

sports

Tennis team improved

By MIKE BURRICHTER
Sports Staff

Texas A&M tennis coach David Kent said his team has two goals to achieve this year; finishing among the top twenty teams in the nation and becoming more of a factor in the tough Southwest Conference race.

In his first year at A&M, Kent led the team to a 1979 season record of 11-11. The Ags finished sixth in the Southwest Conference, compiling a record of 3-5.

"Even then, we almost finished in the top twenty," Kent said, sitting behind a desk in his office located in the two-year-old tennis facility in the southwest corner of campus.

This year, Kent is confident his team will finish in the top twenty. "Oh yeah, we'll be there," he said. "We didn't make it in the preseason poll, but that's because of our record last year."

Moving up in the Southwest Conference is another matter. Six teams from the SWC are ranked in the top 10 in the coaches' preseason poll. SMU is fifth, Arkansas, which Kent said is underrated, has been picked tenth, UH is 12th, Texas is 13th and TCU is number 17.

"The Southwest Conference is easily the toughest in the country," said Kent, whose team must also face number two Trinity University. "We are markedly improved though. Last year it was so cut and dry — we'd lose. This year we're going to have some close matches and score some upsets."

The team played in six tournaments last fall, which Kent called a good tune-up for the upcoming season. Play opens at home against Hardin-Simmons University on Feb. 2nd.

"We beat Texas in a tournament in Conroe for the first time since 1966," he said. "We beat them 5-4. I hope we don't have to wait that long to beat them again!"

Another bright spot on the tennis team's fall season was the emergence of Trey Schutz as a power among Southwest Conference tennis players.

"Trey Schutz has made a tremendous improvement over last year," Kent said. "He's our number one player right now. He was number four or five last year. He worked very hard last semester and got himself mentally tough. He's also got the best serve I've ever seen."

Schutz started out the new year by winning the Cotton Bowl Tennis championship in Dallas on Jan. 1. He topped a field of 64 collegians to win that event. Schutz attributes his success to hard work and a new mental attitude.

"I went to every practice in the fall with the goal of getting something out of the workout," Schutz said. "I just went out and busted my butt."

Kent said that Schutz, a junior Finance major from Galveston, lost some matches last year because of his mental attitude.

"He used to rant and rave all over the court sometimes," Kent said. "Now he knows he must keep his mind on the game to win. He doesn't get bothered anymore."

Schutz said he realized the importance of being mentally tough and worked on it.

"When you get to this level, it's all in the head," Schutz said. "Everybody can hit a forehand and everyone can hit a backhand. It's when you hit it that counts. Matches are won and lost on mental weaknesses."

Kent says his team this year had something that has been missing from Aggie tennis for quite some time: depth.

Behind Schutz are Alberto Jimenez, a senior from Bogota, Colombia, Dallas junior Reid Freeman, San Antonian Max King, another junior, freshman Brian Joelson from Portland, Oregon and Dallas junior Jim Grubert. These six make up the starting lineup for the Ags. Three freshmen, Boyd Allen Bryan from Beaumont, Ron Kowal out of Naperville, Ill. and walk-on Fort Worth resident Tom Judson are the backups. Kent called Judson "a real surprise" and "the best number nine player in the league."

"These freshmen will get more experienced as the season rolls along," Kent said. "They are really pushing the older guys and are going to be a real plus for this year's team. Of course it even makes our future look that much brighter."

Jimenez, the number two player in Colombia, played along with Schutz in the NCAA indoor invitational in Houston last week. Jimenez lost in the early rounds, but Schutz



Coach David Kent

won four matches to reach the final 16 before bowing out.

Reid Freeman played in that tournament last year. Kent said Freeman is capable of playing great tennis.

"When he's on he can play with anybody," Kent said. "Schutz, Jimenez and Freeman are all capable of playing number one on this team. Schutz just has the edge right now."

Kent, the first full time coach A&M has ever had, has done something that no other Aggie tennis coach has had the time to do: recruit.

Kowal won the 1979 Illinois state boys singles championship. Joelson won the 1978 and 1979 Oregon high school championship. Bryan was ranked in the top five in Texas in high school singles last year.

"I've had plenty of time to get out and recruit," Kent said. "We have new facilities and the weather is great so more people are interested in playing here. But A&M doesn't have a winning tradition in tennis like it does in football or basketball,

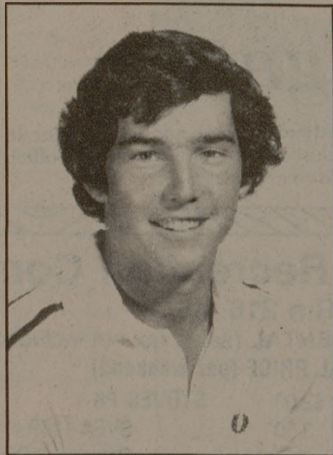
so some are apprehensive about coming here. I want to build a winning tradition."

Kent says he is trying to get the student body to back the team.

"The students are great here," he said. "They have such positive attitude. This is the best place I've coached in 22 years."

Kent, 44, coached at West Texas State University for nine years prior to A&M coaching job. Before that, he coached high school tennis in Midland and Amarillo.

"Once we get some students out here, I'm sure they'll come back," he said. "I want to get the corps interested. If they get involved, it'll be successful. We've printed posters, put up signs all over town and even given out 5000 free tickets to matches, which are free anyway! When Trinity comes to town (Feb. 19) I've even thought about standing out by the MSC and telling people about it. I'll try anything... Maybe parachuting a guy onto campus might work."



Trey Schutz

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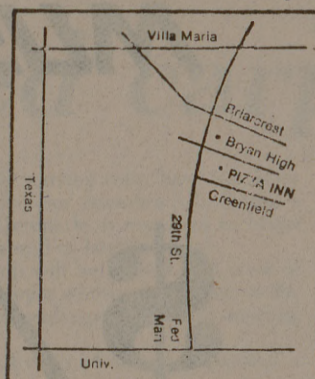
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