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The Press Box Podcast

## Grand Rapids to host wheelchair tennis tourney

by Kelly Hill | The Grand Rapids Press

Wednesday July 22, 2009, 8:40 AM



Dave Raczowski | The Grand Rapids Press

Suzi Egeler, Vicky Schmidt and Beth Redford will compete in the Midwest Wheelchair Tennis Tournament beginning Friday.

GRAND RAPIDS -- Suzi Egeler, Vicky Schmidt and Beth Redford have a combined eight children ranging in age from 4 to 23.

They also have spent a combined 29 years in wheelchairs.

When the three need to get away for a while, they head to the tennis courts. Egeler, Schmidt and Redford are three of 17 West Michigan players scheduled to compete Friday through Sunday in the Midwest Wheelchair Championships.

Sanctioned by the United States Tennis Association and the International Tennis Federation -- and a stop on the NEC Wheelchair Tennis Tour -- the event draws players from around the U.S. as well as Canada and France.

Also scheduled to compete are Texan Steve Welch, formerly ranked No. 1 in the U.S., and former Paralympian and returning champion Stephan Goudou, who lives in Orleans, France.

"I love the camaraderie," Schmidt said. "This is great exercise and everyone has a great competitive spirit. I come from a tennis family and tennis is a good sport that can mix able-bodied players with wheelchair players."

West Michigan's top two wheelchair players, Dan Bolhouse and Curt Bender, also play on teams of able-bodied players in USTA-sanctioned leagues. Bolhouse, who plays at the Michigan Athletic Club, and Bender, who plays at MVP Athletic Club in Holland, are scheduled to play this weekend.

### MIDWEST WHEELCHAIR TENNIS TOURNAMENT

- When:** Friday through Sunday
- Where:** Orchard Hills Swim and Sports Club, 115 Crahan Ave. NE
- Who:** Steve Welch, former No. 1 U.S. player; Stephan Goudou, former French Paralympian and returning champion; Dan Bolhouse and Curt Bender, West Michigan's top two players; and 15 other local players
- Sanctioning bodies:** USTA and ITF
- Prize money:** \$11,500
- Sponsor:** Mary Free Bed Rehabilitation Hospital

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Schmidt, 40, who has an 11-year-old daughter and 16-year-old son, was injured in an auto accident in August 2001.

"I played tennis for a while right after the accident," she said. "But then I got overwhelmed with the kids and building our home -- it has to be accessible -- and taking care of my husband (Terry) who has a brain injury from our accident.

"I had too much on my plate, but now I'm back into it and I want to win my division in this tournament."

Redford, 50, was injured in 2001 while working as the athletic director of what is now NorthPointe Christian High School. She has an 18-year-old son and 23-year-old daughter.

"Vicky and I stayed together when I played a warm-up tournament in Muncie," Redford said. "Vicky and I have a little history, since she took my bed when I left Mary Free Bed."

Mary Free Bed Rehabilitation Hospital sponsors the tournament, which awards \$11,500 in prize money.

Egeler, 37, has four daughters under 13 years old.

"After I had my third daughter, I asked my doctor ways I could stay in shape and he suggested tennis," Egeler said. "Now that I'm here, I'm hooked."

The Grand Rapids Wheelchair Sports Association will host the tournament on the new outdoor courts at Orchard Hills Swim and Sports Club.

Goudou will be making his fifth visit to Grand Rapids.

"I like this tournament and I think that it will be a very big tournament," Goudou said via e-mail. "I think the largest competition will come from Steve Welch, in spite of the fact that he does not play much."

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