

Bronco Women's Tennis 2003 Season Outlook

The 2003 edition of the Santa Clara women's tennis team is going to be stronger than ever, thanks to a solid core of four seniors, experienced underclassmen and a talented trio of incoming players. However, the most important difference might not be the talent and experience the Broncos have; it might be the power and the strength they display on the court, after a fall season of strength and conditioning, a first for the women's program.

"The team only works with a strength and conditioning coach twice a week, but the team is already stronger than they ever have been before," head coach Aby Ryan explained. "Their bodies are buff and you can see the difference in practice. It's not something we've focused on in the past, so right now I'm not sure how it's going to show up on the court, but I do hope that when we start the season, we're going to be in the best shape we've ever been."

Ryan added that the better fitness the team is in at the end of the season, the better the chances the Broncos have of having another good showing in the West Coast Conference Championship.

A look at 2003 Santa Clara Broncos:

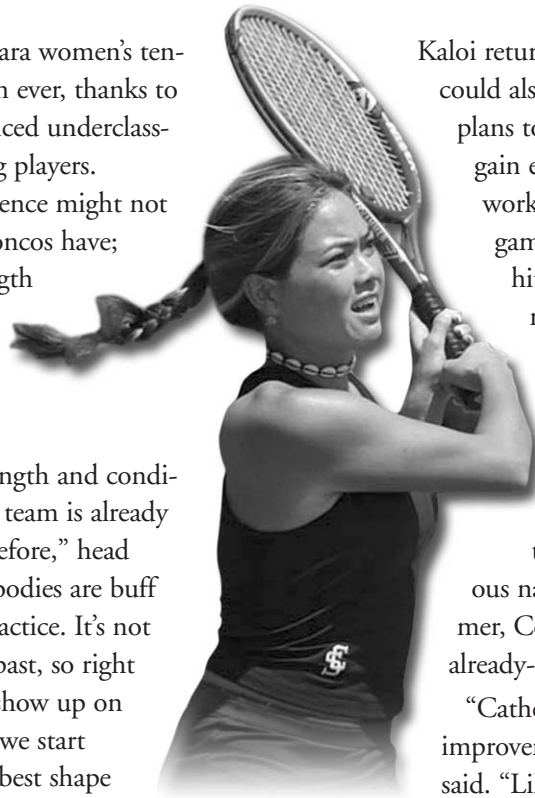
Singles

The four seniors on the team create a wealth of experience on the court, with Ryan guessing that at least three of them will be in the lineup at any given time.

"You know they're going to compete at a high level every day," she said, "and that will teach the freshmen a lot about the intensity level of the collegiate game. Our freshmen will come into the spring season and make an impact right away, but I like having the ability to go with the experience."

Leading the way will be team captain Christine Limbers. She has played at No. 1 singles most of her collegiate career and will return to the top spot. A stress fracture kept Limbers from playing all summer, but according to Ryan, the team's hardest worker and most dedicated player has come back well, with a good showing at the Saint Mary's Fall Invitational, advancing to the Round of 16.

West Coast Conference Freshman of the Year Janalle



Janalle Kaloi
2002 WCC Freshman of the Year

Kaloi returns in the second singles slot, but could also see time in the top spot, as Ryan plans to trade off the two to help Kaloi gain even more experience. Kaloi is working on adding diversity to her game, such as coming to the net and hitting slice drop shots. The sophomore had a great showing the ITA Fall Regional, advancing to the finals of the consolation draw.

Fellow sophomore Catherine Cochrane could break into the top half of the singles lineup this year. Having played in numerous national tournaments over the summer, Cochrane did improve on an already-impressive serve and forehand.

"Catherine's confidence is the biggest improvement in her game this year," Ryan said. "Like Janalle, both are more certain about what's going on all around them and how to adapt to collegiate tennis."

Like previous seasons, Santa Clara has solid depth, making the bottom half of the lineup majority competitive among the team.

Senior Mariko Kawakami and Pati Ruiz will play a factor in the Broncos' success. Kawakami is coming off a summer wrist surgery, after injuring her playing hand at Pepperdine. Although not expected to participate in fall action, Kawakami was able to take part and start getting back to her full form.

"We need Mariko healthy," Ryan emphasized. "We'd like her in the top four of the lineup because she can be an impact player. She uses her weapons well and plays a different style of game than most other players."

Ruiz is coming off a good fall season, and showed improvement in her footwork during the fall tournaments. After a strong finish last spring, Ruiz finished with a winning record at the sixth spot and is relied upon by Ryan to earn victories for the team.

