

City Approval Expected On U.S. Open Tennis Shift

By GERALD ESKENAZI

The city is expected to approve tomorrow the United States Tennis Association's bid to renovate the old Singer Bowl in Flushing Meadow Park in Queens and move the Open championships there from Forest Hills next year. The U.S.T.A. is prepared to spend more than \$5 million to expand the seating of the bowl, which was renamed Louis Armstrong Stadium several years ago, from 12,000 to 20,000. Sixteen to 32 lighted courts and four to eight indoor courts would be installed.

Once the Mayor's committee on concessions approves the bid, the city and the association are expected to begin negotiations next week on a final deal.

"Obviously we're very sorry to see them go if they do move," said Lindley Hoffman, president of the West Side Tennis Club in Forest Hills, where the national championships have been held without interruption since 1924.

"The tennis world is in such a fragmented position. There's so many new things going on. There are few established traditions left in the world. One of the few is Forest Hills. It would be sad to see another tradition go."

Parking a Problem

But U.S.T.A. officials stressed that the West Side stadium's seating capacity was only about 14,000 and parking in the Forest Hills area was limited.

When the city let out bids last fall to take over Louis Armstrong Stadium, the U.S.T.A. acted swiftly. Its five-year agreement with the West Side is up after this year and the two have not been able to agree on long-term goals.

Only one other organization submitted a bid by last Monday, when the sealed bids were open.

The Park Department's manager of licenses and agreements, Mark Trachtenberg, said he did not recall the name of the other bidder, but "their proposal was for a greatly diminished use, the tennis proposal was much more extensive."

By law, the city may not lease Parks Department land. An exception was made in the deal for the Mets' use of Shea Stadium in 1961. But that required a special law by the State Legislature.

So the city would grant a "permit"

to the U.S.T.A. to use Armstrong Stadium. The city cannot extend such permits beyond 15 years. The U.S.T.A. is looking for a 20-year commitment. There will probably be a compromise.

"I have a feeling," said Trachtenberg, "there won't be very much head-knocking." The Armstrong Stadium, he said, "has been used for graduations in recent years, not much else; it's full of violations."

The city would like to retrieve some of its lost sports identity by "owning" the tennis championships. It is now fighting to keep the Jets from deserting New York for New Jersey.

"There's no way the city can refuse us if we come up with the 5 million," said the U.S.T.A.'s president, Slew Hester, by telephone from his home in Jackson, Miss.

In addition to new courts, the U.S.T.A. also plans to install new locker rooms.

Hoffman said the West Side had been prepared to increase seating in the grandstand and marquee areas, and to widen the walkways.

"They seem to feel," he said of the U.S.T.A., "that they can get a better setup elsewhere."

The nationals were first held at the Casino in Newport, R.I., in 1881 and stayed there until 1914. They were played at the West Side, which did not then have its stadium, from 1915 to 1920; then moved to the Germantown Cricket Club in Philadelphia from 1921 to 1923.

In 1968 the tournament became the Open, accepting professionals for the first time as tennis moved into a boom era, in which pros were more celebrated than amateurs. Last year's Open was the most successful of all.

"Around the world we're second only to Wimbledon," said Hoffman. "And we've passed Wimbledon in dollars. Tennis has come out of the minor leagues."