

1998 Great Lakes League Tournament

Little Giants ready for GLL tourney

By MICHAEL PIDANICK
Staff writer

Beat Findlay.
Those will be the two words to live by for the Fremont Ross tennis team as it heads into the Great Lakes League tournament Saturday in Sandusky.
"We just want to take it all," said No. 1 singles player Ainsley Watkins. "We want to see Findlay go down, go down in flames."

"We all just have to play our best, play tough and never let anyone get us mentally down. As long as we're prepared, we're strong."

The Little Giants' lone Great Lakes League loss this season came at the hands of Findlay, a 3-2 decision, Sept. 22 at Rodger Young Park.

The Trojans and Little Giants are

Singles



WATKINS

GLL record: 6-0



MELCHIORI

GLL record: 5-1



N.WOLFE

GLL record: 3-3



CARNICOM

GLL record: 5-1



SCHAAF

GLL record: 5-1



LaBENNE

GLL record: 6-0



LAGROU

GLL record: 6-0

Doubles

expected to be the top two teams in the tournament. Ross is more than ready for the rematch.

"They beat us in the season, but we're prepared," said first doubles player Morgan Carnicom. "We're going to be better prepared and ready to go against them."

Ross has been focused at practice all

week, and coach Lisa Wolfe has confidence that she will get a top-notch effort.

"This team is so determined," Wolfe said. "Whatever happens, they're going to do the best they can and I believe in them."

The seedings for the tournament won't be officially determined until 8:30 a.m. Sat-

urday. But based on regular season results, Watkins and the second doubles team of Courtney LaBenne and Stefanie Lagrou were both 6-0 in the GLL and are expected to be top seeds. Melchiori and the first doubles team of Carnicom and Jenny Schaaf were 5-1 and

are expected to be second. Third singles player Natalie Wolfe was 3-3 and should be seeded somewhere in the middle of the pack.

Being a top seed also brings added pressure from both teammates and opponents.

See ROSS, B2

Ross ready for GLL tournament

Continued from B1

"There will be a lot of pressure on us because a lot of people will be counting on us to get first at second," Lagrou said. "But I think we can do it."

The Giants' second doubles team went 6-0 in GLL play, and earned a fairly easy 6-3, 6-4 win over Findlay's Julie LaJoe and Mel Hirshfield in the dual meet. But Ross expects the Findlay tandem to be fired up for a possible rematch.

"I think Findlay's going to be looking for us, since we beat them the last time," LaBenne said. "We just want to concentrate on staying No. 1."

In the first meeting between Findlay and Ross, the Tigers' Katie Gardner outlasted Ross's Gina Melchiori 4-6, 7-5, 6-2 at second singles in what turned out to be the deciding point. Melchiori is hoping for a chance at revenge.

"I hope to see her in the finals," Melchiori said. "She's a pretty good net player. So if I can keep all my ground strokes in and get her running around, then I should do a lot better."

A key for the Little Giants may be keeping their minds on the court.

"This is a mental game, so we'll have to stay focused," said Natalie Wolfe. "They're pretty competitive, but they get in our heads too. We just have to block them out."

Carnicom and Schaaf also feel they can win at first doubles, but know they have to keep their focus.

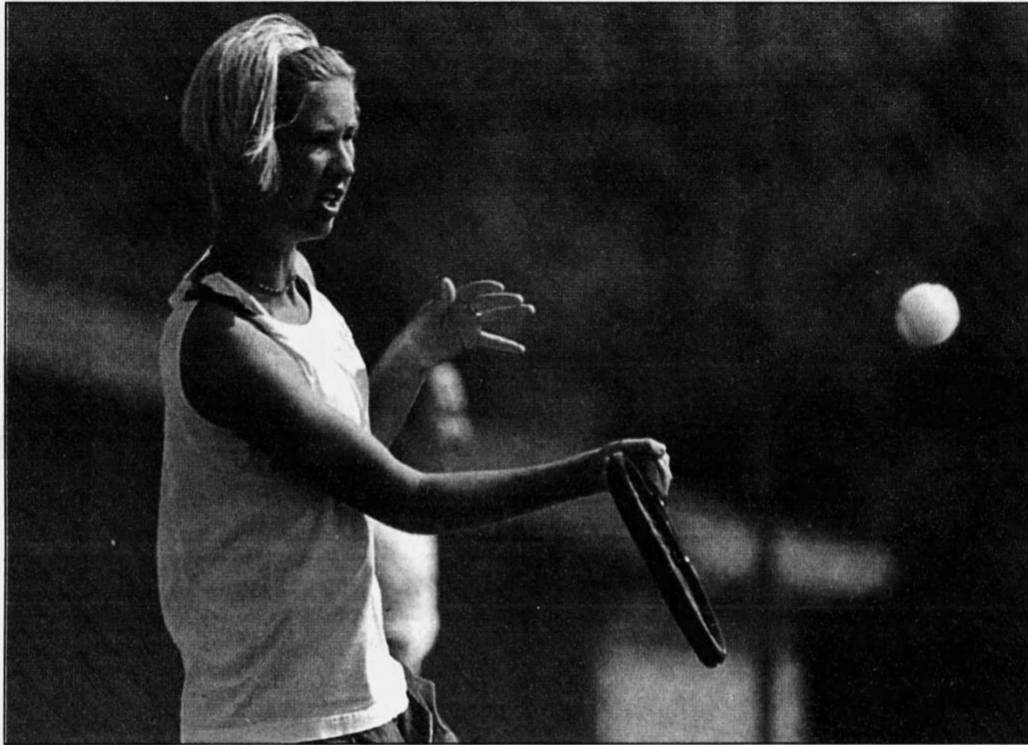
"We have to play better in second set," said Schaaf. "We tend to come down after the first set when we kill them in the first. We let up a bit, and we have to keep it going."

