porsche Brand Ambassador is planning her return after having a baby. Will we see her in Stuttgart?

"She wants to play the Australian Open. Let's see how things go for her and where the journey will take her. Having her here with us would definitely be a big plus for our tournament and all the spectators."

Back to Angelique Kerber: how far can she go in Stuttgart?

"Angie is always good for a surprise. Especially in the Porsche Arena."

Markus Günthardt, Tournament Director

The 2024 Porsche Tennis Grand Prix countdown is running. "Our tournament is an event for the whole family, and we want to keep it that way," says Tournament Director Markus Günthardt. "We're proud and happy at being able to present our audiences in the Porsche Arena with so many top players once again this year."

Markus, having the top stars Iga Swiatek, Aryna Sabalenka and Coco Gauff in the Porsche Arena is something that must make the Tournament Director totally happy?

"As far as the tennis in the Porsche Tennis Grand Prix is concerned, these players are naturally the best you could wish for. I'm actually rather proud they've decided in favour of our tournament, and that they'll

be back in Stuttgart. With a total of nine Top 10 players, there really is more than just a Grand slam whiff. I'm also pleased for our spectators as we can present them with such a world class field."

Can Iga Swiatek make it three in a row?

"She's obviously the big favourite. But it won't be a walk in the park. But I also don't think she will only have her work cut out with Aryna Sabalenka and Coco Gauff. It's quite possible that a player we don't currently have on the radar will be in the mix for the title. By winning for a third time, she would join world stars like Lindsey Davenport and Maria Sharapova in the history books. Even though she's won a lot in her career, I do think that it's a big incentive."

The fact that the top stars are coming to Stuttgart is first and foremost the job of the Operating Tournament Director Anke Huber. You are responsible for the rest. How do you go about managing the off-court side of the tournament?

"After the tournament is before the tournament, and the same applies to the Porsche Tennis Grand Prix. The focus at the start of the planning and the preparations is on the overall concept. We ask ourselves what do we want to improve and what new things do we want to do, no matter whether it's for the players or for our audience. We scrutinise everything. After deciding upon an idea, we then present it to Porsche AG. If we get the thumbs up from Zuffenhausen, then we work on its implementation."

What is awaiting the spectators this year?

"We've taken another step down the road to a hybrid event. This means, we don't only want to offer our audience world class tennis with as many top players as possible, but also an attractive programme of entertainment with numerous off-court attractions."

How important is it for the success of the Porsche Tennis Grand Prix?

"In my view, it's very important. Especially as we want the spectators to spend the whole day in the arena, but we can't expect people to spend ten hours a day sitting in the stands. We have to create the conditions in which they're very happy to stay in the arena for a long time. In the past years, we've instigated a lot of things in this respect and we've turned the Porsche Tennis Grand Prix into an attractive event for the whole family. We've worked really hard to go one better."

How difficult is it to continually improve the tournament?

"It's obviously not easy. We've nevertheless managed it quite well in the past. We don't want any radical reforms. But such an event is never the finished article, you continually find opportunities to improve things. I like to compare our tournament with the Porsche 911. Each year when a new 911 is launched, I have the feeling, it's perfect. But engineers and designers nevertheless continually manage to make it even better. That's exactly what we try to do with our tournament."

The starring role in the Porsche Arena is acted by the players on Centre Court. How do you see women's tennis at the moment?

"For the first time in a long while, we're seeing a phase again in which there's a real battle for the No. 1 spot. And it's a good thing. Women's tennis is benefitting from the rivalry between Aryna Sabalenka and Iga Swiatek and their battle for the crown. And now they have been joined by a Coco Gauff who has improved immensely and who, after her triumph at the US Open aged only 19, has also staked a claim for the crown. One thing is for sure, the next few years are going to be very interesting and exciting. Also at the Porsche Tennis Grand Prix."

MEDIA ENQUIRIES



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