"I'm most excited about Pati because she was just so consistent in winning for us last year, I feel like I can really count on her in singles," Ryan said. "She'll move up into the top four of our lineup if she continues to work on her footwork and keep up with the pace of play. She's the most mentally-tough player on our team and

that will help us out a lot.”

Competition in the lineup at the sixth spot will include doubles specialists Ashley Campbell, a senior, and junior Jenny Siegel, as well as Nicole Jackson, Casey Knutson and Jessie Strunk, the new class of Bronco women's tennis.

“The depth on this year's team is amazing,” Ryan said. “I see everybody on this team with a chance to work their way into the singles lineup. The competition for the sixth spot will make our entire team stronger in the long run.”

Jackson, of Lake Oswego, Ore., is a strong doubles player. A crafty player that finds a way to win, Ryan has been working with Jackson on being more aggressive. Jackson is a step ahead of most collegiate freshmen in that she has doubles experience.

Knutson, of Huntington Beach, Calif., is a ranked player in Southern California juniors and comes with a lot of experience. Ryan said Knutson has punishing ground strokes, but would like to see the newcomer use those shots to finish at the net.

Strunk, of Phoenix, Ariz., uses her consistency as her biggest strength but needs to use more power in her game in order to play well collegiately.

“For all three, it's just going to be a matter of time to learn the intensity and pace of play of collegiate tennis, but I'm confident they'll fit into our system very well,” Ryan said.

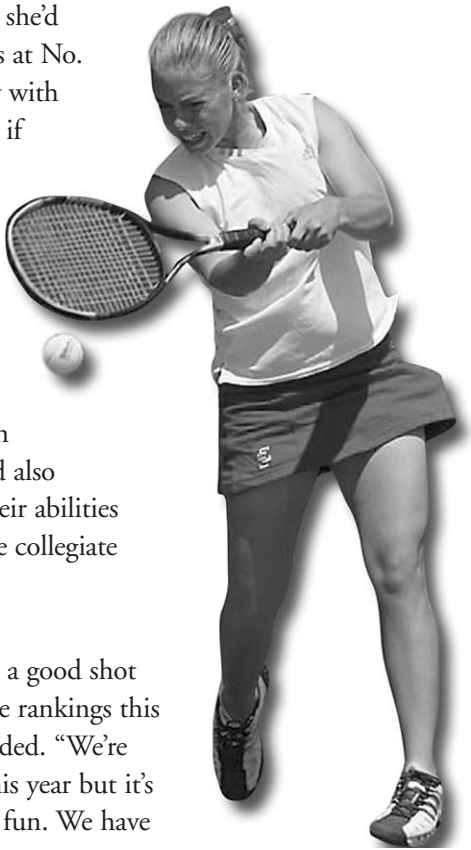
Doubles

Although unsure of her doubles lineups, Ryan said she is certain that two-time West Coast Conference Doubles Team of the Month duo Kawakami and Kaloi will team together to lead the Broncos in doubles. Ryan will build upon their experience for the other two pairs. She spent the fall tournaments trying various combinations and found early success with Siegel and Campbell.

“Jenny's serve has really improved over the summer and she understands doubles so well,” Ryan said. “Ashley can run down ball really well and they made a really good fit during fall play.

Ryan added that she'd like to put Limbers at No. 2 doubles, possibly with Ruiz. Additionally, if Cochrane can improve her transition game to the net, her strong serve would be an asset in the doubles lineup. Jackson and Knutson could also find a spot with their abilities to quickly learn the collegiate game.

“I think we have a good shot at breaking into the rankings this year,” Ryan concluded. “We're going to Hawaii this year but it's not going to be all fun. We have a chance to take on a pretty strong team in our host, Hawaii, as well as a chance to knock off nationally-ranked San Diego State. We're going to have a good time, and get the personal tour from Hawaii native Janalle, but our emphasis on that road trip is pulling off the big win.”



Christine Limbers
2002 All-WCC, Singles



Mariko Kawakami
2002 All-WCC, Doubles

The Broncos are spending much of their time on the road, but will bring in strong competition to the SCU Tennis Center. West Coast Conference rival Loyola Marymount and nationally-ranked North Carolina will make visits in March.

Ryan, now entering her ninth season, is already SCU's all-time winningest coach, but she also has a chance to do something no other women's tennis leader has done on the mission campus—notch 100 victories in a career. If the Broncos win their home opener against San Jose State, Ryan will be able to go for the milestone victory the next afternoon against league opponent Saint Mary's.