Lisa Wolfe said the Little Giants have received support from the whole school.

The Ross boys tennis team, including coach Rick LaFountain and players Pete Scranton and Buck Young, have been helping out at practice.

"There is just so much support," Wolfe said. "We have the whole town backing us. It's wonderful. You walk through Ross High School and the coaches are saying 'Good luck Saturday.' It's just great. The whole town wants it."

Ross is runnerup at GLL



News-Messenger/Andrew Morrison

NATALIE WOLFE of Ross hits a return to Oregon Clay's Tory Heilman in a first-round Great Lakes League tennis match Tuesday.

Watkins is player of year, Wolfe coach of year

News-Messenger reports

SANDUSKY — The Fremont Ross girls tennis team picked up two individual honors on its way to a second-place overall finish in Tuesday's Great Lakes League tournament in Sandusky.

First singles star Ainsley Watkins was named GLL Player of the Year with a 6-3, 3-6, 7-5 victory over Findlay's Sara Radabaugh in the finals, and coach Lisa Wolfe was honored as the first-ever Coach of the Year.

"I'm not disappointed," Wolfe said. "It was a beautiful day, the girls played like they wanted to win, but the points just didn't add up."

Findlay won the event with 27 points, followed by Ross and Bedford with 25 apiece. The Little Giants placed second by virtue of a better regular season record.

Watkins' path to the No. 1 championship was rockier than expected. After a first round bye, the junior defeated Melissa Jackson of Bedford 6-0, 6-1 in the semifinals.

There, she met Radabaugh,

who put up a stiff challenge after Watkins had handled her easily in the regular season.

"(Radabaugh) got into Ainsley's head," Wolfe said of her top player. "She was pushing the ball, and Ainsley wasn't stroking it. It was gut-wrenching."

"She learned some of Ainsley's tricks, and had Ainsley play her game, instead of her playing Ainsley's game. It was a mental thing that some players can do, but Ainsley was determined."

At second singles, Gina Melchiori started off with an easy 6-0, 6-1 win over Oregon Clay's Jessica Berger before falling in the semifinals 6-4, 7-5 to Toledo Whitmer's Amanda Black. Melchiori rebounded to beat Bed-



WATKINS



WOLFE

TENNIS

ford's Julie Bodi 8-4 in the consolation final.

"Gina had a tough loss, but she came back and took control," Wolfe said.

At third singles, Natalie Wolfe beat Clay's Tory Heilman 6-2, 6-2 and Whitmer's Kendra Case 7-5, 6-4 before falling 7-5, 6-3 in the finals to Findlay's Shelley Castret. Lisa Wolfe said her daughter was aided by the weather at Sandusky High School.

"The wind was an asset to Natalie," the coach said. "She uses a lot of slice, and it would just drop and stop."

The coach was also impressed with Wolfe's temperament going against Case and Castret, players who had beaten her in the regular season.

"She played the best out of anybody, going against two girls she had lost to," Lisa Wolfe said.

The top doubles team of Jenny Schaaf and Morgan Carnicom took third place, beating Brittany Roberts and Lexy Durik of Whitmer 6-3, 7-5, losing

to Stephanie Zak and Rachel Paranick of Bedford 6-1, 6-3 and beating Molly Feick and Dana Wobser of Sandusky 8-2.

Courtney LaBenne and Stefanie Lagrou placed second at second doubles, beating Jessica Samko and Erin Dolan of Sandusky 6-2, 6-1 before losing to Jennifer Obersky and Tara Dunnigan of Bedford 7-6 (7-3), 6-3. The loss to the Bedford duo was the first for LaBenne and Lagrou in conference play.

"The Bedford team was consistent," Wolfe said. "Our shots weren't coming in like theirs were."

As for her own honor, Wolfe had a hard time coming up with the words to describe the feeling.

"I was, first of all, shocked," she said. "Second of all, thrilled, and amazed."

The Little Giants return to Sandusky Friday for sectional play, where Watkins is seeded third and the Schaaf/Carnicom duo is seeded second.

Inside: Port Clinton beats Clyde in SBC. Page B3

Tennis

High School

GLL Tournament

Team scores

Findlay 27, Ross 25, Bedford 25, Whitmer 12, Sandusky 11, Fostoria 6, Clay 4

#1 Singles

Ainsley Watkins (R) def. Melissa Jackson (B) 6-0, 6-1; Watkins def. Sara Radabaugh (Find.) 6-3, 3-6, 7-5

#2 Singles

Gina Melchiori (R) def. Jessica Berger (C) 6-0, 6-1; Amanda Black (W) def. Melchiori 6-4, 7-5; Melchiori def. Julie Bodi (B) 8-4

#3 Singles

Natalie Wolfe (R) def. Tory Heilman (C) 6-2, 6-2; Wolfe def. Kendra Case (W) 7-5, 6-4; Shelley Castret (Find.) def. Wolfe 7-5, 6-3

#1 Doubles

Morgan Carnicom/Jenny Schaaf (R) def. Brittany Roberts/Lexy Durik (W) 6-3, 7-5; Stephanie Zak/Rachel Paranick (B) def. Carnicom/Schaaf 6-1, 6-3; Carnicom/Schaaf def. Molly Feick/Dana Wobser (S) 8-2

#2 Doubles

Courtney LaBenne/Stefanie Lagrou (R) def. Jessica Samko/Erin Dolan (S) 6-2, 6-1; Jennifer Obersky/Tara Dunnigan (B) def. LaBenne/Lagrou 7-6 (7-3), 3-6

Coach of the Year: Lisa Wolfe

Player of the Year: Ainsley Watkins