



# A PLATFORM FOR SUCCESS

Istanbul may only be approaching its second year as host city of the TEB BNP Paribas WTA Championships, the end-of-season flagship event of the WTA (Women's Tennis Association), but the city is already enjoying the fruits of the partnership.

**FROM OCTOBER 23-28** Istanbul will stage the second of its three annual WTA Championships secured under a three-year contract from 2011 to 2013.

The WTA is in the midst of a search for the next host city of the event from 2014, however Istanbul's focus is on the present, and efforts to build upon a successful debut in 2011.

"The hosting of the TEB BNP Paribas WTA Championships has done a lot for Istanbul and the first year was a great success," Turkish

Tennis Federation president Ayda Uluc told *SportBusiness International*.

"We had more than 87,000 fans watching the matches and it was the highest WTA Championships attendance for 12 years. It also received the widest reach in broadcast hours of any WTA Championships to date. Istanbul was shown through more than 500 hours of live coverage in 164 countries all over the world."

The tournament is about more than just impressive media and attendance figures for Turkey's sports industry, though, and the significance of the WTA Championships for the country, and Istanbul in particular, is not just restricted to a three-year window of elite women's tennis.

Istanbul is up against the Spanish city of Madrid and Tokyo in Japan for the right to host the 2020 Olympic Games, therefore staging the WTA Championships represents a vitally important opportunity for the city to test out its event-hosting credentials and infrastructure.

"Istanbul is bidding for the 2020 Olympics and the candidacy is very important for us," adds Uluc. "The WTA Championships will provide significant economic value for Turkey for the coming years."

"Istanbul, being a tremendous metropolis, receives year-round promotion thanks to this tournament as the players compete for qualification [throughout the year]. The Turkish Tennis Federation, with the Ministry of Youth and Sports, is working very hard to stage this important event. We have a few weeks to go and the preparations are well on the way, as was the case last year."

"We also have wonderful corporate support from our sponsors, namely TEB BNP Paribas. We are in close contact with them and with their support for Turkish tennis over the [two] years to come I am sure the tournament will continue to be a great success."

BNP Paribas has been a key sponsor of tennis for four decades, but the year-end WTA



Over 500 hours live coverage for the 2011 WTA Championships - Getty Images Sport

Championships offer a different activation opportunity for the financial services company, which is the title sponsor of the event in a three-year deal that coincides with the tournament's stay in Istanbul.

"One of the main strengths of the tournament is that we are able to tell the story throughout the year, when players qualify and the road to the WTA Championships, allowing us to build partnerships through the year," says Sebastien Guyader, BNP Paribas' executive in charge of branding and sponsorship.

"Something else that is very much appreciated is the amount of access we are given to the players by the WTA. It means that for the event we effectively have eight activations [through the players competing at the event]. We are also able to use images of the players to promote our services.

"We have the tennis-dedicated website, [www.wearetennis.com](http://www.wearetennis.com), and we link in to the social media platforms of players. It helps

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that we know that the WTA is always trying to innovate and offer real proof of engagement."

#### **Finding a New Host**

The WTA, assisted by The Sports Consultancy, is continuing to sift through applications to become the next host of the end-of-year competition, with a decision expected late in the first quarter of next year.

A five-year hosting contract is being sought by the WTA for the next cycle - two years longer than the deal awarded to Istanbul and, before the Turkish city, Doha in Qatar.

For BNP Paribas, one of the most recognisable brands in tennis, would a longer sponsorship deal be more attractive?

"After the first year we are already seeing results," says Guyader, referring to the company's title sponsorship. "We have been involved in tennis for 40 years and we have deals with the International Tennis Federation and [the French Open at] Roland Garros that each run for five years. We are committed to tennis and it is in our DNA. It's not a problem for us to enter into long-term partnerships at all, as we want to build with our partners.

"We have been committed to tennis since 1973 with sponsorships of several women's tournaments so it is very natural to sponsor the end-of-year WTA Championships as it is one of the main tournaments.

"The fact that it is taking place in Istanbul is good because Turkey is a very important market for BNP Paribas. When we found out that the tournament was going there, we knew we wanted to be the title sponsor."

So would BNP Paribas consider extending its title sponsorship of the WTA Championships beyond Istanbul? As far as Guyader is concerned, the destination of the event from 2014 will be a crucial contributing factor to such future decisions.

"We don't know at the moment," he says. "In general we try to build a big story around the events we are sponsoring. We have to look at the event and whether it is taking place in a key market for us or not.

"However, if it can continue to generate the same levels of media value for us, then why not? It's

a good event and in comparison with other major tournaments it offers very good visibility for us."

Turkey, though, appears to have ruled out the possibility of retaining the hosting rights for the tournament beyond 2013, with Uluc seemingly acknowledging that the country's focus will soon be fixed on another sporting prize.

"Hosting the WTA Championships has been a great success and has shown a huge international audience the country's ability to host these kinds of world-class events," he adds. "From 2013, the efforts will be focused on running a successful bid for the 2020 Olympics."

For tennis in Turkey, the WTA Championships also provide an important platform for a developing sport in the country, which does not have a player represented in the WTA rankings' top 180.

"The most important goal of the Turkish Tennis Federation is to increase the popularity of tennis in Turkey, and we believe that the best and maybe the crucial way to do this is to organise such a prestigious tennis tournament in Istanbul," Uluc adds.

"The WTA Championships give us an incredible platform from which to showcase the sport. Prior to this prestigious event we organised the WTA Istanbul Cup, which ran from 2005 to 2010. We believe that the more international tournaments we host, the easier it will be to get youngsters involved in this sport.

"The Turkish Tennis Federation believes strongly in junior development, and has done and is still doing a lot for the advancement and providing competition pathways for emerging players.

"Turkey now has four women ranked in the world's top 500, led by Cagla Buyukakcay, and an exciting young prospect in 16-year-old Ipek Soylu, who is already competing at junior grand slam level."

Beyond the WTA Championships, the long-term success of the project to develop women's tennis in Turkey will rely upon the likes of Soylu taking a leading role. However, regardless of the current state of Turkish tennis, the event has already carved out a positive legacy for a country that makes no secret of its grand hosting ambitions.