

Connell not exactly typical All-American

By TONY CORNETT
Sports Writer

Grant Connell is an All-American, but then again, he's not. He's an All-American tennis player for Texas A&M alright, but he's also a native Canadian.

Outside of obvious athletic ability, how does such a young player achieve such status in a field of older and supposedly more mature players? A&M Tennis Coach David Kent is quick to point out Connell's great asset.

"Grant Connell is so tough mentally," Kent said. "He's mentally the toughest player I've ever coached. You could explode a bomb on the tennis court and it wouldn't faze him. If you give him a lemon, he just makes lemonade out of it."

A modest Connell didn't put it quite that way. He said he's worked hard to become a competitive tennis player.

"It's just match experience," Connell said. "I haven't been playing tennis that long, but the time that I've played, it's been very concentrated. Since the beginning of last spring, I've been playing full time without more than a week break. I've just played a lot of matches and I think that helped."

Connell played hockey and swam competitively before taking up tennis. At 6-foot-2, 172 pounds, Connell is bigger than most tennis players. He looks a bit like one of his favorite professional tennis players, Jimmy Connors.

Connell fidgeted throughout the interview, crossing and uncrossing his arms and legs, but if he was nervous, it never affected his frank manner.

For all the time and hard work Connell has put into his game, he's done equally well in school. Connell said he would not be that upset if he ended up being just a student. He's leaning toward the business field.

"At times I love tennis," Connell said. "But I could live without it. I think it's partly because I started playing later. I think if I'd been playing since I was eight or nine, like a lot of people, I'd be more addicted to it. I could become a full time student pretty easily I think."

Connell enjoys reading.

"I like to go out sometimes, too," Connell said. "The weekend is not like Friday and Saturday nights I stay home and read, but if I get some spare time I have a lot of books in my room that I haven't read. I listen to music quite a bit, too. I like Neil Young."

Being from Vancouver, Canada, Connell is an outsider looking in on Texas A&M and said that what he sees in Aggieland is certainly different than what he's used to in Canada.

"In Canadian universities there may be a couple of football teams," Connell said. "But it's really minor league stuff. Other than that, there's hardly any sports. There are no scholarships. It's not even comparable to American universities."

"There's so much money down here. It seems that way. I don't think that the alumni of Canadian universities are nearly as strong."

Connell wanted to come to Texas A&M to play tennis. At first, he met with problems, but with the help of a fellow Canadian, Connell was able to make the switch to Aggieland.

"I sent out over 30 letters," Connell said. "Most of the schools sent letters back saying that they were sorry but that all their scholarships were taken. The coach at Texas A&M, it turns out, didn't know any-

