



Stephanie Schon - Staff Photographer

Senior Leslie Smith battled through a difficult three-set match to capture a 14-12 win in a tiebreaker against Gardner-Webb's Erica White.

Bulldogs snap four-year losing streak to Gardner-Webb

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The UNC Asheville women's tennis team dominated Big South Conference rival Gardner-Webb 6-1, putting an end to their four-year losing streak against the Runnin' Bulldogs.

"I am extremely happy we beat them," team captain, Louise Bottomley said. "I think we could have beaten them my sophomore and junior years so it was a long time coming."

The team, now 10-5 on the season and 2-3 in conference play, were due a victory over the Runnin' Bulldogs, who defeated UNCA every year since the 2004-05 season.

Determined to end the streak, the team made it one of their preseason goals in the fall.

"It was something that was on our list of goals because we felt like we should have beaten them last year," said Head Coach Lise Gregory. "The

seniors especially were really determined to win this time and so they were all very happy about it because they had focused on this since the fall, so they can check it off their list."

The seniors Gregory referred to are Leslie Smith, Louise Bottomley and Tania Mateva, who have not won against the Runnin' Bulldogs their whole college careers.

"I think it was just a confidence booster," Mateva said. "We knew we could do it, but finally winning gave us more belief in the team."

Losing to Gardner-Webb 6-1 in 2006 and 2007, the Bulldogs nearly clinched a victory in 2008 when they narrowed the score 4-3. However, last year GWU stretched their win streak out once again with a 5-2 victory, fueling UNCA's desire to put an end to their losing streak.

Not only did they beat them, but only one Bulldog dropped their match to tally the final at 6-1.

"It was just nice to be able to see the

girls come through with the win such a short time after I've been there," said UNCA tennis alumna Rachel Rhoney, who came to support the team. "It was an exciting match."

A highlight of the day was Smith, who endured an emotionally charged three-set match against Gardner-Webb's Big South Conference freshman of the week Erica White.

Slipping by White 7-5 in the first set, Smith then lost a close second set battle in which White closed her out 7-6 and balanced the score back to 1-1.

The match then went to a 10-point tiebreaker as the overall score of the day was already decided. With tempers brewing in both camps, the score bounced back and forth until Smith finally closed the deal 14-12.

"I realized that I'd lost against that girl in the fall, and so it was really emotional, especially in the tiebreaker in the third set," she said. "But it was good to be able to beat them at home

for my last year. Perfect conditions, I'd say."

Not only was the win a fulfilling one for Smith, but Gregory said she was happy for what it says about the team as a whole.

"(The team) was so happy for Leslie that she won," she said. "I've never seen a team run out and congratulate a victory for a match that didn't clinch the overall win. It shows they really care about each other."

Smith's match also marked another victory for her first winning year of her collegiate career, sitting at 18-7 presently on the season.

"(Smith) let up at one point and the girl came back but she didn't crumble completely," Gregory said. "She's improved so much over the past three years. She has a really good record for everything she's put into it. It was a nice win for her."

The singles line up for the match

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