

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Over 50 Players Will Compete In Innovative-Choice Wireless VI Open Tennis Tournament This Week

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ST. THOMAS -- Tennis players from the U.S. Virgin Islands, Caribbean and U.S. Mainland have registered to compete in the Innovative-Choice Wireless VI Open Tennis Tournament, which takes place this week through March 5 at the St. Thomas Yacht Club.

This year's field is filled with outstanding talent that makes spectating a tennis-lover's dream and confirms the tournament's nickname as the 'Wimbledon of the Caribbean', according to a release issued Tuesday.

One remarkable entry is Chris Haggard, a South African native and current resident of Austin, Texas. According to the release, Haggard turned pro in 1993, subsequently won

six ATP Tour titles and finished runner-up an additional dozen times on the Tour while playing against the likes of other top professionals like Boris Becker. He achieved a career high doubles ranking of 19 in 2003. Haggard will compete in Men's Open Doubles with fellow pro, Edward Boone.

"A friend of mine in Texas told me about the tournament," says Haggard, who currently coach's youth and adults at Austin's Grey Rock Tennis Club. "I've never been to the Virgin Islands. I'm excited for the opportunity to visit and to play some great tennis."

Another entry is Puerto Rico's Erwin Lopez, who won the Men's Open Singles last year as well as the Men's Open Doubles with partner Fernando Negron.

"We only have one or two high level tournaments in Puerto Rico, so we need to go out to other countries to play and keep our level high. This year, I'm looking forward to competing harder and learning as much as I can, because this is my opening tournament of the year after working very hard in the pre-season," says Lopez, who has played several high-level tournaments in El Salvador, Costa Rica and the Dominican Republic.

Additionally, back after a few years' hiatus is Will Boe Wiegaard, of Easton, Connecticut, a two-time Men's Open Singles winner in this tournament.

"We are also looking forward to watching several Virgin Islands players compete, many of whom should definitely give our visitors some great competition," says Val Wilder, tournament director, pro at the St. Thomas Yacht Club and five-time United States Pro Tennis Association 'Pro of the Year', who himself has competed at Wimbledon and the French and U.S. Opens.

Players will compete in 13 divisions in this USTA-sanctioned tournament, the only tennis tournament in the U.S. Virgin Islands sanctioned by the USTA's Caribbean District. There are two Open divisions: Men's Open Singles and Men's Open Doubles. In B events, there are Women's, Men's and Mixed Doubles (8.0 combined); Women's, Men's and Mixed Doubles (6.0 combined); Women's and Men's Singles (4.0 & under); Women's and Men's Singles (3.0 & under); and Men's Doubles 60-plus years of age.

Total prize money amounts to over \$10,000.

Matches will take place on courts at the St. Thomas Yacht Club, the host location for the Finals play on Sunday March 5. Pre-finals play will take place additionally at the Anchorage Condominiums and Sugar Bay Resort & Spa. Matches will be officiated by USTA officials. The public is invited to come out and watch the action.

The Innovative-Choice Wireless VI Open Tennis Tournament is sponsored by Innovative, Choice Wireless, the U.S. Virgin Islands Department of Tourism, Capitol Air, Sugar Bay Resort & Spa, the STYC and USTA Caribbean.