

Tennis teams end season in sixth place

By Rosy McGillan
Staff Writer

Both the men's and women's tennis teams finished up what could be considered struggling seasons at the Big South Conference Tournament in Augusta, GA last week. Each squad finished in sixth place overall.

While the team results were not sterling, coach Karl Johnston was pleased with the performances on the part of both teams. For the men, who had three walk-ons at the fourth, fifth and sixth positions, the outcome was anticipated.

"In the back of my mind, I was thinking that if we finished fifth or sixth, I would be pleased," Johnston said.

On the individual level results were impressive. "In certain spots, we did a lot better than expected. I think Derek (Allen), in coming in fourth place, surprised a lot of people because he had been seeded fifth," said Johnston. Bill Foley finished strongly at fourth in the fourth flight as well.

Junior Jeff Duncan, seeded fourth among the number one seeds, exceeded others' expectations, if not his own, by defeating Baptist College's Neil Rajapakke 6-3, 6-2. Rajapakke was ranked above Duncan at third coming into the tournament after a conflict over the seeding based on the fact that Duncan and Rajapakke did not meet in the regular season because of a rain cancellation.

"I did not do as well as I had hoped to," Duncan said. Duncan lost to Campbell's Rodrigo Cagidi, the eventual tournament champion at the number one flight, 6-4, 6-3 in the semi-final round. But a



Photo by William Allen

Jeff Duncan prepares for a forehand smash.

strong serve and solid performance by Duncan against Rajapakke brought a 6-3, 6-2 victory and third place finish.

In the women's division, UNCA, despite having no conference wins in the regular season, finished only three points behind fifth place winner Augusta. Here, individual

play was exceptional. Kathryn Grooms handed out three strong performances to win first place for the second flight. Enroute to her victory, Grooms defeated two players she lost to in regular season play. "Kathryn showed a lot of determination in the last four or five matches of the season

to work hard and really do well in the tournament," remarked Johnston. After a tiring three sets against first seed Donna Hanlon of Radford in the semi-finals, Grooms, down 2-5 in both sets, came from behind to defeat Maria Loo from Augusta College 7-5, 7-5.

A key to her success in Augusta had a lot to do with Grooms' concentration. "My head was more in my matches at the conference tournament. Being away from school, and being in a total tennis environment helped me concentrate on my matches a little more," Grooms said.

Another fine performance came from junior Jenece Cross. Cross came away with first place overall for the third consecutive year, capping off a 14-1 season record. In spite of the impressive history, Cross was not overly confident going into the tournament. "In my semi-final match I was really nervous. Because of a first round bye, I had not played. And I knew Christian Mack was a steady player," said Cross.

By feeling out her opponents' strokes, and getting herself into the groove of her game, she came away on top 6-0, 6-0.

The final round matched Cross up against Melissa Edwards of Baptist. Experience as well as strategy were keys in Cross' 6-1, 6-1 win. Cross had seen Edwards play and knew the hard-hitting baseliner would have difficulty moving up and back. "I basically knew how I was going to play her going into the match. And I knew I was not going to give her points off my errors," stated Cross.

Johnston feels Cross is one of the strongest players in the NC, SC, area. "Even when she is playing poorly, you do not realize it. Which is what players strive to

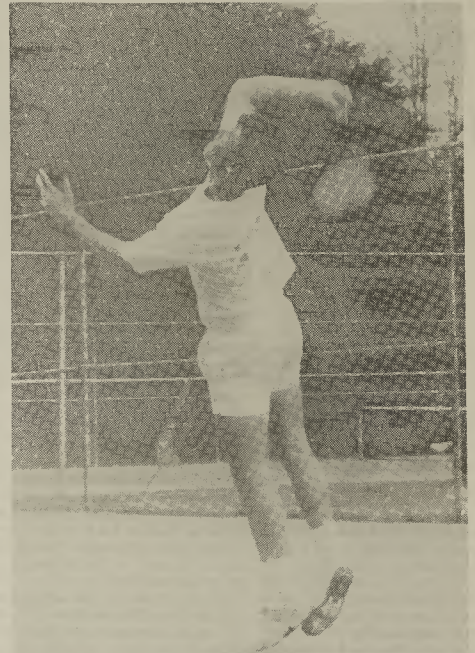


Photo by William Allen

Paul Fanning serves to his opponent.

achieve," said Johnston.

