

Student-athletes will compete at the Billie Jean King National Tennis Center (above and below), with the Arthur Ashe Stadium in the background) under an arrangement between the USTA and the ITA.

**INDOOR TENNIS**

# College tennis to get King's court

By Greg Johnson

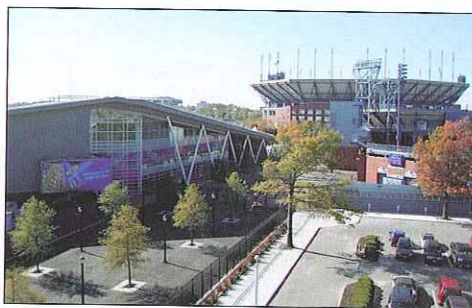
A three-year agreement between the United States Tennis Association and the Intercollegiate Tennis Association will offer varsity tennis players from around the country a chance to play for a prestigious indoor title at the Billie Jean King National Tennis Center in Flushing Meadows, New York.

The USTA/ITA National Intercollegiate Indoor Championships will be played at the center's 12-court indoor facility from 2010 to 2012. The 2010 event is November 4-7.

"Everyone is excited about this agreement," ITA Executive Director David Benjamin said. "It is an important signal from the USTA about college tennis and the role it can play in player development."

The ITA National Intercollegiate Indoor Championships, which began in 1978, feature a 32-player singles field and 16-team doubles bracket for men and women. Participants in the tournament are champions from the 24 NCAA Division I ITA Regional Championships and the ITA National Small College Championships, which include NCAA Divisions II and III student-athletes. The event also includes National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics and junior college champions.

Winners of the ITA Men's and Women's All-American Tennis Championships and



at-large and wild card selections made by the ITA National Tournament Committee make up the rest of the field. In all, more than 8,000 student-athletes will compete.

The journey begins in mid-September with the Small College Regional Championships, which are divided into 64 regions (31 for men, 33 for women). The Division I Regional Championships begin in October in 24 regions.

It all culminates at the Billie Jean King National Tennis Center.

"We want to create this 'Road to Flushing Meadows,'" said Timon Corwin, the USTA senior director of junior and collegiate competition.

The USTA hopes the event also sends a message to intercollegiate athletics departments.

"The USTA cares about college varsity

tennis, and we want to help stem the tide of programs being dropped," Corwin said. "After the NCAA championships, we want this to be the major collegiate event. Hopefully, this becomes a tradition, and we will be involved for many years to come."

This event began in 1978, at first featuring only male competitors from Division I. Women's competition was added in 1984.

Past champions and finalists include current professionals Benjamin Becker (Baylor), James Blake (Harvard), Bob and Mike Bryan (Stanford), Laura Granville (Stanford), John Isner (Georgia), Kevin Kim (UCLA) and Lisa Raymond (Florida). Big Ten standouts and Grand Slam finalists Todd Martin (Northwestern) and MaliVai Washington (Michigan) are also among the past champions.

While the tennis community already regards this as a major event, USTA and ITA officials hope their partnership will enhance the prestige.

"It is an important signal that is being sent to the USTA membership, varsity college tennis players and the tennis world in general that the USTA believes strongly in the value of varsity college tennis," said Benjamin, who coached men's tennis at Princeton for 26 years. "This is a way to help develop world-class players, and it supports higher education and the importance of going to college."