

Fifth Third Bank Tennis Championships

Top-seed Ward Dodges Bullet to Reach Men's Semis;

Davis Shocks Riske, Joining Qualifier Fink in Women's

By Jim Durham, Lexington Challenger Media Director

Lexington, KY (July 22) – Top-seeded James Ward dodged a bullet and hung on long enough to escape the searing heat Friday, rallying for a 3-6, 7-5, 6-1 Lexington Challenger quarterfinal win over Erik Chvojka at UK's Boone Tennis Center.

The British Davis Cupper was two points from an upset at 3-5 in the second set when he somehow changed the momentum on the Canadian. He'd taken a 6-5 lead when torrents of rain stopped play for nearly two hours. When they resumed to the most pleasant temperature of the week, Ward wrapped up the set and the first five games of the rubber set (9 in row!)

Ward moves on to one Saturday semi (not before 6) against Pierre-Ludovic Duclos, who ended the run of qualifier Blake Strode 7-6 (2), 6-4. In the other semi at 4 p.m., Greg Ouellette will try to exhaust another foe – second-seeded Wayne Odesnik, who defeated sixth-seeded Michael Yani, 6-4, 6-3, in the rain-delayed evening feature. The former Florida Gator won his second of three matches via the “retired” route – tiring out his opponents, who were obviously more affected by the heat than he was. His opponent, Jamie Baker of Great Britain, defaulted trailing 7-5, 2-0.

Ouellette's heat-shortened win in the first round was over former UF doubles partner Jesse Levine (last year's runner-up here). “If you're fit and stay tough, that's what it's going to take to win here this week,” said the self-described shortest man on the USTA Pro Circuit.

Lauren Davis – the No. 3 ranking junior in the world (but 383 in the pros) – pulled the late-night shocker, 7-5, 6-0, over No. 2 Alison Riske. The 17-year-old from Cleveland broke Riske (ranked 115) for 5-3, but Riske knotted the first set 5-5. A missed opportunity? “I always try to stay calm and not show my emotions” in situations like that, Davis said. Unfazed, she rattled off eight games in a row – moving better and faster, striking harder, more consistently and with varied pace.

Lexington is the only \$50K Challenger Davis has played, so beating Riske and reaching the semis in her second try here is an important milestone. But, her best win came in December when she beat fellow American Coco Vandeweghe (then 87, now 99 in the world) in the wild card tournament to get into the Australian Open.

Before the evening deluge, three women advanced to the semis on a bit of a roll: Zhang, Fink and Scholl.

Ling Zhang lost in last week's finals of the \$25K Granby Challenger in Canada to French Canadian Stephanie Dubois (the '07 Lexington winner and 2010 runner-up) in three sets. Saturday, the No. 8 seed will face qualifier Amanda Fink.

Fink, by virtue of qualifying, is on a six-match win streak. This is her first \$50K semifinal as a pro...but, as a Southern Cal Trojan she reached the finals of one (Allentown, PA) in '08 while traveling with the USTA Summer Collegiate Team.

Chichi Scholl, the 19-year-old German-born Floridian who ousted top-seeded Melanie Oudin in the first round, dismantled No. 4 Tetiana Luzhanska of Ukraine 6-1, 6-3.

"Ranking doesn't matter at this level," said Fink, who sidelined No. 7 seed Heidi El Tabakh in the second round. "Chichi is mentally very tough and strong off both sides. She has the right to tango with anyone."

Semifinal showdowns: Scholl versus Davis at 4 p.m.; Fink versus Davis at 6.

5/3 Overheads!

First to reach the Lexington semis was eighth-seeded Zhang of Hong Kong. Born in Hunan province of mainland China, she doesn't claim "rock star" status in her now homeland city-state of Hong Kong – but sounds like her tennis association treats their No. 1 female player royally. In January, she and Aussie Mark Philippoussis got to play the Hong Kong Classic exhibition against John McEnroe and Venus Williams (the Americans won).