

From the Courtside: Notes from Coach Wesselink

One of my favorite times of year to coach tennis is the fall season. The weather moderates, except for the occasional Hurricane, and the players arrive with great expectations and visions of success in their heads. Everyone plays and gains experience at the fall tournaments. It is a great opportunity for learning and improvement. This is also the time when teams establish the unity which will be crucial to their success.

I was apprehensive about this year's team because we added four new players. The returning members were a little nervous too as they had not met two of the four new players and we had lost two key players to graduation.

As it turns out my biggest concern was our biggest success. The returning players put aside their egos and uncertainty and welcomed the newcomers. The new players stayed open and positive no matter what was thrown at them. I admit, I stood in gratified disbelief when players finished tough drills and practice matches against teammates with high fives. This is going to be an exceptional team.

Our first tournament was at William & Mary. Meghan Wolfgram played some of her most consistent and dominating tennis. She teamed with Jessica Hubbard, our favorite transfer from Idaho, to win the doubles flight and followed that up with winning her singles flight. Xenia Schneider, one of our many amazing freshmen, raised her game to a new level and went undefeated indoors before losing her final outside to Emmy Fritz-Krockow. Aslee Vosters, another amazing freshman, went 3-1 with her only loss to the eventual flight winner from Arkansas.

The team support was good at W&M but we still had some learning to do, which was okay since we were young and improving.

Wake Forest was the first time I saw Beatrice Grasu look like she did her freshman year playing No. 1. She dispatched a hapless UNCG player, beat Wake's Sierra Poske and had to retire after splitting sets with Del Priore of UVA. Pamela Duran, yet another amazing freshman, picked up two good ACC wins over James of UVA and Poske of Wake. She was gaining some good experience that would help her in the next tournament.

Robin Carter avenged a loss to Pereira of UVA and marched through to the finals before bowing to Wake's Christine Simpson (no relation to Ashley). Robin was back. Jessica Hubbard went 3-1 with solid wins over Syracuse and two feisty UNCG players. Ashlee Vosters had another solid tournament getting to the finals before losing to UVA. Our doubles performance was uneven. We were making some aggressive moves but not executing well. At this point it was still an experiment.

Land of the giants...

Our final fall tournament was at Vanderbilt. The competition was tough: Vandy (#8), Arizona State (#29), Wisconsin (#34) and Ole Miss (#37). I wanted to travel as a team and have everyone to see how close we were to some of the top teams in the country.

Bea had Arizona State's Kady Pooler (#83) at match point with an overhead but couldn't close her out. It was frustrating making concessions to injury but it was also clear that she still has the game if we can get her a little stronger.

Pamela Duran showed what she had learned and how hard she could fight by dusting ASU's Sabrina Capannola (#37) and Vandy's Courtney Ulery. And Pam is only going to get better. We had Vandy down 3-0 at the top two doubles positions before they fought back for some tough wins. The new teams of Wolfgram & Grasu and Carter & Hubbard have some serious potential.

Regardless of our results, I felt this tournament cemented relationships and united the team in the belief that we can compete with anyone and accomplish great things.

I don't like to single out players as most valuable or most anything since this is a team sport. We depend on each other, but everyone deserves recognition when they have worked hard and achieved success. I believe the successes of this team can be as much attributed to Jelena Zivanovic for her hard work on the practice courts and sense of humor off the courts as it can to any wins at the tournaments.

One day this fall, when the sun was shining and everyone was feeling good, I told everyone that we were a team of destiny. I was really just having fun with the idea but, after this fall, I'm wondering if maybe we are...