

## **It all began with a chat A dream came true**

On the occasion of the 25<sup>th</sup> BA-TennisTrophy the international tennis community will be welcomed to the Wiener Stadthalle for the 36<sup>th</sup> time. No other international sporting event still running in Vienna comes close to Austria's indoor tennis tournament in terms of tradition and continued development over the years.

And it all began with a simple conversation between two friends. Leo-Günther Huemer, then Event Director at Vogelweidplatz, and Hermann Fuchs, tennis correspondent for the newspaper "Die Presse" and later editor of the Kronenzeitung, mulled over an idea: "Why don't we have a tennis GP in Vienna?" The answer came in the shape of the 1974 Vienna-Open, yet it resulted in significant losses. The then Stadthalle Director Anton Zahnt was less than impressed and made his position clear to Huemer: "You can forget about your hobbies!" There may not have been a Vienna Open the following year, but Fuchs and Huemer remained enthusiastic about the concept, eventually pushing through a deal with Franz Hillinger, Head of Marketing at ski equipment company Fischer. In spite of Fischer's focus on winter sports, the company decided to go ahead and sponsor the tournament that subsequently became known in the tennis world as the Fischer-Grand-Prix.

Ten years later and Fischer unexpectedly ended its association with the event, leaving the Stadthalle tournament once again facing the end of the road. This led to the first Austrian GP winner, Peter Feigl, being called into action. He had just ended his playing career and had begun dabbling in sports marketing with Creditanstalt, where his tennis skills, international experience and endearing manner opened a number of doors. His good relationship with CA General Director Hannes Androsch, founded on the tennis court, certainly did no harm. At the time Creditanstalt had just entered into the sports scene in order to create a younger image for the company. And tennis arrived at just the right time: "Boy, that's what we'll do!" was Androsch's enthused reaction to Feigl's proposal.

The CA-Tennis-Trophy was born and it went on to run for eighteen years under the same title until changes in the domestic and international banking industry led to the tournament being re-named. From 2004 to 2007 the tournament became known around the world as the BA-CA TennisTrophy and from 2008, following rebranding measures, as the Bank Austria-TennisTrophy (BA-TennisTrophy).

Just as it had been to the 1974 Vienna Open, the reaction to the tournament's first winner, 20-year-old American qualifier Vitas Gerulaitis, was far from overwhelming. However in the following 35 years the roster and list of winners became a who's who of the tennis world, more than making up for its modest beginnings. Only five of the total of 24 world number ones didn't or have yet to play the Stadthalle tournament: John Newcombe, Björn Borg, Mats Wilander, Lleyton Hewitt and Rafael Nadal - a true sign of the quality of the tournament.

Of the many world number ones to have graced the courts in Vienna over the years, the youngest is current world number one Roger Federer, who appeared at the Stadthalle at just 23 years of age. In 2003 in Vienna he successfully defended a title for the first time in his career. He now has a haul of no fewer than 15 Grand Slam titles and has been top of the tennis rankings for almost 300 weeks, underlining his standing as arguably the best tennis player of all time.

The tournament's very first winner went on to blossom following his success in Vienna. In 1977, three years after lifting the trophy, Vitas Gerulaitis won the Australian Open. He reached the finals of the US Open and in Paris and twice made it to the semi-finals at

Wimbledon. Likewise the future of Ivan Lendl was unpredictable when he beat Wiener Stadthalle record champion Brian Gottfried of the USA ('77, '80, '82) 1:6, 6:0, 6:1 and 6:2 in the 1981 final. Lendl went on to win a total of eight Grand Slam titles and hold onto the world number one ranking for 270 weeks.

A range of established tennis stars have also lifted the trophy in Vienna, including Stan Smith (1978 against Balasz Taroczy and 1979 against Wojtek Fibak), Michael Stich (1991 against Jan Siemerink), Goran Ivanisevic (1993 against Thomas Muster and 1997 against Greg Rusedski), Boris Becker (1996 against Jan Siemerink), Andre Agassi (1994 against Michael Stich) and Pete Sampras (1998 against Karol Kucera).

To date only two Austrians have been able to stand alongside such greats. In his tenth appearance at the Wiener Stadthalle in 2009 Jürgen Melzer was able to repeat the achievement of Horst Skoff, who defeated Thomas Muster in 1988. Melzer beat Marin Cilic in the final to seal glory in his home tournament.

Austrians have also tasted success in the doubles, with Alexander Antonitsch crowned winner in 1988, defeating Curren and Smid (USA, CSSR) together with Balasz Taroczy. Following in his footsteps in 2009 was Oliver Marach with Pole Lukasz Kubot, who saw off the challenge from Julian Knowle and Jürgen Melzer.

The development of the Stadthalle tournament reflects the development of international tennis as a whole. Today the tournament is one of 39 events which make up the World Tour 250 (the third ATP category), yet it has retained the prize money of EUR 650,000 from its time as part of the International Series Gold. The prize money has increased thirty-fold since the USD 25,000 shared between entrants in the founding year.

One man above all has accompanied the eventful history of the tournament and has contributed along the way: Leo-Günther Huemer, founder and eternal Tournament Director. His post was finally taken ahead of the first trophy of the 21<sup>st</sup> century by founder of the CA-Trophy and CA sport marketing man Peter Feigl. Following a run of 25 years in charge of the Wiener Stadthalle tournament, Huemer wanted just a further two years acting as a consultant. It is a role he is still playing today, having since supported Feigl's successor as Tournament Director, Sport Manager Herwig Straka of new organisers e|motion.

A story that began with a simple conversation between two friends almost 40 years ago.