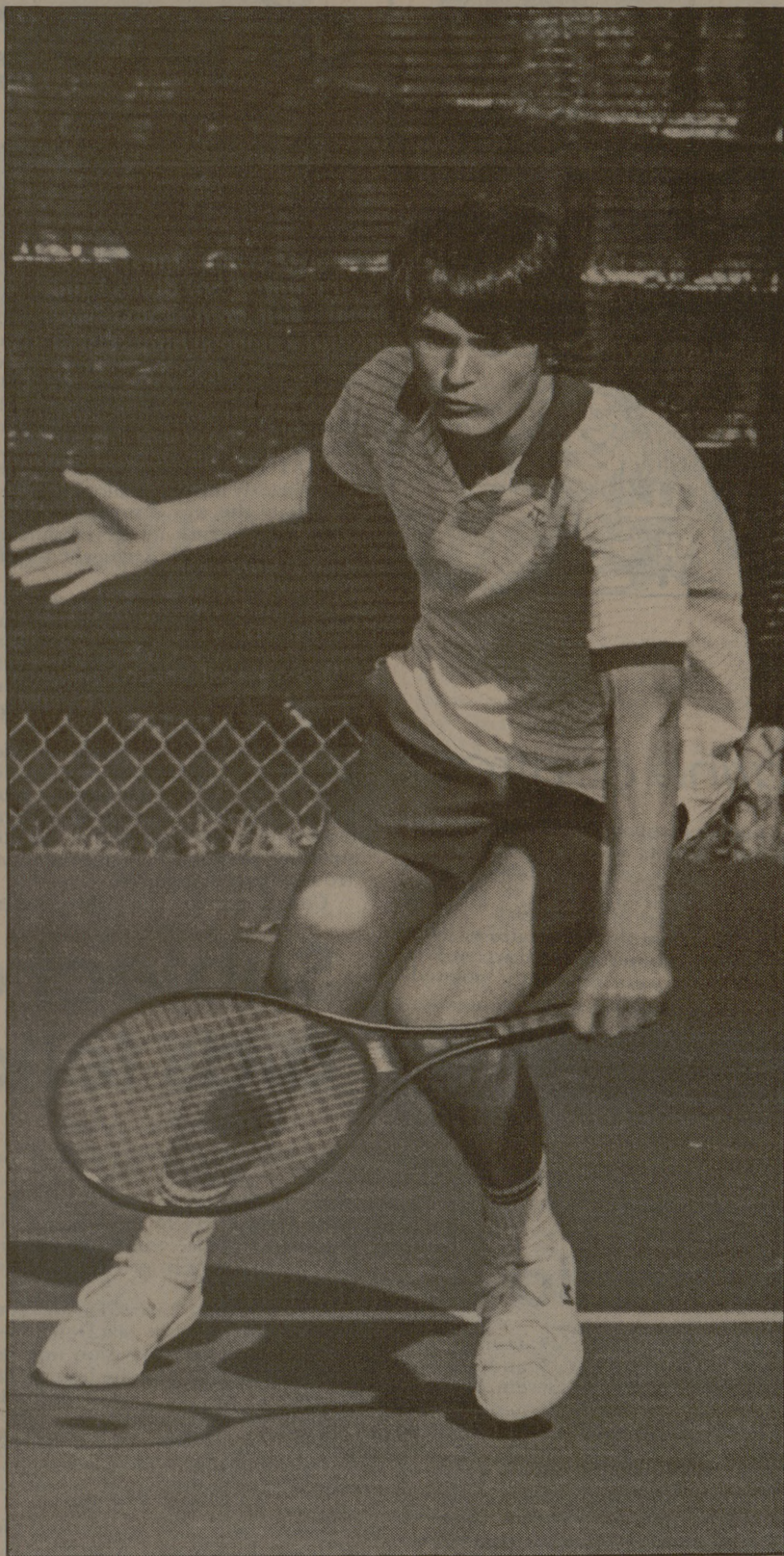


Photo by DEAN SAITO

A&M tennis player Grant Connell — "At times I love tennis, but I could live without it. I think if I'd been playing since I was eight or nine, like a lot of people, I'd be more addicted to it. I could become a full time student pretty easily I think."

thing about me. My results in Canada weren't that great at the time I wrote. He wrote me back and suggested that I go to this other school. I really wanted to go to A&M, so I just held off for a few months.

"Meanwhile, Arnold Kettenacker (a senior on A&M's tennis team last season) came back (to Vancouver) over Christmas. We happened to play each other in a tournament and I beat him. So I wrote Coach Kent back and Arnold talked to him. That helped a lot."

When it comes to the idea of play-

ing professional tennis, Connell has the same attitude he has about college tennis — it would be great, but he could live without it.

"When I finish with school I'd be stupid not to at least go out and try (and make it professionally)," Connell said. "I mean, you spend this much time in a sport, you want to at least say to yourself that you gave it an honest attempt when the time was right. But, it won't tear me up if I don't make it. I've never set really high goals as far as my tennis is concerned."

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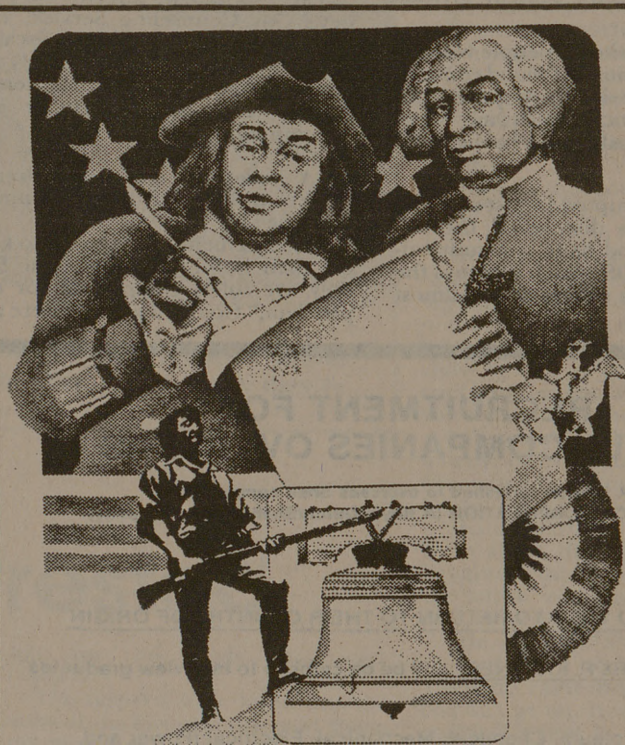


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