

Slims change sets off few sparks

Some glad tobacco connection is gone; others don't care

By LORI CROUCH
Staff Writer

What's in a name? Not a whole lot, say spectators at the Delray Beach Winter Championships.

The tennis tournament used to be known as the Virginia Slims of Florida. The cigarette name was synonymous with women's professional tennis but drew heat from anti-tobacco critics.

Philip Morris, the parent company of Virginia Slims, withdrew from sponsoring the Women's Tennis Association Tour, and now each of the six cities that had a Virginia Slims title tournament has had to find a new name.

Spectators at the Delray Beach Winter Championships on Tuesday still find themselves calling it "The Slims" but otherwise shrug off the name change.

On one hand, many said, it's a good thing a tobacco company is no longer the sponsor of a healthy sport like tennis. On the other, the sponsor name makes little difference on whether they would attend.

"It's good for tennis to disassociate themselves from cigarettes," said Alan Gray of Boynton Beach.

The most positive aspect of the

name change is the spotlight it brings to Delray Beach, others said.

"I like the redevelopment in Delray and this is very good for the city," said Boca Raton resident Karen Deutsch. "I do think it's good for children that they've changed the name."

Still other diehard fans decried the previous years' protests against the Virginia Slims sponsorship of the tournament, pointing out that Virginia Slims poured money into women's professional tennis back when women's tennis was mostly ignored.

"They were the only ones who would fork over the money," said Michele Burns. Donna Banting said: "I don't think it made anybody start smoking."

Liddun International Inc., the tournament organizer, has received mostly positive feedback to the name change. The biggest challenge was educating tennis fans that the Delray Beach Winter Championships was the same as the Virginia Slims.

"It has been a marketing chore to get the name change to everybody," said George Liddy, tournament promotions director.

Otherwise, everything's the same: the \$430,000 purse is slight-

ly larger, the sponsorships are about the same

It's unlikely Liddun will change the name again during the next 18 years, Liddy said.

Name recognition was the biggest concern for the Chicago tournament, which changed its name to the Ameritech Cup. Chicago was the first U.S. city on the circuit.

"There were certainly some people who thought it was a new event," said Mary Heath, vice president of International Management Group's Chicago office. "What was important to us to get across was that it just has a new title sponsor."

Meanwhile the local anti-tobacco protesters are setting their sights on a new tournament announced recently: the Virginia Slims Legends, featuring Chris Evert and Martina Navratilova, scheduled for Dec. 1-3. Sheila Jaffe, longtime Virginia Slims critic, is chairman of a newly organized coalition called The Tobacco-Free Coalition of South Palm Beach County.

"The women have survived and prospered with women's tennis, while a quarter of a million women have died of cigarette-related diseases," Jaffe said.