

Aggies' Kent a slave to his profession

By CAROLYN VEIGA
Reporter

Texas A&M Men's Tennis Coach David Kent — a few grunts are uttered from his players' mouths when they hear the name, but this 50-year-old sun-beaten charmer has brought back dedication and competitiveness to Aggie tennis.

"I hate to lose," Kent says. "I just can't stand to see it. I've got to be the winner in everything I'm involved in — whether it's in tennis or something else. And that's what I expect from my players."

This is Kent's eighth season as the A&M men's coach, and he says his goal is to win the Southwest Conference and keep him coaching the Aggies for many more seasons.

"I want to win the SWC," Kent says. "I also want to win the NCAA National Collegiate Athletic Association. I love to compete, and I want our team to reach No. 1."

Kent, a native of Amarillo, has been coaching tennis for 28 years. He received a four-year tennis scholarship to Texas Tech and earned a degree in business administration.

After brief employment at an investment company, Kent realized that he didn't enjoy the business world. He taught a few business courses while coaching tennis for Amarillo and Midland high schools from 1958 to 1969.

Kent earned a master's in education and political science from West Texas State University in 1969, while coaching high school tennis.

He accepted a coaching position at the men's and women's tennis teams at WTSU in 1970.

Bobby Kleinecke, currently the A&M women's tennis coach, was one of Kent's pupils at WTSU.

"Kleinecke is a great tennis player," Kent says. "He was one of my most energetic players. He's taught me a lot as a coach — as much as I taught him about playing tennis. We complement each other."

Kent, who is known for his short temper, admits he isn't an easy man to please when it comes to tennis.

Kleinecke says, "Coach Kent is a hard person to play for. He realizes — he's a competitor — a big one. Kent is always expecting his players to win. I'd describe him as a hard-arse."

According to Kleinecke, Kent's domineering personality pushes his players to work harder so they'll achieve their best.

Dean Goldfine, a member of the No. 18 men's team, says, "Coach Kent has changed my entire game strategy. He's forced me to become a more aggressive player."

Team Captain Russ Simmons says Kent has built the team's stamina and has taught the players to push harder to win a match.

But Kent says he is dissatisfied with his quick temper when coaching his players.

"If I could change anything right now, I'd throw away my temper," Kent says. "I know I'm not easy to please. Even though none of my coaches in the past were as hard as I am, I still have this drive in me. I cannot accept defeat."

"Maybe it's because I'm so short. I'm only 5 feet 8 inches tall. I guess I had to run faster and work so much harder than the bigger guys when I was in sports."

However, Kent says his stamina and determination have made him reach new heights.

Kent says he came to A&M in 1978 when friends encouraged him to visit A&M after completing his eighth season at WTSU.

"When I came to A&M, it was love at first sight," Kent recalls. "It's a great place to coach, and the people couldn't be nicer."

