

Flushing Meadow Park Is Sought as New Site For U.S. Open Tennis

By NEIL AMDUR

The United States Tennis Association is prepared to spend \$6 million to make Flushing Meadow Park in Queens a major tennis facility and the site of the 1978 Open championships.

Informal meetings between U.S.T.A. officials and Martin Lang, city Parks Administrator, were held last month about shifting next year's Open from the West Side Tennis Club in Forest Hills to a renovated facility in Flushing Meadow Park. The contract between the association and West Side expires after this year's tournament.

A spokesman for Mayor Beame characterized the discussions as "still in the developmental stages."

"We have had inquiries about the possibilities of the Tennis Association moving its site from Forest Hills to Flushing Meadow," the spokesman said yesterday. "They seem to be serious discussions, and my personal judgment is that they are very real in their desire to relocate."

W. E. Hester Jr., U.S.T.A. president, said that if the association received approval from the city for the land and could sign a long-term contract, "we're gonna do it."

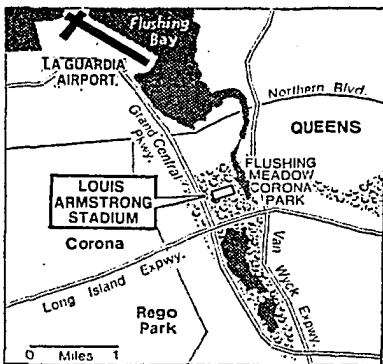
Wants Long-Term Deal

"If the U.S.T.A. wins a concession on a long-term basis," Hester said by phone from Jackson, Miss., "it will spend its own money to build a top public facility at the site of Flushing Meadow Park."

A 12-year contract was under consideration. It would call for renovating and enlarging Louis Armstrong Stadium to a 20,000-seat facility, installing 16 to 32 lighted outdoor and four to eight indoor courts. The stadium, built for the 1964-65 World's Fair, originally was called the Singer Bowl.

"We wish to repay the public players and the people of New York City for the debt we owe them for consistent support and long-term attendance they have given us," Hester said of the association's willingness to provide additional facilities.

As part of the first step in the negotiation process, the city is running an



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advertisement requesting proposals for use of the land in Flushing Meadow Park. The deadline for submitting formal proposals is April 1.

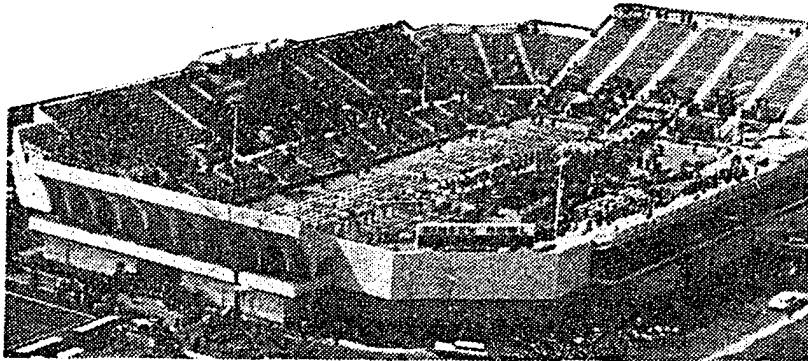
George W. Gowen, general counsel for the U.S.T.A., said no formal proposal had been drafted by the association, but "we plan on doing it." The association's committee of management reportedly approved the plan for pursuing Flushing Meadow Park by a unanimous vote.

A number of other cities, including Memphis and Louisville, have expressed interest in staging the Open next year. But association members particularly Hester, believe the U.S.T.A. can receive more news media exposure and benefit in the long run by keeping the tournament in the New York area.

The West Side Tennis Club has been the site of America's national championships since 1924, and Forest Hills has become synonymous with tennis. But the sport's increased popularity in recent years has produced a number of problems at West Side, particularly a lack of sufficient parking and out-moded facilities in the marquee and grandstand.

In exploring possible avenues for expansion, the U.S.T.A. offered to buy West Side with the idea of rebuilding the marquee. But in a letter to club members last Feb. 22, Lindley Hoffman,

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Louis Armstrong Stadium, formerly the Singer Bowl

New Site for U.S. Open Weighed

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president, declared: "Let me say emphatically that the board of governors is pursuing no course of action which would lead to the sale of the club."

A deadlock between the U.S.T.A. and West Side apparently has developed over future construction priorities, with the association more concerned about major renovations while the club sought internal benefits.

If it moved to Flushing Meadow Park, the U.S.T.A. could increase the capacity of the stadium by almost 8,000. A schematic architectural drawing of Flushing Meadow, commissioned by the association, includes plans for a 3,000-seat grandstand and three 1,600-seat portable bleachers that would be used for field-court matches. The U.S.T.A. estimates an availability of 6,500 parking spaces around the park.

City officials have maintained a low-key attitude toward the tennis situation, particularly in view of the controversy involving the Mets and Jets, the departure of the Cosmos soccer team to New Jersey and Governor Carey's embarrassing comments about trying to bring the 1984 Olympics here. "I would have to characterize the U.S.T.A.'s attitude as a strong expression of interest," said Lang, who met twice with Hester, Gowen and Michael Burns, the association's executive secretary.

Lang said the park plan was encouraging for several reasons: It offered an opportunity to enhance city revenue, upgrade public facilities and provide another sports outlet for residents, and it would cost the city nothing.

"I'm aware that there's a vocal, sophisticated, knowledgeable, aggressive

and frequently militant tennis constituency in the city," Lang said of the persistent demands for additional courts.

He said he advertised for use of the Flushing Park land last November with no results.

"Right now, all we have is talk," he said. "I'll wait for a formal proposal and then we'll proceed."

He added that he would consult with the Community Planning Board before entering negotiations.

The U.S.T.A.'s financial muscle is the result of increased profits from the Open and a lucrative television contract that will provide more than \$6 million over the next three years. The Open, held annually for 12 days beginning the last week in August, is the world's richest tennis tournament. It will offer over \$500,000 in prize money this year.

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