

Bronco Men's Tennis 2003 Season Outlook

The 2003 men's tennis team set lofty goals for last season: to become a top-50 program nationally, to have five wins over ranked opposition, and to become the first squad in the program's history to earn a berth in the NCAA Tournament.

The Broncos came close, peaking at No. 55 in the ITA rankings, and were just shy of reaching the NCAA Tournament. Despite the new season, long-time assistant and first-year head coach George Husack is confident his team will pick up right where it left off.

"We are not just going to stop where we left off last year; we're going to get better," he said. "We enjoyed a great win streak last year, with strong wins. We also had some hard fought losses, where we felt the victory was right there and to lost it... well, these guys learned a lot from that and I think that's going to add stability to this year's program.

"Everybody's hungry to meet those goals," Husack continued. "We had a great fall in terms of competing and playing hard throughout events. We've always been around on the last day of a tournament. With that in mind, I'm looking forward to a very exciting year."

A look at 2003 Santa Clara Broncos:

Singles

Husack said the lineups for singles have not been set yet, but indicated that everybody has high expectations for themselves and all will make an impact this season.

The Broncos return two seniors to the lineup in Michael Bruggemann and Federico Mattioli. A stronger doubles player, Bruggemann has made it his goal to make an impact in the singles lineup.

"This is something we wanted to see from his first day in this program because we knew he had the potential and we're very excited he's going to do it here in his final year," Husack added.

Mattioli is an all-around solid player and according to his coach, 'could play forever, as he is one of the most fit guys on our team.' Husack added that Mattioli has done a great job in learning the transition game over the last year, which has helped him not just stay in points, but impose his game in order to win points.

"He made a comment to me over the summer while watching a few fellow Argentinians at clay court tournaments how they could have won more points had they

come to the net," Husack said. "To hear that from him demonstrates his improvement in understanding the game. I see him playing a big role this year, just like he has every year."

Junior Erich Chen is coming off his most successful year at Santa Clara. With 16 wins at the No. 3 and 4 spots, he solidified his game quite a bit. With a strong serve and volley game, Chen took some time off away from the courts to concentrate on conditioning.

"Erich had a terrific fall," Husack said. "Last year, his consistency grew dramatically as he proved he could be on his game all of the time. I expect him to continue that this year and be one of our top players."

Junior Rick Ruso is described as the leader of the team. A three-year captain, his biggest strengths lie in his serve and competitive drive. Like Bruggemann, Ruso is very strong in doubles but will also look to make an impact in the singles lineup.

"Though injuries set him back in the fall, his current physical condition is the best it has ever been in his Bronco career," Husack said. "He will be

an effective weapon for the squad.

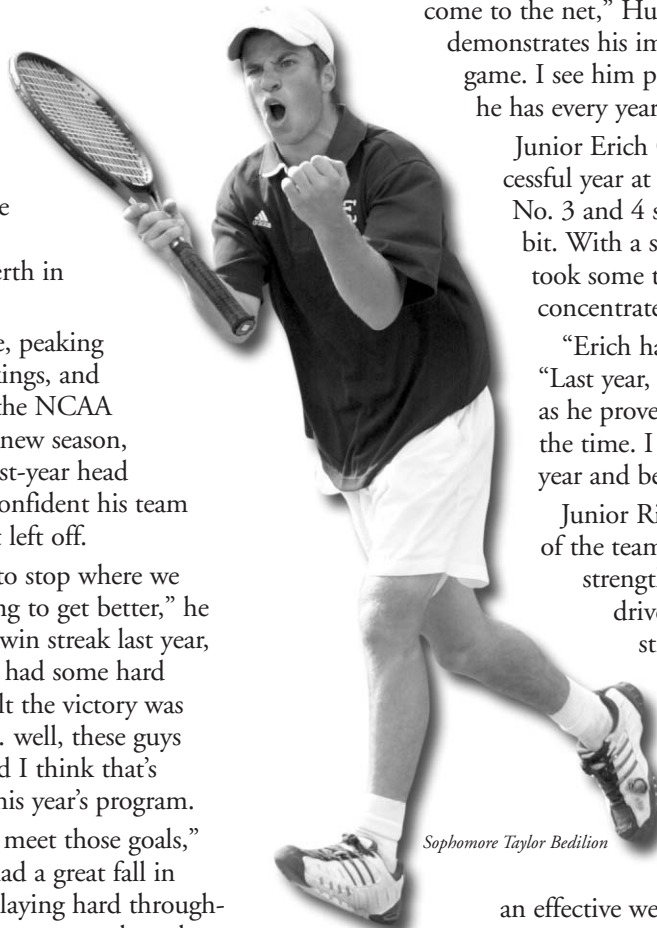
"Most of all, Rick's taught every person on this team what it means to be a Bronco," Husack added. "He exemplifies what we're trying to teach every player that comes into our program and puts us all on the same page in terms of what we're trying to accomplish."

Sophomores Francisco Zepponi and Taylor Bedilion had strong seasons last year, with Zepponi setting the season record for singles victories

"Francisco couldn't have had a better year last year," Husack said. "It didn't matter who we played, it was pretty much automatic for Francisco that he was going to win. He took a little bit of time off in the summer and is happy to be back. He is stronger and more physically fit than last year. Now that he has a year under his belt, he wants to go out and do it again. I'm not expecting him to win 30 matches again, but I am expecting him to play with the same fire he displayed on the court last year."

