

## Tourney tickets for sale today at discount

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The holiday shopping season starts early for Southwest Florida tennis fans.

Tickets go on sale today for a March event in Naples that will feature legendary players Jim Courier, John McEnroe, Mats Wilander and Pat Cash. Also competing: Aaron Krickstein and Mikael Pernfors.

Two more stars — possibly including Pete Sampras — will be added by New Year's Day to the lineup of the Champions Cup Series, set for March 10-13 at The Players Club and Spa at Lely Resort.

Buy series tickets before the end of the holiday season and get 10 percent off, or buy single tickets and receive a 5 percent discount, a grinning Courier told media at a Tuesday news conference at the club.

Prices range from \$15 to \$100 for a seat.

Ivory Scott will be there.

The Fort Myers tennis fan remembers watching Courier on TV.

"Anytime you get the guys together to play for money, it'll be competitive," said Ivory, who joked he'll never wash his hand again after shaking Courier's.

Ivory brought five Fort Myers children from the First Serve program, which introduces kids to the game and for which Courier is a national spokesman.

Community involvement — such as charitable donations and a free kids' clinic — is a key to the Champion's Cup, the 6-foot-1 strawberry-blond tennis star said. More than \$50,000 was raised for charities at a Courier-organized event in Houston earlier this month.

The Naples event will kick off a four-city series for 2006. Other stops are Boston, Memphis and Houston again.

It will be serious tennis, said Courier, who won the French Open and Australian Open twice each.

"This is a legitimate tournament ... a battle to make it to Monday night's final," he said.

Who will be in the battle is anyone's guess.

Courier beat Cash in the Houston final. Courier described his tennis game these days with self-deprecating humor.

"I'm still as limited as I ever was — big serve, big forehand, using my feet," said Courier, 35, who joked that he does have more hair than when he played on the ATP Tour, from which he retired at age 30.

Another "retiree," Sampras, is a potential competitor if Courier gets a commitment from him.

"There's nothing concrete, but we have spoken since Houston. I remain optimistic."

The Champions Cup purse won't be announced until early next year. Players will compete in a singles round-robin. If a match is tied at one set apiece, players will duke it out in a 10-point super tiebreak in lieu of a third set.

No doubles play is planned for the cup, which is open to players over 30 who have been ranked in the top five in the world or played singles on a winning Davis Cup team.

Fans can attend afternoon and evening sessions Friday through Sunday and the evening final match (and a third-place match) on Monday.

The Champions Cup is not affiliated with the Nuveen Championship, which is the men's pro tennis event Southwest Florida fans are used to seeing during Spring in Naples. The Nuveen last was here in 2002. Sponsorship issues marred its return.

Courier and his partner in InsideOut Sports & Entertainment, which is producing the Champions Cup, are confident Naples is ready for another event and can support it.

They drew 11,000 people to Houston, and will have seating for 3,000 at each Naples session. "We hope to sell out," said Courier, a Florida native who now lives in New York City and described Naples as a "ripe" tennis market.

"This is our first year but we're planting roots here," he said.