

## **RALEIGH NEWS & OBSERVER**

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### **HAPPER MAKES IT HAPPEN AS FED CUP ARRIVES ON SHORT NOTICE – TOURNAMENT DIRECTOR, EXPERIENCED, ENERGETIC**

RALEIGH—Karen Scott Happer was having a tough night. Already travel weary and waiting to catch a late flight from Atlanta to Raleigh, she made matters worse by spilling a dish of chicken and black bean sauce in her lap. Then her cell phone rang. It was her husband, Marshall, calling to say United States Tennis Association officials wanted to talk to her about the possibility of moving the Fed Cup from Croatia to Raleigh because of the war in Yugoslavia. “I can’t do it,” blurted Happer, who despite spilling the beans, still had a full plate—figuratively speaking—as director for the BTI Champions senior tournament set here April 21-25.

But after returning home, getting a good night’s sleep and putting on fresh clothes, Happer, 50 embraced the Fed Cup opportunity. She submitted an official application and landed the event for Raleigh despite rival bids from Florida clubs in Del Ray Beach and Amelia Island.

“She is the key reason it is here” said longtime friend, Billie Jean King, the captain of the US Fed Cup Team that will meet Croatia Saturday and Sunday in a quarterfinal match at the Raleigh Racquet Club. Preparation time for the Fed Cup is typically about four months. But this one was coming on two weeks notice, and tennis officials needed an experienced tournament director who could rally volunteers, secure sponsors and generate ticket sales.

Carole Graebner, a former fifth ranked player in the world and current chairman of the Fed Cup USTA, told the committee Happer could deliver on short notice. King concurred and here they are.

It’s all coming together now. The 2,500 seat Racquet Club is sold out and more spectators will plop down on the grassy bank. Sponsors are in place. The teams are ready. “I’m so deliriously happy to be a part of having the world’s best tennis players in Raleigh,” said Happer, an energetic native of Australia. “Everything is perfect. All I have to do is accommodate the people on the grass.”

Racquet Club personnel, USTA officials, and dozens of volunteers also have worked relentlessly to pull off one of the biggest tennis events in North Carolina history. And BTI tournament sponsors, at Happer’s request, agreed to set up a week earlier to aid the Fed Cup.

Like her celebrity husband, who founded the Racquet Club and is a former executive director of the USTA, Happer can get things done effectively and expeditiously. She knows the tennis racket, so to speak, having started working in the administrative side of the sport with John Newcombe in Australia in the mid 1970s. And she’s the only woman ever to serve as tournament director of a Grand Slam event, twice overseeing the Australian Open.

“She’s vivacious, a dynamic personality; she really likes people, she’s organized, delegates when

she needs to, and she is very good on details,” said King, reeling off reasons Happer succeeds at directing tournaments and managing other tennis related business. “She knows all elements of an event, the social as well as the other. She’s great with the players and the players like her, and she takes care of the customers. You don’t always have both of that. She just truly likes you and loves tennis.”

Jimmy Connors, who will be here for the BTI Tournament next week is one of Happer’s biggest boosters. Since 1996 she has worked as partner of the 35 and over circuit Connors conceived, and she directs the flagship tour tournament in New York in addition to the Raleigh event. That requires her to spend three days in the Big Apple every other week.

Happer’s tennis resume also includes directing 35 and over tournaments in Australia that drew luminaries including Rod Laver, Fred Stolle and Cliff Drysdale. After moving to the United States in the late 1980s, she remained involved in the game and directed the ‘90 Fed Cup in Atlanta, which attracted teams from 47 nations.

Sometimes, it seems she can’t get enough tennis. Happer plays the game herself. At home with Marshall, now a Raleigh attorney, table talk includes various aspects of the sport. “Everyone who’s ever met her says she’s possibly one the most upbeat persons they’ll ever meet,” Marshall said of his wife of 11 years. “And she’s a perfectionist at running tournaments. She’s probably the best promoter with sponsors I’ve ever seen in developing strong relations with them.”

The Happers have other common interests—entertaining friends, gardening and cooking. “She works just as intently at home as on her job and she’s a great cook,” Marshall added. And if all goes as smooth as expected this weekend in the Fed Cup and next week in the BTI Champions tournaments, Karen might celebrate afterwards by carefully serving up another dish of chicken and black bean sauce.