Of the three years Johnston has coached Cross, on only two occasions has he seen her play below par. One of those times came early this season when Cross lost to Davidson. But as Johnston points out, she did not get down. She bounced back and went

undefeated the rest of the season.

The year was one of frustration for UNCA tennis, but Johnston's attitude is one of optimism. "We had some small victories in different areas and we had a good tournament. The players showed a lot of resilience in bouncing back from the losses," said Johnston.

Commentary

Bulldogs sign 8'11" center

In an effort to bring more height to a relatively small team, the UNCA basketball staff, that just last week signed a 6-10 freshman, has recently announced the signing of an 8-11, 115 pound freshman center.

Herb (pronounced Erb) "Frog Boy" Phillips is a native of South Florida and attends South Swamp High School. Phillips had been living in the swamps for all of his young life before he was discovered by South Swamp's basketball coach, Pug Jones. Jones said he was "alligator watching" when he discovered Phillips swimming near his boat. The claim that Jones was actually just observing alligators has been questioned since he was carrying a high powered rifle at the time.

"I get a better view of the critters threw my scope," said Jones. According to Jones, Phillips claims to have been abandoned in the swamps as a small child and raised by "big ole' frogs." Phillips attributes his height to the strange air in the swamps, and his 115 pound physique to "a diet that a rabbit could barely survive on."

Jones summed up Phillips' basketball skills by saying, "he's big."

UNCA coach Don Doucette said he became interested in Phillips after UNC signed a 7-1 freshman, and Wake Forest was announced as being a front runner to get a 7-6 transfer.

Said Doucette, "Down the road we hope to be competing with these schools so we wanted someone who could matchup with their big people. We couldn't find someone like that so we just went for somebody really big."

Phillips said he decided to attend UNCA because, "their uniforms fit the best."

"We just took one of (Brent

Keck's old uniforms and stretched it out," responded Doucette.

In his one year as a player for South Swamp, Phillips averaged 1.8 points, three rebounds, and 22 blocked shots. The 22 blocked shots was a national record. Jones attributed Phillips shot blocking

Guy Stuart

ability to the fact that "he's big."

Phillips shot blocking career best was a game against the school's local rival Mosquito Central High when he blocked 60 of Central's 61 shot attempts. Unfortunately South Swamp still lost, 2-0. Phillips said he was playing so well he probably could have blocked all 61 shots but got his head tangled in his own net when he attempted a dunk and this kept him from playing defense on the transition.

Doucette said the Bulldogs are hoping for good things from Phillips in the future. "We plan to work on his shooting and try to get his percentage up into at least double digits," said Doucette, "We also plan to put him on a weight program so he can block out better and have at least the proportional weight of a large beetle."

Phillips responded that he was thrilled about these plans, "Some

of my best friends are beetles."

One UNCA player who asked that his name be kept out of the whole business, explained what a player like Phillips brings to the Bulldogs, "he's big."

There has been some question as to how Jones got Phillips into high school without any former schooling. Jones replied that Phillips had been educated "by nature herself" and was more than prepared to enter high school.

"At first, principle (Freddy) Kramstremski was very skeptical but after I invited him over to my nature facility out by the swamp, he quickly changed his mind."

Kramstremski, who is currently still in the hospital recovering from alligator bites, was unavailable for comment.

Phillips helped lead South Swamp to its best record ever of 5-13, and a sixth place finish in their conference. This was the first time the school had finished other than last in its 15 year basketball history. Said Jones, who had coached all 15 years, "this was a very touching and emotional

season and it guarantees I can squeeze at least another two years out of this job."

When asked why he had not tried to convince Phillips to stay and play for South Swamp another season, Jones replied that the school board had insisted Phillips move on to college, and that the weather was too cold for alligators.

Dean Arbuckle, a former car salesman who coached this year's last place Everglade High said Phillips was unlike any other player he had ever coached against. "He's big," said Arbuckle.

Phillips said he was very excited about playing for UNCA and is continuing to work on his game. Phillips also said that he is at the point where he can almost dunk but says he can't quite get his timing right.

Jones concluded that he feels Phillips has a lot of potential and could be to basketball what Bob Uecker was to baseball. "I think if Herb really works he can become the kind of player that someday people can look at and say, 'he's really big.'"

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