

KM's Mark Eaker Looking Forward To Playing Tennis Just For Fun

By GARY STEWART
Mirror-Herald Sports Editor

Kings Mountain's Mark Eaker, senior captain of the Western Carolina tennis team, has been playing competitive tennis for six years. He says he's looking forward to the time when he can play just for the fun of it.

Home the first of this week for Easter break, Eaker paused from a match at the Kings Mountain High courts to talk about his college career with the young but improving Catamounts.

"I hope to soon get back into social tennis," he said. "The people that make it in competitive tennis after college have to be really good. I admit I'm not good enough so I'm looking forward to getting away from it."

Eaker is the first graduate of the young KMHS tennis program to play on the college level. One other

KMHS graduate, Joe Crocker, played tennis at Western but he never picked up a racquet while in high school.

"Joe was a big influence on my decision to go to Western," recalled Eaker. "Western doesn't give scholarships for tennis, but the coaches there talked to me and Joe's the main reason I went there."

Eaker, who is starting for his fourth straight year, is playing number four singles and number two doubles. He has won his only Southern Conference matches to date over VMI.

"It's going to be tough playing a full Southern Conference schedule," he says. "Schools like UT-Chattanooga and Furman are big tennis schools. They give scholarships and Western doesn't. Before Western becomes a contender in tennis, they're going to have to start giving some money."

Even though the Catamounts as a

team probably won't win the conference, Eaker is hoping he can contend for the number four singles crown.

"In our tournament," he says, "you play only against other players in the same position. I played number three my sophomore and junior years so that should help me in number four this year."

Eaker's best year with the Catamounts was his freshman season when he posted a 9-7 record playing the fifth position. That was the best mark of any player on the squad.

He says the key to being a good tennis player is hard work and he averages four hours per day on the tennis courts. Another big key, he says, is playing against players with more talent.

"I look forward to coming home a lot," he says, "because that gives me the opportunity to play against Tim Riddle. He's helped my game more than any other player. He's so

steady he can get another player's game back in shape.

"There has always been good competition in Kings Mountain," he added, "But tennis is just now getting support here."

While at KMHS, Eaker played two years and his senior season made All-Southwestern Conference. He and Eddie Mauney formed the top doubles team in the conference and the two players that eliminated them from the Western Association tournament, Johnny and Sammy Post of Salisbury, went on to win the association title.

