Markus Günthardt: “Excellent basis for a successful tournament”

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02/03/2021 Despite a number of challenges posed by the pandemic, the preparations for the Porsche Tennis Grand Prix in Stuttgart's Porsche Arena from 17 to 25 April are going to plan.

As the Porsche Tennis Grand Prix tournament director, Markus Günthardt has already had to overcome some challenges: the event has not only moved from tranquil Filderstadt to Stuttgart, but from hard court to clay and from autumn to spring. However, compared to pulling together the 44th edition of the world class tournament during a global pandemic, these changes seem rather simple.

“The pandemic has completely changed the focus. It has gained in importance a lot in the past months,” says Günthardt, who hails from Switzerland. Still, he insists that he feels like a tournament director, and not a crisis manager. “The coronavirus is now a big part of the tournament, and brings with it new tasks, which I'm tackling with my team.”

“Porsche is right behind the tournament”

The organisers are making every effort to enable the tournament to go ahead so that fans can enjoy a degree of normality and Günthardt has the full backing of Porsche. “Porsche is right behind the tournament and sees it as part of its societal responsibility to hold this popular and long-standing global event, even in these difficult times,” he says.

On the road to the first serve being delivered in the Porsche Arena, the team behind the event has already come a long way. “The preparations are going to plan,” continues Günthardt. “We've found solutions for the most important issues.” By this he means issues elementary to the safe running of the tournament: how will visitors be managed? How will people be tested? Who will be allowed to enter which area? “As far as I'm concerned, we've developed a very good hygiene strategy,” he says. “It means we're well-prepared to offer everybody involved the safest conditions possible.”

In addition to the Porsche Arena being available for the Porsche Tennis Grand Prix, the additional space offered by the Schleyer-Halle is proving to be an invaluable asset this year. The players and their support teams will be accommodated in a hotel directly opposite the venue, which will also house the highly frequented player zones such as the restaurant and the lounge that were previously located in the Porsche Arena. Players will only go to the arena to practice and play matches.

Continuous communication with the authorities and the WTA

Though the rules and regulations have changed several times over the past months, Günthardt and his team have not had to completely revise their plans, although a decision was taken early on to do away with the VIP Lounge, which is usually popular among sponsors and business seat ticket-holders. “It wasn't an easy decision to make but it helped us to draw up a sound basic concept right from a very early stage. It also gave us greater surety and flexibility,” says the tournament director. The extra space that has been created as a result can now be used exclusively by the players and the very limited number of staff that will accompany them. As the coronavirus pandemic continues to fluctuate, the organisers are in constant contact with the authorities and the Women's Tennis Association but the uncertainty of the situation does not worry Markus Günthardt unduly: “Through laying the foundations at a very stage, we can adapt to the new circumstances quickly and without having to go to too much effort.”

The 44th Porsche Tennis Grand Prix will differ from previous years' events in many ways. “We'll experience a completely different tournament,” says Günthardt. Normally, the Porsche Arena is sold out every day and the spectators create a fantastic buzz. This year there will only be a few or perhaps even no fans in the arena, meaning the atmosphere the players love so much will not be the same. Nevertheless, Günthardt says: “We'll endeavour to create an environment for the players in which they feel at home.”

Numerous top stars set to appear at the Porsche Arena

The stars of the WTA Tour feel at home in Stuttgart. When the players last voted for the world's most popular tournament, they placed the Porsche Tennis Grand Prix at number one in its category – for the tenth time since 2006. Now that Ashleigh Barty, Naomi Osaka and Simona Halep have confirmed they will appear, the Porsche Arena will play host to the world's top three players. The trio will be joined by other Top 10 players along with the Stuttgart winners Petra Kvitova (2019) and Karolina Pliskova (2018) and the three-time grand slam winner and Porsche Brand Ambassador Angelique Kerber. One thing is for certain even before entries close: the quality of the tennis at the tournament will not suffer due to the pandemic.

“The entries of so many top stars have boosted our optimism. It's an indication of the esteem in which our tournament is held all over the world,” adds Günthardt who, seven weeks before play starts, is feeling confident. “I have the greatest faith in Porsche and our team. We have a very good concept. We've done everything that has been possible. It's an excellent basis for a successful tournament.”

MEDIA ENQUIRIES



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Consumption data

718 Boxster S (WLTP)*: Fuel consumption combined: 10.4 – 9.6 l/100 km; CO_2 emissions combined: 235 – 218 g/km; CO_2 class: G

911 Carrera 4S Cabriolet (Modello precedente)

*Further information on the official fuel consumption and the official specific CO_2 emissions of new passenger cars can be found in the "Leitfaden über den Kraftstoffverbrauch, die CO_2-Emissionen und den Stromverbrauch neuer Personenkraftwagen" (Fuel Consumption, CO_2Emissions and Electricity Consumption Guide for New Passenger Cars), which is available free of charge at all sales outlets and from DAT (Deutsche Automobil Treuhand GmbH, Helmuth-Hirth-Str. 1, 73760 Ostfildern-Scharnhausen, www.dat.de).

Image Sublines

Path: Markus Günthardt: "Excellent basis for a successful tournament"/Images/img_1.jpg
Title: Markus Günthardt, Porsche Tennis Grand Prix tournament director, Petra Kvitova, Winner of the PTGP 2019, Oliver Blume, Chairman of the Executive Board of Dr. Ing. h.c. F. Porsche AG, Anke Huber, l-r, 2019, Porsche AG
Subline: Markus Günthardt, Petra Kvitova, Oliver Blume and Anke Huber at the Porsche Tennis Grand Prix 2019 (f.l.)

Path: Markus Günthardt: "Excellent basis for a successful tournament"/Images/img_3.jpg
Title: Porsche Brand Ambassador Angelique Kerber, 2016, Porsche AG
Subline: Porsche Brand Ambassador Angelique Kerber won the Porsche Tennis Grand Prix in 2015 and 2016

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