Bedilion spent the fall recovering from an ankle injury he sustained right before school started, and reinjured while in training. He was able to perform at the ITA Regional during fall play despite not much practice on the courts.

"Taylor worked out really hard this summer and played a lot of tournaments and was definitely ready to go when school came around, but his injury set him back and he got frustrated that he couldn't get started right away. He's



Sophomore Taylor Bedilion



back now and has already improved from last season and like Francisco, is going to have a big impact in our lineup.”

Sophomore Ben Hidalgo, one of the most enthusiastic members of the team, is coming off summer shoulder surgery. He hit left-handed forehands all summer and fall, just to stay on the courts, and at the conclusion of the fall season, was just starting to hit ground strokes on his repaired joint.

“Ben was just so hungry to be out there, it really inspired his teammates,” Husack said. “One of his teammates even commented to me this fall at a tournament how different it was without having Ben along for trips. He is a huge vocal leader and has been a presence on our team even though he has been unable to play. When he is healthy in the spring, he is going to be a big part of our team’s success.”

The Broncos welcome freshman Ted Blosser of Scottsdale, Ariz., to the roster this season. Husack said that Blosser’s passion for tennis and being part of the program spoke volumes this fall season. He will provide depth to the lineup while continuing to improve his all-court game.

“It seems like I’m saying everybody’s going to play a big part, but I guess that’s the luxury of having so many guys with different strengths,” Husack concluded.

Doubles

Bruggemann will lead the Broncos in doubles again this year. Playing with various partners throughout last season, Bruggemann found success wherever he was on the court. An All-WCC selection in doubles, Bruggemann has improved on his game over the summer and will join fellow all-conference honoree Chen in the top position for the Broncos.

“He is definitely one of the top doubles players in the conference and I’d even put him right up there with the top doubles players in the country,” Husack said of Bruggemann. “Mike is really fast; he has the best hands I’ve ever seen. He’s just so quick for doubles. His return game is solid and he has a great mindset for the game.”

Ruso, another league honoree, will most likely be paired with Bedilion.

“Power and quickness will be the key for this duo,” Husack explained. “Both players’ serves, returns and aggressive net play will put them in a position to win a lot of matches this season.”

Zeponi, Mattioli, Hidalgo

and Blosser will round out the final doubles tandems, as their solid service returns and volleys will be hard to keep out of the lineup, according to Husack.

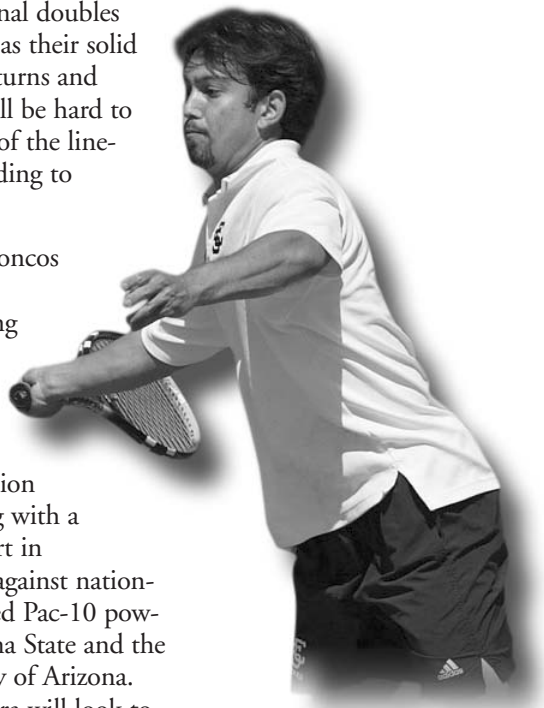
The Broncos face a demanding schedule once again, with this year’s edition beginning with a tough start in Arizona, against nationally-ranked Pac-10 powers Arizona State and the University of Arizona. Santa Clara will look to revenge a 4-3 loss to UC Santa Barbara in its biggest home match of the year, scheduled for Feb. 16.

“We had a tough loss to them last year and we intend on being noisy and loud now that they’re coming to our house,” Husack said.

The team will visit Boise, Idaho, and take on Boise State and Mexico in indoor matches, while a Spring Break trip to Southern California will feature competition against West Coast rivals Pepperdine and Loyola Marymount. Toward the end of the season, the Broncos will visit Fresno State and again, hope to reverse one of two 4-3 losses last season to nationally-ranked squads.

Of utmost importance to the Broncos, who won all 12 matches at the SCU Tennis Center in 2002, is keeping that perfect home winning percentage alive through nine home contests in this year’s schedule. Combining this strong schedule with a solid showing at the West Coast Conference Championships will help the Broncos reach their goal of advancing to the NCAA Tournament.

“This is a strong team and we grew a lot closer to our goal last season,” Husack concluded. “We know what we want to accomplish and this is our year to do it.”



*Michael Bruggemann
2001 All-WCC, Doubles*



*Rick Ruso and Erich Chen
2002 All-WCC, Doubles*