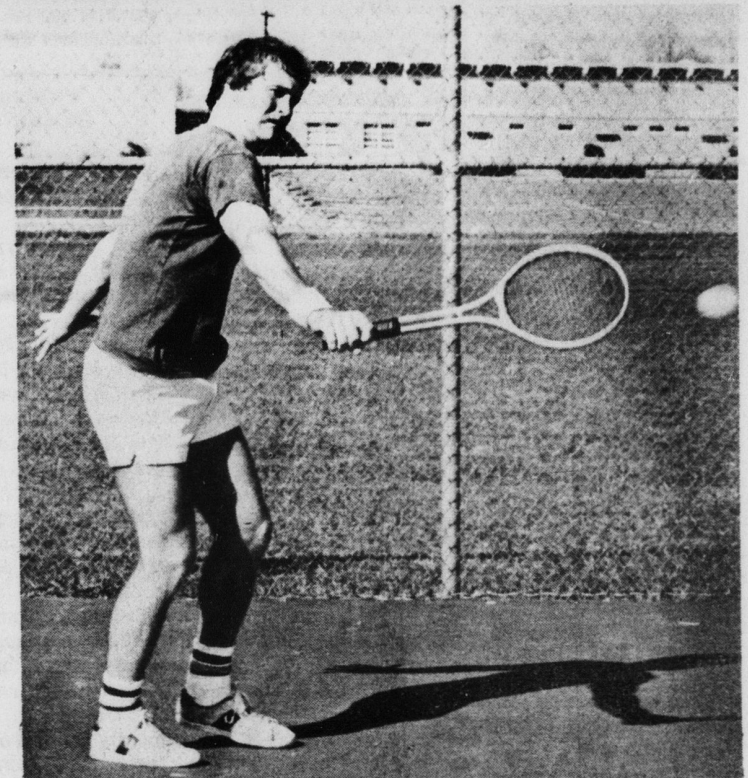
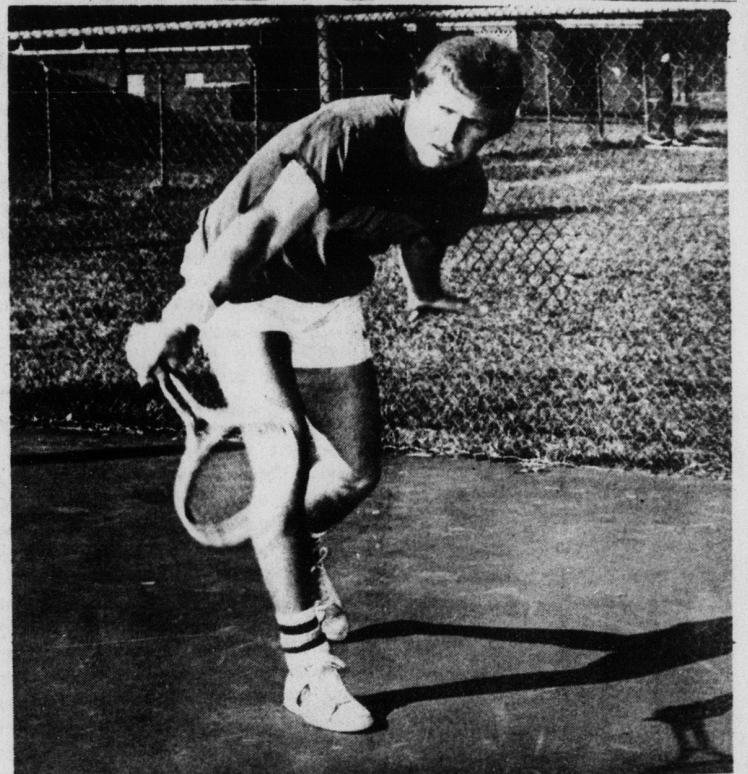
"I started playing tennis when I was in the eighth grade," he recalled. "I took some lessons from Russell Talley, a pro in Gastonia, and he helped my game a lot. But I didn't start playing competitive tennis until the 11th grade, when I went out for the high school team.

"I think tennis is one of the biggest steps ever taken at Kings Mountain High," he went on. "Coach Ed Guy has put a lot of time into building the program. It used to be when you thought of high school tennis you thought of places like Lexington and Shelby. But now Kings Mountain ranks right up there with them. Tim Riddle helped bring a lot of recognition to Kings Mountain. He's by far the best player to ever come out of here. And the fact that Kings Mountain won the association last year helped bring the town and school a lot of recognition too."

Coach Guy, who is in his sixth year as head coach of the Mountaineers, credits Eaker, Mauney and Joey Wells with getting him into the coaching ranks.

"I used to come over here to the courts to play some," Guy noted, "and Mark and the others suggested that I might coach the team. When I first came they knew more than I did."

"They were a real good bunch of guys and Mark was one of the best. I think of him more as a friend than a former team member. I think the big thing about Mark is that he's a hard worker. He's not the most talented tennis player in the world, but what he lacks in talent he makes up for with hard work."



PLAYING FOR FUN - Mark Eaker was playing tennis just for fun when these photos were made at the KMHS courts. The Western Carolina senior, a graduate of KMHS, says he's looking forward to the end of his college career, when he can play tennis socially instead of competitively.

Photos By Gary Stewart

Junior High Golf Rebuilds

Kings Mountain Junior High's golfers are rebuilding but still hope to compete for the Western Junior High Athletic Association title.

The Patriots are playing for the first time in the new league, which also includes Shelby, Burns, Crest, East McDowell, West McDowell and College Park.

The KMJH squad, which is practicing at Kings Mountain Country Club, opens April 3 here with a nine-hole match against West McDowell.

Coach Joe Speight has only two starters back from last year's 5-2 team, which finished second in the old Foothills Conference. Those players include Lee Neisler and David Rhea.

Most of the other golfers are new to the sport, but Coach Speight says he has been pleased with the progress they've shown.

Others on the roster include ninth graders Jamie Humphries, Scott Bowen, Dexter Tate, Jack Jackson, Carl Plonk and Robert Lutz, eighth grader Tim Ross and seventh graders Guy Bickley, Mark Cloninger, Rodney Sellers and David Peeler.

