

HEARD & SCENE

Serving at Center Court, Food and Drink

By MARSHALL HEYMAN



From Monday, when the U.S. Open kicks off, until Labor Day, it's pretty much going to be tennis, tennis, tennis and more tennis. So let's get a head start.

On Thursday, at the W Hotel on 49th and Lexington, several tennis players competing next week and several chefs who compete every day on the tough Har-Tru court that is the Manhattan restaurant scene, joined forces for 2012's Taste of Tennis. The annual party, sponsored by the Euro-zone bank BNP Paribas, is mostly an eating and drinking affair. The chefs cook; the tennis players are their sous-chefs for the evening. Proceeds from the event benefit the New York Junior Tennis League, the largest tennis and education-themed community organization in the U.S., helping 100,000 kids a year.

"Do you want to hear my favorite tennis joke?" asked Daniel Holzman, a co-founder of the Meatball Shop. Of course we did. "Why do tennis players make horrible life partners?"

Mr. Holzman and his business partner Michael Chernow were preparing a signature



spicy pork meatball and a salad with bacon, lettuce and tomato. So, why do tennis players make horrible life partners? "Because to them, 'love' means nothing."

Mr. Holzman said what he and Mr. Chernow have in common with tennis players is "We all serve balls on a daily basis." In fact, he and Mr. Chernow added, over the three Meatball Shops in New York, "We're looking at serving 6,000 of them a day."

"But in all honesty, the correlation you can draw between chefs and tennis players is that you always have to be on your game," said Mr. Chernow.

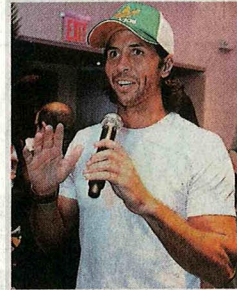
"You never know what's going to come at you," added Mr. Holzman. "Being fast and nimble is important."

Kerry Heffernan, a local chef who also appears on "Top Chef Masters," was tossing together a plate of fresh green-market tomatoes, a house-made burrata and marjoram with a crisp garlic chip on the side.

When you're cooking, said Mr. Heffernan, an amateur tennis player in his own right, "You need to open with a great serve. Your amuse bouche—the first thing people taste—tells them a lot. That first serve is everything."

He continued the metaphor. Just like a tennis match full of long, base-line rallies, dinner service can start at five p.m. and go through the evening. "The person who comes in at 10 p.m. didn't pay any less," Mr. Heffernan said. "There's an athleticism to being a chef and a restaurateur. You've got to be on point, on the ball and focused."

Gail Simmons, a regular



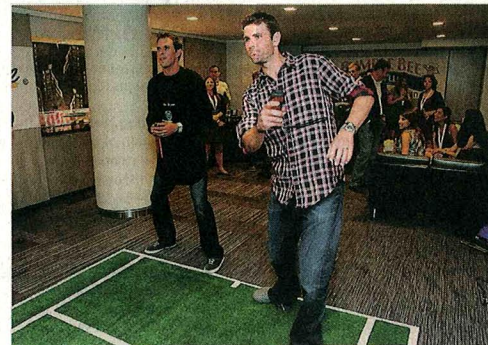
Left, Serena Williams at Taste of Tennis; above left to right: tennis player Fernando Verdasco; chef Marc Murphy and player Mirjana Lucic.



Above right, A.J. Calloway and James Blake; below, players Mike Bryan and Mardy Fish; below right: Gail Simmons and player Bob Bryan.



Player Robby Ginepri



judge on "Top Chef," was hosting the Taste of Tennis with Bob and Mike Bryan, the 2012 gold medalists in the London Summer Olympics for men's doubles. The brothers would be her sous-chefs on two things.

First, a beverage: a ginger lemon fizz made with vodka, ginger lemon syrup and fresh and candied ginger.

"It's really an easy, summery cocktail," said Ms. Simmons.

As for food, they'd be preparing buckwheat noodles with shredded chicken and a spicy Asian peanut sauce.

"They wanted something that was really healthy to eat before a match," said Ms. Simmons. "It's really yummy and

has complex carbohydrates. Also, Bob has a gluten allergy."

Ms. Simmons went to tennis camp as a kid but now uses most of those skills on the couch watching the Open. But, she said, "just like cooking, tennis requires a lot of strategy. You need to be organized, and it helps to play every day and really understand the game. They're both individual sports. You have to rely on your instincts. It's you against the flames, so to speak."

She added that eating well plays a role in both endeavors. "I wish some chefs took as good care of their bodies as tennis players," Ms. Simmons said.

After sampling the noodle



dish which they hope to make at home, Messrs. Bryan confided that they don't spend much time in the kitchen. "We're not big cooks," said Bob.

"But to play tennis, you definitely need fuel in your system," said Mike. "This meal could definitely get us on the court."

Bob said he used his tennis skills while shredding the actual chicken for the dish. "It wasn't easy. I had to use my core," he said. "I had to stay balanced. I visualized a return serve."



New York Rangers' Henrik Lundqvist