

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Winners Named At Innovative-Choice Wireless V.I. Open Tennis Tournament

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ST. THOMAS -- Puerto Rico's Alex Llompарт made an impressive comeback after a two-year hiatus from tennis by winning the highly-competitive Men's Open Singles at the Innovative-Choice Wireless V.I. Open Tennis Tournament, according to a release issued late Sunday.

The event, nicknamed the 'Wimbledon of the Caribbean' for its world-class competition, was hosted February 27 to March 5, at the St. Thomas Yacht Club. Fifty-five players from the U.S. Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, St. Kitts and U.S. Mainland states of Colorado, Connecticut, Florida and Texas, competed this year. Players included professional as well as a strong contingent of amateur or B division participants.

"My goal was to keep the ball deep and serve well, and I accomplished that," says Llompart, who beat fellow islander, Alejandro Rodriguez-Vidal, (6-7)(6-0)(6-2). Llompart, who spent the last two years establishing his real estate career, brought a lot of experience to his comeback. In the past, he was ranked in the top 100 in singles as a junior and in the top 200 as a professional in doubles. Llompart was also the number two ranked college player nationally while attending Pepperdine University in Malibu, California.

In Men's Open Doubles, Chris Haggard of Bee Cave, Texas and partner Edward Boone of Austin, Texas, triumphed over Puerto Rico's Gabriel Mantilla and Alejandro Rodriguez-Vidal (7-5)(7-6).

"Our strategy was to play the big points well. Plus, I think we played well as a team when we were down. It was a very close match; it could have gone either way," says Haggard, who after turning pro in 1993 won six ATP Tour titles, finished runner-up an additional dozen times on the Tour while playing against the likes of other top professionals like Boris Becker, and achieved a career high doubles ranking of 19 in 2003.

In the B division, Anthony Caines of St. Thomas and Paul Trotman of St. Kitts won the best of three round-robin (2-0) against Jerry Head and Brandon Owens, both of Austin, Texas, and Mike Lammens of Denver, Colorado and William Newbold of St. Thomas in Men's Doubles (8.0 combined).

"Super happy" is the way both St. Thomas' Joyce Bailey and Denise Holmberg described their win in the Women's Doubles (8.0 combined) against Jennifer Coffindaffer of St. Augustine, Florida, and Ann Roberts, from Southlake, Texas. The Virgin Islands players were seeded second to the visitors, which underscored their elation.

"We went from Love-40 on the last game and made a real comeback," says Holmberg.

Fellow St. Thomas players, Morgan Avery and Osa Notting, bested St. Thomas' Eve Matthews and Head in the Mixed Doubles (8.0 combined), with a score of (4-6)(7-5)(7-6(3)) that included a tie-breaker.

"I started playing tennis six years ago, when my daughter took lessons. I had forgot how much fun ball sports were from when I was a kid," says Avery. "as a team, our strategy was to stay focused and not let nerves get to us. If nerves take over, it's hard to play well,"

St. Thomas' Rene Migdal and Natalie Lo beat St. Thomas' Cindy Asfour and Carol Baker-Robinson ((7-5)(6-2) in Women's Doubles (6.0 combined).

In Men's Singles (4.0 & under), St. Kitts' Trotman beat Texas' Owens (6-0)(6-0).

"I've played in this tournament for four years now and it's a lot of fun," says Trotman, who explained that he trained for the event by running hills to build up his stamina and ultimately tire his opponent during competition play.

The contest was close in Women's Singles (4.0 & under), yet St. Thomas' Kerri Clifford won over fellow islander, Megan Richardson (6-2)(6-3).

"I didn't have a strategy; I just played," says Clifford. "It was a good match up and I remembered Megan as a good junior player. In fact, she was able to get my backhand drop slice when many other in previous matches couldn't."

Migdal also won the Women's Singles (3.0 & under) division over St. Thomas' Sandy Gregory (6-1)(6-2).

"This is the first time I've played in this tournament and I love it," says Migdal. "I've only been playing for about six weeks, but I used to play squash. Going into this, I thought if I could run the 8 Tuff Miles road race last weekend on St. John, I surely had the endurance and to be able to move around well on the court."

Finally, in Men's Doubles 60-Plus years of age, it was the duo of Lammens and Newbold that prevailed over St. Thomas' Ronald George and Rick Hunter (6-0)(6-1).

"My mindset was that I felt fortunate to be out on a beautiful tropical day and this atmosphere helped me to play," says Lammens. "Other than that, it was to get up to the net and put pressure on my opponent. In other words, make them come up with the goods."

Over \$10,000 in prize money was awarded in addition to trophies.

Matches were officiated by USTA-certified referee, Cesar Febus, from Puerto Rico, while Gloribel Ramos, also USTA-certified and from Puerto Rico, served as umpire. The Innovative-Choice Wireless V.I. Open Tennis Tournament is the only tennis tournament in the U.S. Virgin Islands sanctioned by the USTA's Caribbean District.

"Overall the tournament went very well," says director, Val Wilder, a five-time United State Pro Tennis Association 'Pro of the Year' and now pro at the St. Thomas Yacht Club. "We really would like to thank our sponsors for enabling us to host this event and to let our players know that the dates next year are set as March 1 to 4. We hope to have 100 to 125 players in 2018."

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.

Feature Image: Men's Open Singles winner, Puerto Rico's Alex Llompert. (Credit: Dean Barnes)