

Australia offers hope for hungry tennis stars

The summer of tennis could be extended to cover Covid losses

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TENNIS

The post COVID-19 Australian summer of tennis could be extended beyond a month with additional tournaments played around the country as officials look to offer global stars greater opportunities.

Tennis Australia chief executive Craig Tiley said should the coronavirus position across the country be safe enough, some tournaments could also feature larger draws than usual.

The ATP and WTA Tours were suspended in mid-March for more than four months but in recent weeks officials have begun adding extra events through Europe for competitors.

While players and coaches will require travel exemptions to enter Australia and must then serve a fortnight of quarantine, the nation is well-positioned to be a land of opportunity.

Tiley confirmed this could see

additional “jobs”, tour slang for entries, created through an increase in draw sizes and qualifying at events leading into the Australian Open.

It could also mean that lower-tier events currently held in cities outside the main capitals in early January are upgraded to proper tour status.

The ATP Cup may only be held in one city instead of three but provided the health outlook is positive, there is optimism about the summer ahead.

“There will be more jobs for players, pending infection rates, because if there is a spike, that probably can’t happen,” Tiley told *The Australian*.

“But the players are going to be looking to here and it makes a lot of sense. We have to work with the states and the states who do work with us will get the opportunities. We will probably see a few more events and a few larger draws.”

The local footprint on the tennis calendar usually extends beyond the Australian Open for another fortnight with lower-tier tour events held in Tasmania.

Given tennis players are desperate to play events to compensate for the months lost due to the

shutdown, Australia appeals as a nation that can offer these opportunities. Tiley believes tennis can be at the forefront when it comes to assisting an economic recovery, particularly in Melbourne, at the start of 2021.

“Tennis will be part of the recovery and we are looking forward to playing that role. We will be able to bring multi-millions of (dollars in) economic benefits and many jobs,” he said.

“We want to play a role in rejuvenating the economy and play a role in sending a message to the world about how great Australia is and, at the same time in Melbourne and other cities, play a role in helping the community and local economy to bounce back.”

Tennis Australia has worked on its biosecurity protocols for the summer with the assistance of Aspen Medical and experts at the Australian Institute of Sport. They are awaiting state and federal approval.

Last year’s Australian Open drew more than 800,000 fans, so there but organisers are still hopeful of drawing an attendance of up to 50 per cent of that figure. The Open has a major advantage given separate sessions can be

held over 15 days and nights. A spacious site boasting three separately ticketed major courts that are roofed will also assist in terms of spreading crowds and enforcing COVID-19 protocols.

TA also has the advantage of being able to draw from the procedures used by the US Tennis Association over the past month to run tournaments in Lexington and New York.

Superstars including Serena Williams and Novak Djokovic opted to stay in private residences, manned by a 24-hour security detail, at their own expense.

The majority of players stayed in a “bubble” which comprised of two hotels on Long Island.

Benoit Paire tested positive to the virus, but tennis and health officials swiftly isolated the Frenchman and his close contacts while the event continued without any further spread.

TA will also monitor the methods employed by the French Federation for the rescheduled Roland Garros tournament, which will begin later this month.

“The USTA should be applauded because they have pulled off something of magnificence,” Tiley said.