



## **PRESS RELEASE FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **Northern Suburban Special Recreation Association (NSSRA) Gator Tennis Athletes Wow the Crowds at the Nielsen Pro Tennis Championship**

**Northbrook, IL – July 15, 2019** – In what has become a tournament highlight, the Northern Suburban Special Recreation Association (NSSRA) Special Olympics Gator Tennis team took the courts on Monday, July 8 to greet the crowds at the Nielsen Pro Tennis Championship and perform an exhibition prior to opening matches. Held in Winnetka from Monday, July 8 – Sunday, July 14, the ATP 80 Challenger tournament is a one-of-a-kind event attracting some of the finest tennis players in the world and drawing international attention. Net proceeds benefit NSSRA, and in the last 12 years the tournament has donated over \$185,000 for programs and services benefiting people with disabilities.

Gator athlete Stefan Xidas of Wilmette played a friendly set of matches against his tennis coach Pat Fragassi, who is also Manager at Winnetka Park District's Nielsen Tennis Center. "Stefan did a great job this year playing against Pat," shared NSSRA Recreation Specialist and Gator Coach Abby Whalen. She continued, "They have a great relationship, and it's evident when they play each other on the court. Stefan really showed off his skills, and it was so fun for all of us to cheer him on!"

NSSRA, founded in 1970, serves approximately 1,800 children, teens and adults with disabilities living in its partner communities throughout the northern suburbs. In addition to its Special Olympics Gator Tennis program, NSSRA has over 500 recreation, sport, cultural and social offerings available during the day, after school, in the evenings and on weekends, creating new experiences, opportunities for leisure time, skill development and perhaps most importantly, friendship. NSSRA's Gator Athletics/Special Olympics programs span 10 sports with nearly 100 athletes.

After the exhibition, Xidas and fellow Gator athlete Sam Green (Winnetka) sang the National Anthem to open the evening's play; their performance is always a highlight for attendees and an anticipated moment each year.

Green and Xidas were joined Monday evening by Gator teammates Katie Livingston (Kenilworth), Deane O'Connor (Evanston), Rachel Palmer (Glencoe), Inaara Rajwani (Glenview) and Alison Shapiro (Highland Park), all of whom recently competed in the Special Olympics Illinois (SOI) Tennis Qualifier in Aurora on June 29. In their respective events, O'Connor and Xidas placed 3<sup>rd</sup>, Palmer and Rajwani earned 2<sup>nd</sup> and Green took 1<sup>st</sup> place. With his gold medal win, Green qualified for the state competition in August.

"The team has been looking forward to the exhibition all season, and during practice beforehand it was all they wanted to talk about," commented Whalen. She continued, "The Gators really enjoy seeing the crowd come out to cheer them on, and the recognition and support they received from their families, friends and community was incredible. They had giant smiles on their faces the whole evening, and it was a memorable night for everyone!"

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NSSRA provides and facilitates year-round recreation programs and services for children, teens and adults with disabilities who live in the partner communities. NSSRA is an extension of ten park districts, two cities and one village in the northern suburbs of Chicago. This partnership includes the Park Districts of Deerfield, Glencoe, Glenview, Highland Park, Kenilworth, Lake Bluff, Northbrook, Northfield, Wilmette and Winnetka; the Cities of Highwood and Lake Forest; and the Village of Riverwoods. NSSRA has been creating an environment of belonging through play since 1970, and has the distinction as the first Special Recreation Association in the country. For more information about NSSRA and the programs and services it provides, visit [www.nssra.org](http://www.nssra.org).