

## Ken Alexander



### Tim Riddle Getting Better Each Match

For somebody who has been playing the game competitively only five years, Tim Riddle is one of those rare do-it-yourself success stories in tennis.

And he's getting better by the tournament, just ask Doug Eller.

The 20-year-old Riddle, a rising junior at Presbyterian College in Clinton, S.C., took Hickory's Eller to the cleaners, 6-2, 6-1 for the singles championship in the recent Western Carolinas tournament in Gastonia.

And, actually, it wasn't that close.

But Riddle refused all the credit. He wrote it off as a good day for him, a bad day for the number two seed, Eller, a former Pembroke baseball standout who turned to tennis.

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There are those who would disagree with the modest Riddle report, like Eller himself. "I don't think I've seen a player more determined to win a match than Tim did against me. Almost an obsession."

In a regular-season WCT go with Eller, Tim was as decisively whipped as he was a winner against Doug in the tournament. So, atonement was apparently uppermost in Riddle's mind as he methodically went to work.

Riddle, a coming power in the state for the past two years, is far from peaking. "Or, at least, I hope that's the case," said the Kings Mountain native. "I've got two more years at PC and I'd like to think that the best is yet to come."

Tim didn't start playing competitively until he was 15 and competed in a junior tournament at Shelby. "Didn't get too far, but it was a starter and I got a lot of encouragement from people in the business, who saw some potential, and I took it from there."

As proof of his relatively quick progress once he got the 'feel' of the game, young Riddle was the rage of the 3-A Southwestern Conference prep ranks as a Mountaineer competitor. He lost only one tournament match in playing as the number one player all three varsity years at Kings Mountain High.

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Riddle, by his own admission, isn't dominant in any one phase of his game. "Just consistency, I suppose, in all areas," he says matter of factly and I've been fortunate it's been that way."

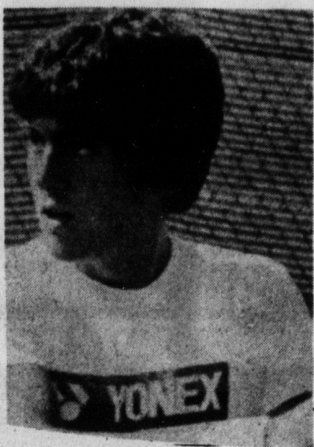
In his steady, unchecked march to the WCT singles championship on the Gaston College courts, Riddle left no doubt as to his superiority.

After a bye in the first round, he cut down Richard Leininger of Gastonia, 6-2, 6-1, eliminated a good talent in Belmont Abbey's Kevin Burke, 6-2, 6-2 and North Wilkesboro's Brian Cooper by the exact margin before putting Eller in his hip pocket.

Even Riddle will admit that he had no business roller-coasting to such lop-sided scores in all four matches en route to the winner's circle. "Put it this way," he says, "My game was on and I couldn't be happier."

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While he has to be encouraged by the rise of his own game, the 5-10 Riddle uses his talents and energy to encourage and promote other youngsters. In particular, he's excited about one of his proteges, 10-year-old Sammy Stinnett of Bessemer



TIM RIDDLE

City. "I'm working with him daily now," says Tim, "and, mark my word, he's going to be a good one."

It's true that Tim has practiced hours on end on his own in order to improve his game, but that's not unusual. He's been tutored by some of the finest men in tennis in Cleveland County and more specifically--Shelby, for a sharper hone.

J. Russell Talley, whose coaching genius has rubbed off on many promising players, recalls the first time he saw Riddle. "He was in a group of four boys from Kings Mountain, as I remember. A Plonk kid, I believe, Tim and two others, about five or six years ago and I held a session or two with them. Even then, young Riddle had the patience to listen and willingness to learn. It's good to see him go up."

As for his two remaining years at PC, Riddle sees the Blue Hose as a definite threat to NAIA supremacy.

The Presbyterian coach is Richard McKee, a former standout at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill.

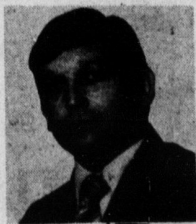
"That's a big plus in anybody's books," said Riddle. "Also Norm Schellenger Jr., plays number one and he comes from an outstanding tennis family. He's only a sophomore as is the number two man, Billy Higgins of Columbia, S.C. I'll be number three again and four-five-six men are also solid. I just can't see anything but good things happening to our program next spring."

But any other approach would be entirely out of character for Riddle. A positive thinker, just like he plays the game.

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