"I told my wife that if I didn't get

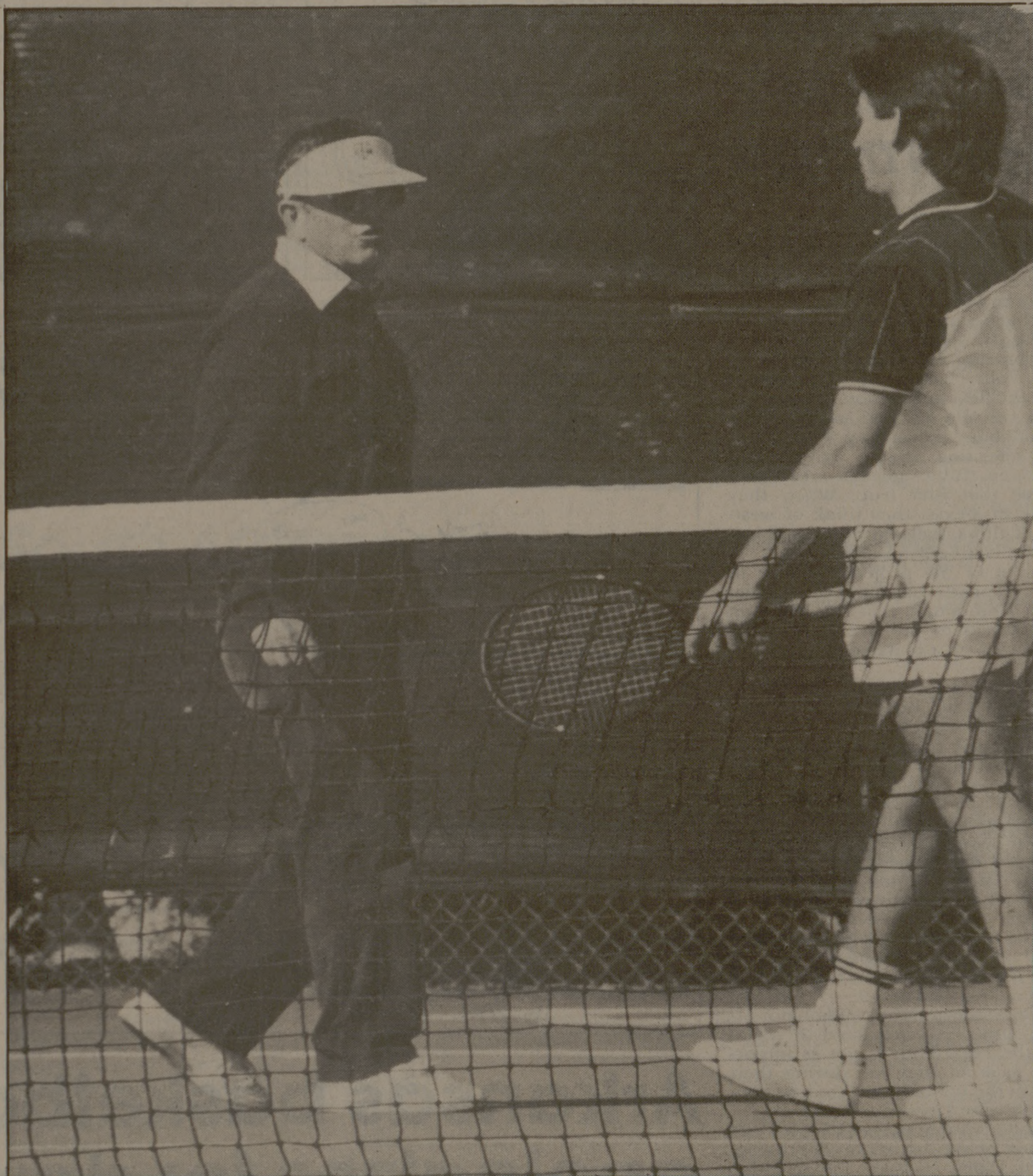


Photo by BRIAN PEARSON

A&M Coach David Kent (left) offers advice to Dean Goldfine during last weekend's matches against Trinity. A&M starts play in the 24-team H.E.B. tournament today in Corpus Christi.

to go to A&M, she'd have to bury me in the front yard."

Kent says he can't wait to go to work in the morning because tennis has become an inseparable part of his life.

"If there was one word to sum me up, it'd be 'workaholic' — coaching tennis is all I think about," Kent says. "A man told me once that if a brain surgeon opened up my head, he'd pull out a giant tennis ball."

Kent says his hectic workdays involve afternoon practice, attending tournaments and recruiting new players.

Recruits are nationally ranked on draw sheets by the United States Tennis Association. Players compete in tournament circuits either as individual competitors or representatives of their high school team.

The USTA ranks the players on draw sheets, then distributes the rankings to various colleges and universities across the nation.

"I look for players who can win," Kent says. "When you're in the Top 20, you have to bring them in raring to go."

There are currently nine players on the A&M team, four of whom are foreign.

"Our foreign players have been some of our best competitors," Kent says.

Kent says he doesn't have any dif-

ficulty when it comes to breaking poor tennis habits in his players. Collegiate players have already developed good tennis skills, he says.

"And if I do get a player that gives me trouble, then he's no longer part of my team," Kent adds. "I call the shots, and they've got to do what I tell them. Then, I'm happy."

Kent says his method of coaching is usually done from the sidelines.

"Good shot, Kimmo — way to slam it," he says as he glances at A&M's No. 1 player, Kimmo Alkio, during practice.

"I don't actually play during practice drills, but I still compete in tournaments," Kent says. "But I know the team knows how to play. I just want to see that stamina and dedication to win in their faces."

His effective coaching ability isn't entirely restricted to men's tennis.

Though Kent says he coached the women's teams at WTSU and Midland and Amarillo high schools, he feels that his short temper tends to hurt female players.

"I coached women's high school tennis, and it was a success," Kent says. "But I tend to fly off the handle too quick. I've also got bad profanity on the court."

"I think female coaches are excellent for men's tennis. But you've got to choose coaching either men's or women's tennis — you can't do both."

Kleinecke says that Kent's coaching techniques aren't appreciated until a player completes his tennis career with Kent.

"I tell his players that once they make it through him, it's worth it," Kleinecke says. "When they've finished it, then they know they'll be prepared for anything in life."

Goldfine agreed that he'll probably appreciate Kent more once he's not competing.

"It's Kent's former players that are his biggest fans," Kleinecke adds. Goldfine and Simmons say that Kent's ability to organize, schedule and publicize the matches are one of his best qualities.


Kent devotes what little spare time he has to the church. But the majority of his time is spent thinking about tennis.

"I just love the sport — my wife thinks I'm dull," he says, laughing.

Kent has three children in their 20s who play tennis competitively and leisurely. But Kent says he's never forced the sport on any of his children.

Kent stresses that he hopes his players find him more than a tennis coach.

"I hope I can be an adviser on and off the court — a friend or father figure, maybe," he says. "But who'd want a 50-year-old friend?"



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