THE SCHEDULE

APRIL

3 - W. McDowell

17 - at Crest

24 - Burns

MAY

1 - at E. McDowell

8 - College Park

18 - at Shelby

28 - Conf. Tourn.



GARY STEWART

Moore And Gillespie To Coach Legion Nine

Robbie Moore and Richard Gillespie, two young Gardner-Webb students who worked wonders with the Post 155 American Legion baseball team last summer have agreed to lead the team in Area Four action again this year. They're counting on several returnees, plus newcomers from Kings Mountain, Cherryville, North Gaston and Clover to improve the team's record in '78...

Reports are that the University of North Carolina is enjoying one of the best football recruiting years of any college in the nation. New Coach Dick Crum will be looking for a berth in a major bowl within the next few years. Some of the recruits who are probably known to area fans include Al Burris of Shelby, Rocky White of Charlotte Olympic, Jeff Hayes of Elkin, and Darrell Nicholson of Winston-Salem, the man Kings Mountain's Chuck Gordon defeated for the state wrestling title...

North Gaston's Larry Penley helped lead Clemson's golf team to the championship of the Furman Invitational last week, firing a 155 to help the Tigers to a 593 team total, which bested Georgia Southern (601) by eight strokes. North Carolina and N. C. State tied for sixth at 609 and Wake Forest at 616...

Clemson's tennis team came up with a big victory last week when it downed LSU 5-4 on the Bengal Tigers' home court. It was only the second loss for the nationally-ranked Bengals and their first at home. Clemson's number two singles player is freshman Pender Murphy of Charlotte Latin, the only player to beat Kings Mountain's Tim Riddle last year...

Clemson University, which has most of its players returning from last year's Gator Bowl squad, has recruited two area Shrine Bowlers, 250-pound tackle Lanny Ford of West Lincoln and 195-pound running back Jamie Pope of Maiden...

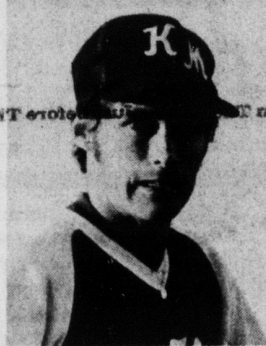
Gastonia's James "Peanut" Parks, who hurled Don Saine's Hunter Huss Huskies to the state 4-A finals last year, is off to a quick start as a freshman with the University of North Carolina. He currently sports a perfect 3-0 mark, having beaten Duke 19-3 for his third win last Thursday...

Gardner-Webb's Bulldogs have lost their second football coach this year. Oval Jaynes, the head man, resigned several weeks ago to take an assistant's job at the University of Wyoming. Defensive coordinator Ken Sanford resigned last week to take the head job at R-S Central High School...

Shelby High basketball coach Dick McClenny has been named head coach of the West team for the East-West All-Star game to be played in Greensboro in July... Little League baseball has announced plans for its 11th annual Summer Camp in St. Petersburg, Fla., three different sessions beginning on June 8, July 2 and July 16. If you're interested contact your local little league president or write P. O. Box 13866, St. Petersburg, Fla. 33733...

North Carolina's Phil Ford finished his career with four school records. Marks included most points, 2290, career assists, 753, career field goals, 805, and most games played, 123...

Shelby's Lloyd Little, Harold C. Bullard of Charlotte and Arden F. Ray of Concord will be inducted into the Lenoir Rhyne College Sports Hall of Fame at a ceremony on April 4. Speaker will be Joe Theismann, quarterback of the Washington Redskins...



ROBBIE MOORE

Baseball Team Hosts Shelby Today

Kings Mountain area sports teams swing back into action this week after taking a couple of days off for Easter.

The KMHS baseball team plays the first of two big regular season games with county rival Shelby at 4 p. m. today at Lancaster Field. The game was originally scheduled for Friday.

The Mountaineers, 2-1 in the Southwestern Conference and 4-1 overall heading into a game yesterday at North Gaston, and Shelby, also 2-1 in the SWC, are regarded as two of the three teams to beat in the Eastern Division of the split SWC. The other favorite, South Point, is 3-0.

Kings Mountain thus far has lost only to Chase and Shelby to Crest. Ironically, both losses were by 8-7 scores with both the Mountaineers and Lions turned back on comeback attempts in the last inning.

