




JUL 27 **Tennis: Divisioning**
SPORTS: TENNIS

Medals, umbrellas, and volunteers highlight Monday's action

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After thoughtfully thinking about his answer, German Michael Wittman said his goal for his participation at the World Games is to, "grab the gold," and he might just get his wish after his powerful performance in today's singles divisioning at the Los Angeles Tennis Center.

Michael, 22, had just won his singles men's tennis divisional match 11-9 in a tense tiebreak. When asked what his advice would be to younger players hoping to play in the World Games one day, Michael said, "Have fun, practice well, do your best to compete and win."

Michael's girlfriend, Susanna, is also on the German tennis team. Although he looked nervous, Michael said he enjoys watching her play. Susanna lost a tough match Monday with her partner, Thomas Wendt. Thomas had participated in a hard-fought singles match earlier in the day. One of the team's coaches, Peter Landisch said, "Thomas is a fighter. He stayed calm, and knows where to play." Thomas insisted after the match he was not tired, and said he would like to stay in the United States after Special Olympics Sunday to work.

Three -yes three- United States women's doubles played against each other in a round-robin match at today's divisioning at the Los Angeles Tennis Center. The representing states all across the host nation include Kansas, California, South Carolina, Pennsylvania and Nebraska.

Japan's Hiroshita Takahashi has coached athletes Aimi Obara and Akina Horiguchi for nearly 20 years. The duo took home the women's doubles gold medal in the 2011 World Games in Athens, just three months after the tsunami in Japan destroyed Aimi's family home. They won the gold despite tragedy and her inability to practice tennis for a long time. In these Games, however, they are on separate teams. Horiguchi is now teamed with Shunji Tobita and they won their divisioning match today against the Netherlands. Coach Takahashi said Akina has vastly improved her stroke in the past four years. "She has a steady serve," he said.

Meanwhile, the Netherlands team is headlined by Kevin Teeuwissen and Sharon Sjouwerman. Both are competing in their first World Games. Kevin had a large contingent cheering him on, which included several friends and family members. His sister, Demi, was very excited about her brother competing, and told media she was so proud of him. And, in true World Games fashion, the Netherlands contingent cheered just as loudly each time Japan made a nice play.

"Pay no attention to the umbrella," deadpanned announcer Jamie Alcroft as a sports umbrella on the court two umpire chair flew off in the middle of play, flying into the air and onto court one just as match point was about take place in a men's doubles competition between USA and Egypt, which Egypt went on to win.

A group of 50 spirited kids from Freedom Schools cheered on the athletes and were happy to soak in the California sunshine at the Straus Stadium on a day many fans were seeking shade anywhere they could find it. "I think it's awesome for the kids to be out here supporting people who have worked so hard to be here, said Kristen Woodruff, a servant team leader for the organization. "[The kids] felt it was going to be sad because only one team is going to be able to win, but we were talking to them about how just even being at the Olympics is awesome so either way it's a great thing for them to see."

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