

Are you ready for some...tennis?

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LATHAM—For some, it's the dream to be playing on Monday night. The bright lights, the fierce competition, and the adrenaline all push you to be the best player during your short time in the spotlight.

No, this story has nothing to do with that highly-publicized, nationally-televised football game every Monday.

Instead, it is a league of men's tennis players that consistently meet each Monday night at the Tri-City Fitness Center on Route 9 in Latham. There are no bone-crushing hits to be heard at the facility near Exit 7 off the Northway. When you enter on a Monday night, it's simply a competitive atmosphere, and some dedicated participants playing in a men's doubles league.

"We started in late 2003 with a few courts," says league organizer Herb Sweet. "Since then, we've grown from two or three courts worth of people, to seven or eight courts, consistent through the summer. We have people that play outdoors who come as well."

Tri-City is home to twelve courts in all, along with a state-of-the-art fitness facility. A check of the facility's schedule will point out tournaments for teens, and even a parent/child tournament. From the early morning hours to late at night, men, women, and children of all ages will file in to work on their backhands and lobs. However, it is the men's doubles league on Monday night that keeps bringing people through the doors with great success.

"The time really isn't a good time," says Sweet, "but people still come."

The set-up of the league is a pretty simple one. Sweet matches players up by their familiarity with each other, along with their skill levels. Although the numbers change each week, and there is no commitment to play every Monday night, the men's night always has some constants.

"A lot of people bring people, and then recommend it to friends," says Sweet. "It's not a closed shop. I might have eight, nine or ten of the regulars that will come every week. There are definitely people that will come and play every other week, or sporadically, too."

And just who shows up?

"I have a father and son combination that comes regularly. There are people in their seventies. We have doctors, mechanics, dentists, and state workers. It's a good microcosm of almost everybody you could imagine," says Sweet.

It is Sweet's job to organize those players, get them set on the right court, and start at the right time. It's a job the tennis lover handles with ease, and it's just one of the reasons Sweet's name is well-known by those who play tennis in the Capital Region, and throughout much of eastern New York.

"It's easy to set levels of men up, but it's hard to set up personalities," says Bill Ciejka, the General Manager and Head Tennis Professional at Tri-City Fitness. "Herb foresees things really well. He understands personalities and relationships as a dynamic, so everybody that goes out there is not only having a good match, but they're having a really good time as they play." That good experience, camaraderie, and competition keeps people coming back, too.

"Business is going really well right now," says Ciejka. "Other than Monday night, we have four days of men's leagues, and the men's programs are doing really well because of Herb."

Sweet is also known for his "tennis ladder" throughout the Capital Region. It's a system of matches where competitors play at their own convenience, and as often as they want. Whatever the competition, skill level, or type of match, Sweet says it's about giving the people what they want.

"I think the product has to be there, because otherwise, it probably wouldn't have as much success." Sweet says Tri-City also makes it easy for players to get excited about hitting the courts. "The hours for tennis are great. You can play as early as 6:30 in the morning until about ten or eleven at night."

As for the bright lights and big hits every Monday night on ESPN, Ciejka says he's not surprised at the amount of guys that come out to play instead of staying home and watching football.

"I think that's the option," Ciejka says with a smile. "Some of these guys don't like football, so instead of sitting there doing nothing on the couch; they're out here getting good exercise, so it's definitely a more positive thing."

If you'd like to join the Monday night Men's Doubles league at Tri-City Fitness, you can call Herb Sweet at 785-4311, extension 17, or e-mail him at herbsweet10s@juno.com. Matches are played from 8:30 to 10:30 every Monday Night. Tri-City Fitness is located at 944 New Loudon Road in Latham. They are on the web at www.tricitytennis.com.