Booster's Club Meeting Monday

All Kings Mountain High athletic supporters are urged to attend a meeting Monday at 7 p. m. at the high school.

Purpose of the meeting is to discuss the possibility of a booster's club.

This is not an organizational meeting but solely one to determine whether or not enough fans are interested in organizing one.

If you're interested, it's important that you attend Monday's meeting.

Shelby, with a young club, is trying to return to the SWC playoff picture after an absence of two years. The Lions haven't made the playoffs since 1975 when they lost to the Mountaineers in a best-of-

three series for the league title.

The Mountaineers have a veteran ballclub which finished second to South Point last spring.

The baseball game is the only activity slated for today.

The Mountaineer tennis team, pre-season favorite in the SWC, entertains 4-A North Mecklenburg Friday at 3 p. m. The Mountaineers were scheduled to host Watauga in a makeup match yesterday.

Coach Ed Guy's charges have romped over six opponents thus far with their only tough test coming

from 4-A East Mecklenburg. The Mounties whipped the Eagles 7-2 in a match that was closer than the final score indicated.

The sports schedule gets back into high gear next week with both the senior and junior highs having a full slate.

The junior high golfers, hoping to return to the top after finishing a rare second last year, open Western Conference play Monday at Kings Mountain Country Club against West McDowell. Coach Joe Speight has a young team but the Patriots are talented.

Tuesday's schedule has the Mountaineer baseballers at home against East Rutherford in their first night game and the

tennis team at Watauga for a return bout.

The Wednesday schedule has the junior high tracksters opening their season at Shelby.

Next Thursday, the junior high baseballers, 2-0, travel to Hickory to face Grandview while the junior high girls softball team goes for its third straight win against Grandview at Lancaster Field.

Next Friday, the Mountaineer netters open their conference season here against East Rutherford, the baseball team travels to South Point for what could be a major battle and the Mountaineer track team goes to Burns.



GROVER CHAMPS - Here's the fifth grade basketball team which won the championship in Grover School's annual intramural tournament last week. Players include, front row, left to right,

Keith Bell, Travis Camp, Lavar Curry and Farris Turner. Back row, Sam Pruitt, David Dockery, Kim Lockhart and David Dingus.

A's Play Pair Here

The Kings Mountain A's host a pair of South Carolina teams in exhibition games this weekend.

Oak Ridge challenges the KM club Saturday at 2:30 p. m. at Davidson Park and Bowling Green comes here for a Sunday 2:30 game.

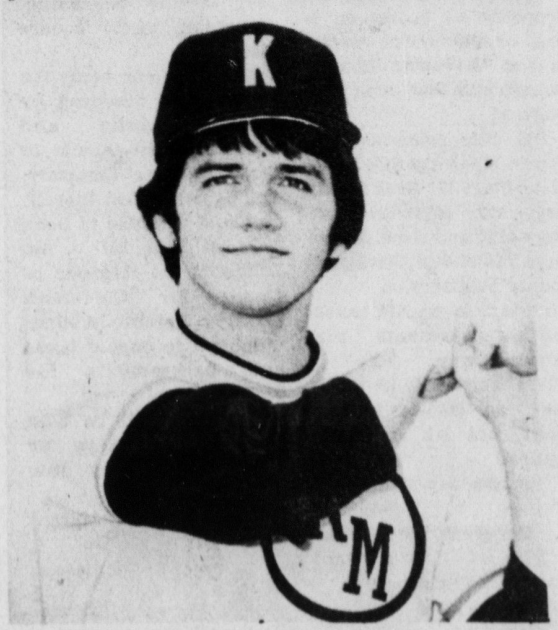
Last week's scheduled games with Bowling Green and West Charlotte were rained out.

Winner of the A's drawing for a CB radio was Nathan Davis.

Three Days To Register

Youngsters ages eight through 12 who plan to play city baseball this summer have only three more days to register.

You may register Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday from 5 p. m. until 9 p. m. at the community center.



KM LEADER - David Ray Robinson, leading hitter for the KMHS Mountaineers last spring, will be a key figure in the Mounties' drive for the SWC title this year. Robinson alternates his playing time between shortstop and the pitcher's mound. KM hosts Shelby today at 4 p. m. in a big East Division battle.