

IT'S ELECTRIFYING

By Chris Jones
EVENING STANDARD

As sound bites go, it doesn't get better than this for the organisers of the hugely popular Barclays ATP World Tour Finals that will, once again, be held at London's iconic O2 arena in November. "It's electrifying, it's entertainment, it's got that myth around it, having the musicians here. I feel it's an arena where one day you will be proud to have played. It's a win-win situation for the city, for the players, for the arena."

Thank you Roger Federer, the greatest accumulator of Grand Slam singles titles in men's tennis and defending champion at The O2.

For Chris Kermode, the tournament's innovative managing director, such a ringing endorsement bolsters confidence that London can remain the home for the finale of the men's tennis season after the current deal runs out in 2013. There are numerous reasons to stick with London, the most obvious being that, for the world's top eight men's singles players and top eight doubles teams, a trip on the Eurostar from Paris is preferable to jumping on a plane and heading to, say China or Brazil.

The continuing success of London - more than 250,000 fans attend The O2 over the week - will work in Kermode's favour when the negotiations start at the end of the year and he will have the backing of leading players along with the All England Lawn Tennis Club and The Lawn Tennis Association.

There are significant improvements being made to tennis facilities in the UK, including more than £6m being spent on the Edgbaston Priory Club which hosts the popular AEGON Classic in the same week as the highly rated AEGON Championships at Queen's Club. The decision to make Eastbourne, the week before Wimbledon, into a men's and women's tournament has also been a success, while the position of the combined grass court Nottingham Challenger, the AEGON Trophy, helps confirm that the British tennis calendar is both varied and exciting.

"Each of the tournaments at Nottingham, Edgbaston, Queen's and

Eastbourne plays an important role in providing competitive opportunities for players on grass courts ahead of The Championships," said Philip Brook, Chairman of the All England Club.

"The developments currently under way at Edgbaston are a good example," Brook continued. "From next summer the Edgbaston Priory Club will have a new main stadium grass court with 1,000 permanent seats and the potential to increase capacity to around 4,000 seats, combined with four refurbished match courts, a new six indoor court tennis centre, and a new clubhouse. Importantly, all of these grass courts are being constructed to the same exacting specifications used at The Championships.

"London meanwhile has proved to be a fantastic choice for the World Tour Finals, with huge crowds and sublime tennis on display," Brook added. "It confirms

Kermode is understandably bullish about what his team have achieved in terms of meeting the financial and logistical requirements for staging

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an event which houses 17,500 fans daily. "We have sustained our level of attendance which is extraordinary for a one-court event," he said. "It equates to Beyonce playing 15 sell-out concerts back-to-back.

"Players and fans love the O2 Arena, the three-set structure is family-friendly and the hard-court style of play is very dynamic and physical," Kermode said.

Roger Draper, the LTA chief executive, is committed to doing whatever he can to ensure the World Tour Finals stay in London and recognises that the tournament speaks to a whole new audience.

"You get on the tube and it's not like going to a tennis tournament, it's more like attending a Coldplay concert," Draper said. "You just have to look at the mix of people who are attending and it allows British tennis to reach out to these fans."

The final word on the World Tour Finals goes to that man Federer, who added: "I don't think this tournament could be any better run. We've had a wonderful time."



our long-held belief that there is very strong interest in Britain in watching world-class tennis and the World Tour Finals complements The Championships in offering tennis fans another chance to see the best male players compete in London."