Keowee Key set for 7th annual tennis tourney

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SENECA — Last year, the Keowee Key Pro Tennis Invitational saw one of its biggest years of growth, attracting nearly 300 people a day to the three-day tournament.

While the club is busy adding four new Har-Tru courts, it is looking forward to another big showing this weekend for the seventh installment of the annual event.

Keowee Key tennis director and resident pro George Esqueda said the new courts will give the club 14 lighted courts.

"The additions will give us four more clay courts, bringing the total to eight clay courts and four grass courts," he said. "The additions will put Keowee Key up there with the best clubs in the Upstate."

The additions are also expected to help bring more statewide tournaments to the club.

"The new courts will help in making it easier for us to schedule more tournaments and accommodate more players," he said.

And while the courts will be unavailable for this weekend's tournament — they are slated to be completed by mid-October — organizers expect a competitive weekend where seven pros, along with Esqueda, and including the No. 1 ranked player in South Carolina, Oliver Elston, will vie for a $5,000 prize.

"We offer a lot of money to the winners. Other tournaments offer trophies, but our players will compete for $5,000," Esqueda said. "We are bringing the best pros and players in the Upstate."

But aside from new courts, free beer, wine and soda and professional-caliber tennis, the pros are also holding clinics Friday and Saturday.

"Each pro is going to have six students — full clinics," Esqueda said. "We are going to have courts that emphasize forehand, backhand and serving."

Clinics are full and run from 4 p.m. to 5 p.m. Friday and Saturday.

With the growth on the horizon, Esqueda and tournament organizers hope the future courts are foreshadowing the continued growth of the tournament.

"Last year we broke attendance records, and we want to do it again. We were in the 300s last year, and we want to continue to build that," Esqueda said.

The tournament runs from Friday to Sunday. Admission and drinks are free. Burgers and chicken sandwiches are for sale between $5 and $6, and are provided by Keowee Key Catering.

"This is a very special tournament. The more people we can get the better," Esqueda said. "Some pros have mentioned that the Keowee Key crowd is one of the best."

The doubles tournament kicks things off Friday, while Saturday features the singles quarter and semifinals. Sunday is slated to host the singles finals.

First serve for all days is 7 p.m., and each day should conclude around 10 p.m.

Bob Hill Realty has signed on as presenting sponsor for the event. Joining them as sponsors are Eagle Media/The Journal, Blinds And Us, Upstate Insurance, My Garage by Essex, Thraves Jewelers, D&D Motors, Jan Fredman Investments/CEA LLC, Howard B. Jones & Son, Blue Ridge Printing Co., Carolina Beer Co., and The Wine Emporium.

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